

Discussion Papers

The Use of Relative Care
While Parents Work:
Findings from the 1999
National Survey of
America's Families

Kathleen Snyder
and
Sarah Adelman

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Assessing
the New
Federalism

*An Urban Institute
Program to Assess
Changing Social
Policies*

Assessing the New Federalism is a multiyear Urban Institute project designed to analyze the devolution of responsibility for social programs from the federal government to the states, focusing primarily on health care, income security, employment and training programs, and social services. Researchers monitor program changes and fiscal developments. Olivia Golden is the project director. In collaboration with Child Trends, the project studies changes in family well-being. The project aims to provide timely, nonpartisan information to inform public debate and to help state and local decisionmakers carry out their new responsibilities more effectively.

Key components of the project include a household survey and studies of policies in 13 states, available at the Urban Institute's web site, <http://www.urban.org>. This paper is one in a series of discussion papers analyzing information from these and other sources.

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Executive Summary

Many families rely on relatives to care for children while the parents are at work. While recognition of the important role relative care plays in the lives of children and families has been growing, the child care field has been missing a basic picture of relative care use in the United States. This paper uses the 1999 National Survey of America's Families to look in depth at the use of relative care for children under 13 while their parents¹ are at work—including who uses it, for how many hours, and how often it is relied on as the only child care arrangement versus one of a combination of arrangements.² The paper also examines some characteristics of these relative care settings, such as whether the care is provided in the child's or relative's home, whether the caregiver is above the age of 18, whether the child is cared for in a multi-child setting, and whether the care is provided by a relative who lives with the child.

Some main findings from this paper include the following:

- Relative care is used for a significant number of children under 13 with an employed parent. Approximately 9.9 million children under 13 regularly spend time in relative care while their parents are at work—and 7.5 million of these children are in relative care as their only nonparental care arrangement.
- Many children spend significant amounts of time in relative care while their parents are at work, particularly children under 5. Approximately one in three children under 5 (37 percent of children under 3 and 31 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds) in relative care spend 35 or more hours a week in that care.
- Relative care use varies for children of different ages. Approximately one-third of children under 5 regularly spend at least some time in relative care while their parents are at work, compared with one-quarter of 6- to 12-year-olds.

¹ By parent, we are referring to the most knowledgeable adult (MKA)—usually a parent—who answered questions about the child's child care arrangements.

² For information about relative care using 2002 data, please see Kathleen Snyder, Timothy Dore, and Sarah Adelman, "Use of Relative Care by Working Parents," *Snapshots of America's Families III* (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, forthcoming).

- The use of relative care in combination with other arrangements is low, so when children are in relative care it is often their only nonparental arrangement. Children under 3 are more likely than any other age group to be in relative care as their *only* arrangement, while 3- and 4-year-olds are more likely than other age groups to be in relative care as part of a *combination* of nonparental arrangements. However, even though 3- and 4-year-olds are more likely than other age groups to be in relative care in combination, almost one in five 3- and 4-year-olds are in only relative care while their parents are at work.
- Some families—such as low-income families and single-parent families—are more likely to have their children in only relative care as their care arrangement. However, patterns of which families are more likely to rely on relative caregivers vary by the age of the child.
- The characteristics of the relative care settings vary in terms of where the care takes place, the age of the caregiver, whether other children are being cared for at the same time, and whether the relative caregiver lives with the child. These characteristics also vary by the age of the child. For example, children under 5 are more likely to be cared for in the relative’s home than school-age children. Of those cared for in their own homes, school-age children are more likely to be cared for by a relative under the age of 18 than children under 5.

Our analysis indicates that relative care provides an important support for many working families and affects the lives of millions of children. For many children, it is the only arrangement in which they spend time. The implications of relying exclusively on relative care depends on the quality of care provided, but it may be a particular issue for 3- and 4-year-olds who may be missing out on programs designed to prepare them for school. These issues underscore the importance of reaching out to relative caregivers and working to support and enhance the quality of care provided by them. However, the wide range of relative care settings in which children spend their time may make designing policies that appropriately target these caregivers more challenging.

