

Working time flexibility and parental ‘quality time’ spent with children

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The time parents spend with their children, especially “quality time” spent on educational activities or play, rather than caring duties, significantly affects children’s skill formation and their future life outcomes, educational attainment, employment opportunities and incomes. Thus, differences in the amount of parenting children receive are one of the factors shaping future inequalities.

This paper adds to the literature on early childhood inequalities by shedding light on the factors influencing parental time investments into children. We focus our attention on investigating the role of parental socio-economic status and background. We answer three sets of questions:

- (1) What are the parental characteristics associated with parental time investments into children?
- (2) Do working parents spend less educational time with their children compared to non-working parents?
- (3) Are these relationships influenced by the availability of flexible scheduling at work?

Data

Our research is based on data from a large panel survey of Polish households carried out in 2013 and 2014 (Determinants of Educational Decisions Household Panel Survey, UDE). We analyse the incidence of spending time by parents on various educational activities with children such as reading, playing with them or teaching them new things, separately for children of ages 1-7 and 8-14. We also use the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) data to calculate a set of working time flexibility measures associated with different jobs and occupations.

Results – employment status

According to our results working parents are more likely to invest quality time in children as compared to parents who are unemployed. The link between parental employment status and parenting intensity stems from factors other than the parents’ labour market position other factors, not the parents labour market position per se. The statistically significant determinants of parenting intensity are: the parents’ education level, parental background, the values and attitudes shared by families (measured as the number of books in parents’ family homes when they were 10), children’s composition in the household.

Results – work (in)flexibility

We find that having more or less working time flexibility does not influence the amount of time working parents spend with their children on educational activities, despite our expectations that parents with more working time flexibility would be more likely to invest time into their children. The potential explanation could be that better educated parents are much more likely to find the time to spend on educational activities with their children, regardless of their time budget limitations. Moreover, it may be that certain dimensions of working time flexibility are important, but we don't see them in our data. This might concern e.g. flexibility demands by the employers (e.g. on-call demands, the necessity to check emails and answer phone calls after the working day has officially ended) which we expect could lower time available for children.

Marginal effects of working time flexibility measures on parenting intensity

	long working hours	long working days	night work	Saturday work	Sunday work	shift work	scheduling	short notice	hour off	work free-time
Parents of children aged 1-7	0.00	0.01	-0.03	0.02	-0.04	0.01	0.02	-0.02	-0.00	0.01
	(-0.04-0.04)	(-0.03-0.04)	(-0.07-0.01)	(-0.02-0.06)	(-0.08-0.01)	(-0.03-0.06)	(-0.02-0.06)	(-0.07-0.02)	(-0.04-0.04)	(-0.04-0.05)
Parents of children aged 8-15	-0.00	-0.00	-0.03	0.02	-0.00	0.00	-0.01	-0.02	-0.01	-0.02
	(-0.05-0.04)	(-0.05-0.04)	(-0.07-0.01)	(-0.03-0.06)	(-0.05-0.04)	(-0.05-0.05)	(-0.06-0.03)	(-0.06-0.02)	(-0.06-0.03)	(-0.06-0.02)

Note: Confidence intervals (95%) in parentheses, *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Source: own estimations based on UDE data.

The complete results of our research are published in the article:

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