

Outsourcing parenthood? It takes a village AND the marketplace to raise a child

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Ask any parent raising kids in today's fast-paced society and chances are they would agree that there are only so many hours in the day.

Recognizing a need for help, many businesses now offer traditional caregiving services ranging from planning birthday parties to teaching children how to ride a bike. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, by outsourcing traditional parental duties, modern-day parents feel they are ultimately protecting parenthood.

"Parents are increasingly outsourcing caregiving activities. The expanding array of caregiving services is blurring the boundaries between family and the marketplace and raising new questions about what is acceptable to outsource and how parents make sense of these sometimes contentious decisions," write authors Amber M. Epp and Sunaina R. Velagaleti (both University of Wisconsin, Madison).

To better understand the role of the marketplace in modern-day parenting, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with participants who varied in parenting views, practices, and challenges ranging from income to social class and the availability of help from immediate family.

The interviews revealed that parents are more willing to turn to the marketplace for help once they have provided a strong baseline of activities that allow them to direct how care is given, protect their connections as parents, and assert their role as the primary caregiver. Achieving this balance helps parents maintain their feelings of

responsibility, control, and intimacy.

For instance, when deciding whether or not to hire someone to help plan their child's birthday party, parents might ask themselves if it is their job as a parent to do this (responsibility), how they might feel if the party planner doesn't do things the way they want them to be done (control), and whether or not they should be the person who has created the excitement and joy on their child's face (intimacy).

Understanding this can offer insight for companies looking to better market their services to [parents](#). "Our findings run counter to the widespread idea that family and the local community should always be the first and second lines of parenting help. Often times, businesses can resolve parenting tensions more effectively due to the contractual nature of the services they provide," the authors conclude.

More information: Amber M. Epp and Sunaina R. Velagaleti. "Outsourcing Parenthood? How Families Manage Care Assemblages Using Paid Commercial Services." *Journal of Consumer Research*: December 2014.

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