Introduction

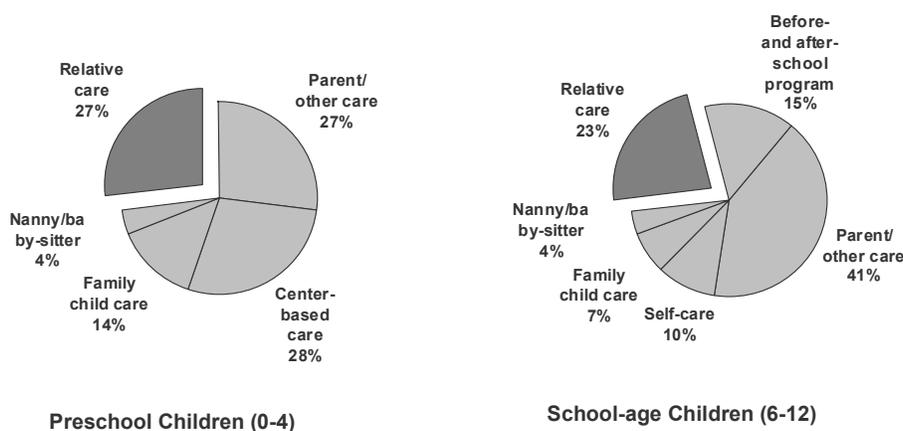
Many children in the United States are regularly cared for by someone other than a parent while their parents are at work. In a number of cases, the individual caring for the child is a relative—e.g., a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or sibling. In 1999, approximately 9.9 million children under 13 regularly spent time in “relative care” while their parents were at work—and 7.5 million of these children were in relative care as their only nonparental care arrangement.³ In fact, relative care—care provided by a relative either in the child’s or relative’s home—is one of the more common types of nonparental arrangements used by employed parents (figure 1). In 1999, 27 percent of children under 5 and 23 percent of 6- to 12-year-olds were primarily cared for by relatives while their parents were at work, making relative care the second most common type of nonparental care for children under 5 and the most common nonparental arrangement for school-age children (Sonenstein et al. 2002).

Relative care is of particular interest to policymakers and the child care community for a number of reasons. As noted above, many families rely on relatives to care for their children. Public funds can also be used to pay for relative care for low-income families through child care subsidies, so there is particular interest in understanding more about what these funds are purchasing for low-income families. Relative care is also not regulated in the same way as other forms of care, such as center-based and family child care,⁴ so there is a general interest in understanding more about who uses it and why, and the quality of care provided by these caregivers.

³ Relative care is often subsumed under the broader category of “informal” or “unregulated” care, which can include nonrelative providers such as friends and neighbors, as well as smaller family child care providers not required by state law to be regulated. It is also included under those care arrangements referred to as kith and kin care (Collins and Carlson 1998) or family, friends, and neighbor care (Brandon et al. 2002). This paper focuses only on child care provided by relatives. The NSAF does not provide information on which relatives are caring for the children in relative care. However, other research indicates that grandparents are often the relative caring for children—though the use of grandparents as caregivers varies by the age of child (Smith 2002).

⁴ Relative care is not regulated, though relatives providing care for families receiving subsidies do need to meet basic health and safety standards, which are set by the state. Licensing regulations for center-based and family child care vary by state, but generally these forms of care are regulated. However, in some states, some centers (such as religiously affiliated centers) and/or small family child care providers are not subject to licensing requirements.

Figure 1. Primary Child Care Arrangements for Children with an Employed Parent



Source: Sonenstein, Freya L., Gary J. Gates, Stefanie Schmidt, and Natalya Bolshun. 2002. *Primary Care Arrangements of Employed Parents: Findings from the National Survey of America's Families*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. *Assessing the New Federalism* Occasional Paper No. 59.

While there is a growing research base about relative caregivers and the families who use them, the child care field has been missing a national picture of relative care use—including who uses it, for how many hours, and how often it is relied on as the only child care arrangement versus as one of a combination of arrangements. This paper uses the 1999 National Survey of America's Families (NSAF) to look in depth at the use of relative caregivers for children under 13 while their parents are at work.

The National Survey of America's Families

The NSAF provides information on a nationally representative sample of children under 13.⁵ For selected children, interviews were conducted with the person in the household identified as the “most knowledgeable adult” (MKA)—usually a parent—about the child care arrangements used at least once a week in the past month (i.e., their *regular* child care arrangements) and the number of hours spent in these arrangement. These arrangements include center-based child care (including child care centers, Head Start, preschool, prekindergarten, or before- or after-school

⁵ The NSAF is a survey of more than 42,000 households. It is representative of the noninstitutionalized, civilian population of persons under age 65 in the nation as a whole and in 13 states: Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. The survey focuses primarily on health care, income support, job training, child care, and receipt of social services.

programs), family child care (care by a nonrelative in the provider's home), baby-sitter or nanny care (care by a nonrelative in the child's home), and relative care.⁶ In addition, MKAs identifying care that took place in a home setting (either the child's own home or another person's home) were asked details about that provider, including whether the provider was a relative, whether the provider was over 18, and, for in-home providers, whether the provider lived with the family.

