

Working odd shifts can hurt parent-child relationships

December 4 2013, by Matt Shipman

Research from North Carolina State University shows that working a job that doesn't keep 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. hours can hurt the relationships between parents and adolescents, increasing the likelihood that children will engage in delinquent behaviors. However, the researchers found that in some circumstances, an unconventional work schedule can be a benefit for children.

To determine the impact of "nonstandard" [work](#) schedules on child-parent relationships and delinquency, the researchers looked at nationally representative data from 1,986 adolescents aged 10-17. The data included information about parent work schedules, self-reporting from the [children](#) on their relationships with their [parents](#) and self-reporting from the children on delinquent behaviors. These behaviors included acts such as vandalism, hurting others badly, theft and skipping school. Nonstandard [work schedules](#) are anything outside the conventional "9 to 5" framework, such as night or evening shifts.

The researchers evaluated two-parent households where both parents worked standard, 9 to 5 jobs; households where one parent worked a standard schedule and one worked a nonstandard schedule; and households where both parents worked nonstandard schedules. The researchers also looked at single-mother households where the mothers worked a standard schedule, and where the mothers worked a nonstandard schedule.

"One thing we found is that 'tag-team' parenting, where one parents

works a nonstandard schedule, can result in stronger family relationships," says Josh Hendrix, a Ph.D. sociology student at NC State and lead author of a paper on the research. "Specifically, in households where the father works 9 to 5 and the mother works a nonstandard schedule, adolescents reported higher levels of closeness to their parents than households where parents both worked standard schedules. They also reported lower levels of [delinquent behavior](#). There was no advantage when the father worked a nonstandard schedule and the mother worked 9 to 5."

However, children in two-parent households where both parents work nonstandard schedules reported weaker bonds with their parents, compared to children in households where both parents work standard schedules. While other research shows that these weakened parent-child bonds put children at greater risk of delinquency, the children in two-parent households where both parents work nonstandard schedules in this study did not report higher levels of delinquent behavior. However, children of single mothers who work nonstandard schedules did report both higher levels of delinquent behavior and weaker child-parent bonds.

"Nonstandard work is becoming increasingly prevalent in our society, so many people will end up working in these types of jobs. We are not blaming [single mothers](#) or telling people not to work a nonstandard job if that is what's available," Hendrix says.

"What we want to highlight is the need for social institutions to be in synch with each other," says Dr. Toby Parcel, a professor of sociology at NC State and senior author of the paper. "Research indicates that approximately one in five workers works a nonstandard schedule and we need support systems – such as after-school programs – to accommodate the needs of those families. That's just one example. What about [households](#) with parents who work swing shifts or night shifts? Addressing their needs is an important challenge we must face."

More information: The paper, "Parental Nonstandard Work, Family Processes, and Delinquency During Adolescence," is published online in the *Journal of Family Issues*. [DOI: 10.1177/0192513X13510299](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13510299)

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