

Parents' work hours affect children

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A comprehensive review of studies on parents' work schedules and child development spanning the last three decades shows that parents' work schedules in evenings, nights and weekends, so called "nonstandard work schedules" or "unsociable work hours", may have negative consequences for children. When parents work such hours, children tended to have more behavioral problems, poorer cognitive ability (e.g., language, reading and mathematics), and were more likely to be overweight or obese than children in families where parents mostly worked during the daytime hours and week day. This review based on research in developed countries was conducted by a team of researchers from the US and Australia, led by Jianghong Li, a senior researcher from WZB Berlin Social Science Center.

The authors readily acknowledge the difficulties faced by researchers in capturing the complexity of parents' [work schedules](#) and how these may matter to children's health and development. However, 21 out of 23 reviewed studies in developed countries have shown negative associations between parents' nonstandard work schedules and indicators of [child development](#). Most studies have examined child behavior covering infancy to adolescence. These associations were in part attributed to parents' depressive symptoms, poorer quality parenting, reduced child-parent interaction and closeness, and a less supportive home environment. Problems linked with unsociable work hours were more pronounced in disadvantaged families, such as low income or single-parent families, and when parents worked such hours on a full time basis.

Findings from the review highlight the need for financial, workplace, childcare and other community supports for parents, especially in vulnerable families. The 24/7 economy may be adding to the challenges faced by [parents](#) in managing their work and parenting commitments, when jobs require them to work unsociable hours.

More information: Li J, Sarah Johnson, Wen-Jui Han, Andrews S, Dockery M, Kendall G and Strazdins L. "Parents' nonstandard work and child wellbeing: A critical review of the literature." *Journal of Primary Prevention* (published online first 10.1007/s10935-013-0318-z)

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