Overview of the Paper

This paper focuses on the use of relative care for children under 13 while the MKA (whom we refer to as the parent) is at work.⁷ We focus on *employed* families using child care because relative care use (and child care patterns in general) differ for those who are not employed, though we do include some information on nonemployed families using relative care (see appendix 1). Our focus is on child care used *during work hours* because few employed families appear to regularly use relative care outside their work schedule.⁸ Since child care arrangements can vary significantly by age, this paper looks at relative care use separately for children under 3, 3- and 4-year-olds, 6- to 9-year-olds, and 10- to 12-year-olds. We have not included 5-year-olds within these age groups because their child care arrangements differ significantly depending on whether they have started school. Appendix 2 contains information about the use of relative care for this age group. Additionally, this paper examines relative care patterns for the United States as a whole. It is important to note, however, that child care patterns vary considerably across states (Sonenstein et al. 2002).

⁶ In cases where the MKA reported no nonparental arrangement while he or she worked, children were categorized as being in parent/other care. This category may include parents who watch their children while at work, parents who arrange their work schedules around each other, or parents who use several arrangements on an irregular basis. For school-age children, this may also include lessons, sports, or other activities that do not occur on a regular basis. Respondents were also asked whether their children regularly cared for themselves or spent time alone with siblings under age 13. This situation was categorized as self-care.

⁷ Ninety-six percent of children 5 and under have an MKA that is their parent (69 percent are mothers and 27 percent are fathers). Ninety-seven percent of children between 6 and 12 have an MKA that is their parent (72 percent are mothers and 24 percent are fathers).

⁸ Approximately 5 percent of children with working parents are in relative care while their parent is not at work (6 percent of children under 3, 5 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds, 5 percent of 6- to 9- year-olds and 4 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds are in relative care for non-work-related reasons). Not surprisingly, children with working parents in relative care spend on average less time in that care while their parent *is not* working than they do while their parent *is* working. In particular, children under 3 with an employed parent spend an average of eight hours a week in relative care while their parent is *not* at work, while 3- and 4- year-olds spend 6 hours, 6- to 9-year-olds spend 5 hours, and 10- to 12-year-olds spend six hours a week.

Relative care use can be explored in many ways. Past Urban Institute reports using NSAF data have focused on primary child care arrangements—i.e., the arrangement that children are in for the most hours each week. However, these percentages provide only a partial picture of relative care use in two ways. First, they understate the true extent to which families rely on relatives to care for their children, since many families may use relative care as a supplementary arrangement. Second, they do not indicate the extent to which families rely exclusively on it as their child care arrangement, since some families primarily using relative care may use other arrangements as well. Therefore, in order to provide a more detailed look at how families use relatives as caregivers, this paper explores relative care in terms of the following:

- The percentage of children in *any* relative care on a regular basis, regardless of the number of hours. This percentage incorporates both those who use it as their only arrangement, as well as those who use it as part of a combination of nonparental child care arrangements. Examining any relative care use provides more complete information on the range of families that *regularly* rely on relatives to care for their children even if it is not the only arrangement they use.⁹
- The percentage of children in relative care as their *only* care arrangement. Focusing on only relative care use provides information on the extent to which families rely solely upon care that is totally outside the formal child care market—and whose care setting, therefore, may not be reached or affected by traditional child care policy mechanisms.

While our primary focus in the text is on *any* and *only* relative care use, we provide some data about families using relative care in combination with other nonparental arrangements. Children in relative care as part of a combination of child care arrangements may be in one or more additional nonparental arrangements beyond their relative care arrangement, including center-based care, before- and after-school care, family child care, or nanny/baby-sitter care. Their relative care arrangement may or may not be the arrangement in which they spend the most hours. The first section of the paper includes some discussion about the use of relative care with other arrangements. We also include data on the percentage of children in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements in each of the tables.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section provides an overview of relative care use, including the percentage of children in relative care and the hours they spend in this form of care. The second section focuses on how relative care use varies by family characteristics, including income, race and ethnicity, education, family structure, parent availability, and work schedule. The third section provides information on the relative care setting itself, including whether the care is in the child's home or the relative's, whether the caregiver is above or below the age of 18, whether the child is cared for in a multi-child setting, and whether the caregiver lives in the child's home.¹⁰

This paper is intended to provide policymakers and the child care field with a descriptive picture of relative care use in the United States. It does not, however, provide information about *why* parents choose these arrangements. It is not clear the extent to which parents choose relative care because it is their preference or because of constraints. This is an issue that likely varies by family. There are a number of reasons why parents might prefer the care of relatives over other forms of care, including that it may allow the child to be with someone they know and trust, and who has shared values and cultures (Lesser et al. 2003). Relative care also seems to offer parents more flexibility—a recent study indicates that parents with preschool children are more likely to choose family, friend, and neighbor care when they are concerned about flexibility and convenience of hours (Brandon et al. 2002). At the same time, there may be constraints related to other forms of care that may figure into a family's decision about using relative care. For example, relative care may offer families a less expensive child care option, as research indicates that many relatives are not paid or paid very little (Brandon et al. 2002; Smith 2002). Relative care is also one of the few types of care available on evenings and weekends. Other child care options can also be more limited in some neighborhoods—particularly for low-income families (GAO 1997).

Additionally, while this paper provides information on where children are cared for, it does not speak to the quality of care provided in these arrangements and whether children should be spending time in relative care rather than other types of arrangements. Research on the quality of

⁹ At the same time, since the NSAF looks at regular child care arrangements, we cannot measure the extent to which parents rely on relatives for more irregular care arrangements.

¹⁰ Throughout this paper, differences across groups are cited when they exceed the lower or upper bounds of the 90 percent confidence interval (Wigton and Weil 2000).

care provided in relative care settings is limited and there is disagreement on how best to define quality in more informal settings (Brown-Lyons, Robertson, and Layzer 2001). As with other forms of care, the quality of care provided by relatives can vary (Lesser et al. 2003), with some being very good and some poor. However, some research suggests there may be some cause for concern about the quality of care provided in these settings. For example, research indicates that on average relative caregivers have less child care training and fewer years of education overall compared with regulated providers (Galinsky et al. 1994). In addition, a study of low-income children and their caregivers in three cities found that unregulated providers, such as relative caregivers, rated the lowest developmental quality compared to center-based and regulated homes (Coley et al. 2002). Regardless of these issues, the significant role that relatives play in the care of children underscores the importance of understanding more about the characteristics of the families using relative care.

Relative Care Use in the United States

This first section explores the percentage of children with an employed parent who regularly spend time in relative care while their parent (the MKA) is at work. Box 1 provides information on the number of hours these children spend in relative care.

While relative care use varies by the age of the child, approximately one-quarter to one-third of children with an employed parent are in *any* relative care while their parent is at work (table 1). Younger children are more likely to spend time in relative care than older children. The proportion of children in relative care decreases from approximately one-third of preschool children (35 percent of children under 3 and 32 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds) to about one-quarter of school-age children (27 percent for 6- to 9-year-olds and 24 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds). The larger percentages of preschool children in relative care compared to school-age children may reflect overall differences in the extent to which parents rely on nonparental arrangements for preschool versus school-age children. As indicated in figure 1, a majority of school-age children are in the care of a parent, or care for themselves, while their parent is at work.

Looking at the extent to which relative care is the child's *only* arrangement, a larger share of infants and toddlers are in only relative care compared with other age groups. Specifically, one-quarter (28 percent) of children under 3 are in only relative care as their care arrangement, compared with approximately one-fifth of 3- and 4-year-olds (18 percent), 6- to 9-year-olds (22 percent), and 10- to 12-year-olds (21 percent).

Box 1. How many hours do children spend in relative care?

Another important issue is how many hours children with an employed parent spend in the care of relatives each week while their parent is at work. We look at this issue in terms of the percentage of children in different hours in care (i.e., less than 15 hours a week, 15–34 hours a week, and 35 or more hours a week). As shown in table 2, many children spend significant amounts of time in the care of a relative. Not surprisingly, the hours spent in relative care generally vary by age, with younger children spending more time in relative care than older children. This is not surprising since school-age children spend much of their day in school, so working parents with school-age children have fewer hours that need to be covered with child care than working parents with children under 5.

Looking first at children under 5 in any relative care, approximately one-third of children under 3 (37 percent) and 3- and 4-year-olds (31 percent) spending time in any relative care are there full time (35 or more hours a week). The proportions in full-time care are higher when focusing on those children only in relative care—more than two-fifths of children under 3 (42 percent) and 3- and 4-year-olds (44 percent) in only relative care are in care full time. In contrast, the majority of school-age children in relative care (both those who spend any time in it as well as those for whom it is their only arrangement) are in this form of care for less than 15 hours each week—though approximately one-quarter of school-age children in any relative care spend between 15 and 34 hours in that care.

The extent to which relative care is used in *combination* with other arrangements also varies by the age of the child. Three- and 4-year-olds are more likely than any other age group to use relative care in combination with other arrangements (13 percent, compared with 7 percent of children under 3, 5 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds, and 3 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds). For children who are in a combination of arrangements, relative care is most often paired with center-based care (or before- and after-school care for school-age children) (figure 2). Three- and 4-year-olds and 6- to 9-year-olds are more likely than any other age group to be in a combination of relative care and center-based care/before- and after-school care. Overall, though, with the exception of 3- and 4-year-olds, relatively small percentages of children are in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements.

Table 1. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent Using Relative Care, by Age of Child

Child's Age	Any Relative Care (Only + Combination)	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination	Sample Sizes
Under 3	35	28	7	3,511
3 and 4	32	18 ^a	13 ^a	2,907
6 to 9	27 ^a	22 ^{a,b}	5 ^b	5,361
10 to 12	24 ^{a,b,c}	21 ^a	3 ^{a,b,c}	3,816

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Notes: "Any Relative Care" equals the sum of the percentage of children only in relative care ("Only Relative Care") and the percentage of children in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements ("Relative Care in Combination"). Sums may not equal the "Any Relative Care" figure in this table because of rounding.

Statistically significant differences at the .10 level are noted as follows: a = statistically significant from children under 3, b = statistically significant from 3- and 4-year-olds, c = statistically significant from 6- to 9-year-olds.

Table 2. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent in Different Hours in Relative Care, by Age of Child

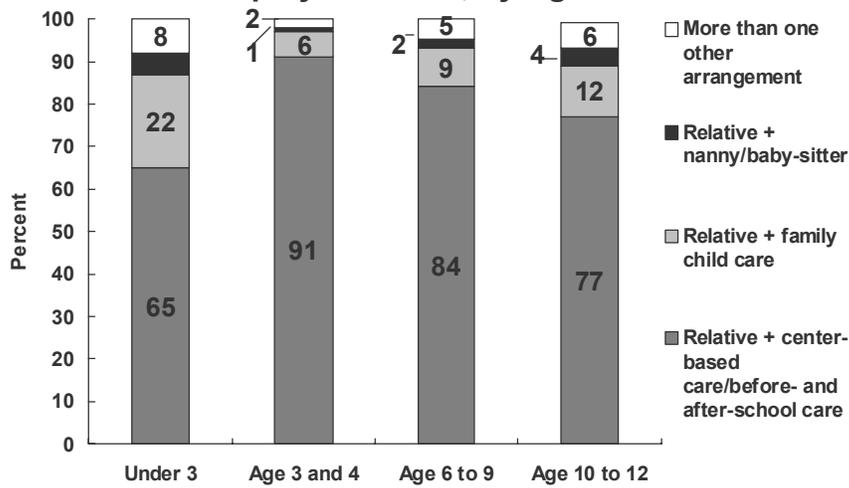
	Any Relative Care	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination
Child's Age			
Under 3			
< 15 hours a week	32 ^{a,b}	26 ^{a,b}	55 ^{a,b}
15–34 hours a week	32 ^{a,b}	32 ^b	35 ^{a,b}
35+ hours a week	37 ^{a,b}	42 ^{a,b}	11 ^b
3 and 4			
< 15 hours a week	35 ^{c,d}	26 ^{c,d}	49 ^{c,d}
15–34 hours a week	35 ^{c,d}	31	41 ^{c,d}
35+ hours a week	31 ^{c,d}	44 ^{c,d}	12 ^d
6 to 9			
< 15 hours a week	62	60	69
15–34 hours a week	26	27	22
35+ hours a week	13	14	10
10 to 12			
< 15 hours a week	72	71	79
15–34 hours a week	23	23	20
35+ hours a week	6	7	1

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Notes: Totals within columns for each age group may not equal 100 percent because of rounding.

Statistically significant differences at the .10 level are noted for the following comparisons of estimates: a = children under 3 and children age 6 to 9, b = children under 3 and children age 10 to 12, c = children age 3 to 4 and children age 6 to 9, d = children age 3 to 4 and children age 10 to 12.

Figure 2. Arrangements Used in Combination with Relative Care for Children in Another Arrangement and with an Employed Parent, by Age of Child



Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Relative Care Use by Family Characteristics

Research indicates that child care patterns vary across different types of families (see, for example, Smith 2002; Sonenstein et al. 2002). This section explores how relative care use varies by family characteristics, including family's income, parent's race and ethnicity, parent's educational level, family structure, parent availability, and parent's work schedule. While this section provides information about differences in relative care use by a particular demographic characteristic, various interrelated factors may influence the child care choices families make, so a higher or lower use of relative care by families with one characteristic does not necessarily tell us why the family chose that care (e.g., to what extent does the choice reflect a family's preferences or constraints?). Differences in relative care use for families with different characteristics also do not indicate a causal link between that particular characteristic and relative care use. Many of the characteristics we examine are closely related to other characteristics (e.g., low-income families generally comprise the majority of families in the low education level category). There are also other characteristics associated with the use of relative care (see, for example, Center for Child Care Workforce and Human Services Policy Center 2003) that are not considered in this analysis.

Overall, although we find some variations in relative care use across families with different characteristics, we also find that the same age patterns—i.e., a higher reliance on only relative care for infants and toddlers and a higher reliance on relative care in combination with other arrangements for 3- and 4-year-olds—discussed in the previous section are generally still apparent, though in some cases the patterns are more or less pronounced.

How does relative care use vary by family income?

Child care choices can vary for families at different income levels (Capizzano, Adams, and Sonenstein 2000; Sonenstein et al. 2002). Lower-income families in particular may face constraints in the amount they can afford to pay for care and have more irregular work schedules, so relative care may offer these families a less expensive and more flexible child care option. Our analysis of relative care use by income status compares children from families with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (low-income families) and children from families with incomes at or above 200 percent of the federal poverty level (higher-income families).

Overall, while for some age groups relative care use differs by income status, with low-income children more likely to be in relative care than higher-income children, this pattern differs by the child’s age (table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent using Relative Care, by Income Status

	Any Relative Care (Only + Combination)	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination	Sample Sizes
Child’s Age				
Under 3				
Higher-income	34	27	7	2,338
Low-income	36	30	6	1,173
3 and 4				
Higher-income	29 ^a	16 ^a	13	1,887
Low-income	38	23	14	1,020
6 to 9				
Higher-income	24 ^a	19 ^a	5	3,546
Low-income	32	27	5	1,815
10 to 12				
Higher-income	23	19 ^a	3	2,690
Low-income	27	24	3	1,126

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America’s Families.

Notes: Low-income is defined as below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and higher-income as at or above 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

“Any Relative Care” equals the sum of the percentage of children only in relative care (“Only Relative Care”) and the percentage of children in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements (“Relative Care in Combination”). Sums may not equal the “Any Relative Care” figure in this table because of rounding.

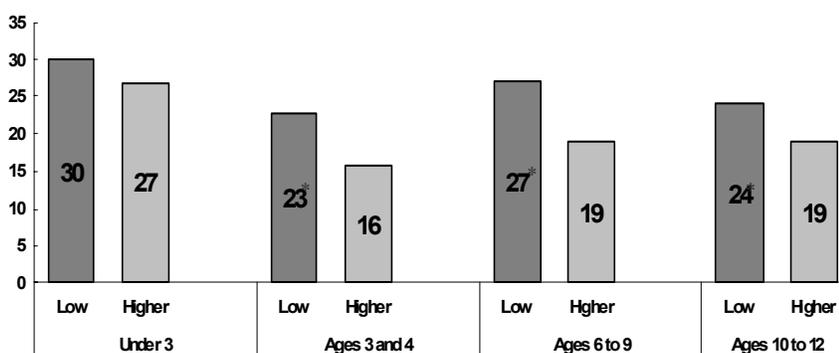
a. Indicates a statistically significant difference at the .10 level between low- and higher-income children within age groups.

Looking first at *any* relative care use, for the youngest children (children under 3) and oldest children (10- to 12-year-olds), there are no differences by income in the share of children spending any time in relative care while their parent is at work. Approximately one-third of children under 3 and one-quarter of 10- to 12-year-olds spend time in any relative care, regardless of income. However, for both 3- and 4-year-olds and 6- to 9-year-olds, low-income children with working parents are more likely to spend any time in relative care than higher-income children. Specifically, 38 percent of low-income 3- and 4-year-olds and 32 percent of

low-income 6- to 9-year-olds regularly spend any time in relative care, compared with 29 percent of higher-income 3- and 4-year-olds and 24 percent of higher-income 6- to 9-year-olds.

In terms of the extent to which families rely on relative care as a child’s *only* arrangement, within most age groups, low-income children are more likely to be in relative care as their only arrangement than higher-income children (figure 3). In all of these age groups except children under 3, approximately one-quarter to almost one-third of low-income children are in only relative care while their parent is at work, compared with approximately one-sixth to one-fifth of higher-income children. Low- and higher-income children under 3, however, are equally likely to be in only relative care.

Figure 3. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent in Only Relative Care, by Income



Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America’s Families.
 * Indicates that the percentages of children in only relative care are significantly different for low- and higher-income children at the .10 level for that age group.

How does relative care use vary by parent’s race and ethnicity?

Research indicates that the child care choices families make can vary by their race and ethnicity (Burstein and Hiller 1999; Capizzano et al. forthcoming). Our analysis focuses on three groups—white, non-Hispanic; black, non-Hispanic; and Hispanic of any race—since the sample sizes for other racial and ethnic groups are too small to be included. We refer to these three groups as

white, black, and Hispanic. Our analysis focuses on the race and ethnicity of the MKA (whom we refer to as the parent). While the data indicate clear differences in relative care use by race and ethnicity for children with an employed parent, the patterns are not consistent across age groups. However, within many age groups the patterns of relative care use for children with a black or Hispanic parent are more similar to each other than for children with a white parent, with children with a black or Hispanic parent often most likely to be in relative care (table 4).

Looking first at the extent to which children are in *any* relative care, within all age groups, the use of any relative care is similar for children with a black parent and children with a Hispanic parent.¹¹ For many age groups, children with a black or Hispanic parent are more likely to be in any relative care while their parent works than children with a white parent. For example, 43 percent of children under 3 with a black or Hispanic parent spend time in any relative care, compared with 32 percent of children under 3 with a white parent. There are, however, some age groups where relative care use is more similar between children with a black or Hispanic parent and children with a white parent—for example, relative care use is similar for whites and blacks with 3- and 4-year olds and for whites and Hispanics for 10- to 12-year-olds.

We find similar patterns when focusing on the use of relative care as a child's *only* arrangement. In particular, for most age groups there are no differences between children with a black or Hispanic parent in the percentages in only relative care. Comparing these two groups with children with a white parent, we find that for many age groups children with a white parent are again the least likely in each age group to be in relative care only.

¹¹ Within all age groups, there is no statistically significant difference in the use of any relative care for children with a black parent and children with a Hispanic parent. There is a 10 percent difference in the use of any relative care for 10- to 12-year-olds with a black parent and 10- to 12-year-olds with a Hispanic parent, but this difference is not statistically significant.

Table 4. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent using Relative Care, by Race and Ethnicity

	Any Relative Care (Only + Combination)	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination	Sample Sizes
Under 3				
White	32 ^{a,b}	25 ^{a,b}	7	2,443
Black	43	35	8	468
Hispanic	43	39	3	447
Age 3 and 4				
White	28 ^b	16 ^b	12 ^a	2,009
Black	36	16 ^c	19 ^c	410
Hispanic	40	28	12	393
Age 6 to 9				
White	23 ^{a,b}	20 ^{a,b}	4 ^{a,b}	3,825
Black	38	26	12 ^c	697
Hispanic	33	27	6	639
Age 10 to 12				
White	22 ^a	20 ^a	3	2,820
Black	35	30	5	488
Hispanic	25	22	3	382

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America’s Families *Notes:* White, black, and Hispanic denote white non-Hispanic, black non-Hispanic, and Hispanic of any race, respectively. “Any Relative Care” equals the sum of the percentage of children only in relative care (“Only Relative Care”) and the percentage of children in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements (“Relative Care in Combination”). Sums may not equal the “Any Relative Care” figure in this table because of rounding. Statistically significant differences at the .10 level are noted for the following comparisons of estimates: a = white children and black children, b = white children and Hispanic children, c = black children and Hispanic children.

For example, 25 percent of children under 3 with a white parent are in relative care as their only care arrangement compared with approximately 35 percent of children with a black parent and 39 percent of children with a Hispanic parent. There are, however, some exceptions to this pattern—there is no difference in the percentage of 3- and 4-year-olds in only relative care between whites and blacks, and in the percentage of 10- to 12-year-olds in only relative care between whites and Hispanics.

While generally the patterns of relative care use are similar for children with a black parent and children with a Hispanic parent, there are some notable differences between these two groups. For example, Hispanic parents rely more heavily on only relative care for 3- and 4-year-olds (28

percent compared with 16 percent for children with a black parent), while black parents rely more on relative care in combination for 3- and 4-year-olds (19 percent compared with 12 percent for children with a Hispanic parent) and 6- to 9-year olds (12 percent compared with 6 percent for children with a Hispanic parent). A forthcoming Urban Institute paper will examine the child care patterns across families with different race/ethnicities in more depth (Capizzano et al. forthcoming).

How does relative care use vary by parent's educational level?

Child care arrangements can vary by the educational levels of parents (West et al. 1996). Our analysis focuses on the education level of the MKA and examines three groups: parents with less than a high school diploma, parents with a high school diploma, and parents with a college degree. Our analysis indicates that there are clear differences in the use of relative care by employed parents with a high school diploma and employed parents with a college degree—with parents with less education more likely to use relative care. However, the patterns of relative care use are not consistent when comparing these two groups to parents with less than a high school degree (table 5).

Looking first at *any* relative care use, across all age groups, children whose parents have a college degree are less likely to spend time in any relative care than children whose parents have a high school degree. For example, 30 percent of children under 3 whose parents have a college degree spend time in any relative care, compared with 36 percent of similar age children whose parents have a high school diploma. The patterns of relative care use by parent's education level are more complicated when comparing these two groups with children whose parents have less than a high school diploma. For most age groups, there is no difference in the percentage of children in any relative care for parents with less than a high school diploma and parents with a high school diploma.¹²

¹² Note, though, that for many of the age groups there appears to be a large percentage difference in the children spending any time in relative care for children whose parents have less than a high school diploma and children whose parents have a high school diploma. These differences, however, are not statistically significant which is likely due to the small sample sizes.

Table 5. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent Using Relative Care, by Parent's Education

	Any Relative Care (Only + Combination)	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination	Sample Sizes
Under 3				
Less than H.S. diploma	43 ^b	38 ^b	5	295
H.S. diploma	36 ^c	30 ^c	6	2,075
College degree	30	21	8	1,141
Age 3 and 4				
Less than H.S. diploma	28	21 ^b	6 ^{a,b}	254
H.S. diploma	35 ^c	20 ^c	15	1,819
College degree	25	13	12	834
Age 6 to 9				
Less than H.S. diploma	37 ^{a,b}	31 ^{a,b}	5	448
H.S. diploma	28 ^c	22 ^c	6 ^c	3,366
College degree	21	17	4	1,547
Age 10 to 12				
Less than H.S. diploma	23	20	3	332
H.S. diploma	28 ^c	24 ^c	3	2,390
College degree	16	14	2	1,094

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Notes: "Any Relative Care" equals the sum of the percentage of children only in relative care ("Only Relative Care") and the percentage of children in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements ("Relative Care in Combination"). Sums may not equal the "Any Relative Care" figure in this table because of rounding.

Statistically significant differences at the .10 level are noted for the following comparisons of estimates: a = less than high school diploma and high school diploma, b = less than high school diploma and college degree, c = high school diploma and college degree.

There is also no difference in any relative care use for children whose parents have less than a high school diploma and children whose parents have a college degree for 3- and 4-year-olds and 10- to 12-year-olds. However, children under 3 and 6- to 9-year-olds whose parents have less than a high school diploma are more likely to be in relative care than similar age children whose parents have a college degree.

Focusing on *only* relative care, children whose parents have a high school diploma are again more likely to spend time in only relative care compared with children whose parents have a college degree. Additionally, for most age groups, children whose parents have less than a high school diploma are more likely to spend time only in relative care than children whose parents

have a college degree. For example, 38 percent of children under 3 whose parents have less than a high school diploma are in only relative care as their care arrangement, compared with 21 percent of children under 3 whose parents have a college degree. There is no difference for most age groups in the percentages of children in only relative care for children whose parents have less than a high school diploma and children whose parents have a high school degree.

How does relative care use vary by family structure?

Another family characteristic that may influence the child care choices families make is whether the family is composed of one or two parents. Two-parent families can have more flexibility in caring for their children since they may be able to arrange their work schedules to complement each other or have one parent stay at home while the other works. Working single parents, however, do not have this same flexibility and are more likely to rely on nonparental forms of child care (Sonenstein et al. 2002). Across all age groups, we find that children from single-parent families are far more likely than children from two-parent families to spend time in the care of a relative while their parent is at work (table 6).¹³

Within all age groups, children from single-parent families are more likely to regularly spend *any* time in relative care each week than children from two-parent families. For example, almost half (47 percent) of 3- and 4-year-olds with a single parent spend any time in the care of a relative, compared with a little over one-quarter (27 percent) of 3- and 4-year olds in a two-parent family. While the difference between these two groups is most pronounced for 3- and 4-year-olds, in all age groups there are significant differences between single- and two-parent families in the use of any relative care.

¹³ We also found similar differences when we focused only on low-income families.

Table 6. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent Using Relative Care, by Family Structure

	Any Relative Care (Only + Combination)	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination	Sample Sizes
Under 3				
Single-parent	44 ^a	32	12 ^a	706
Two-parent	33	27	5	2,805
Age 3 and 4				
Single-parent	47 ^a	24 ^a	23 ^a	718
Two-parent	27	17	10	2,189
Age 6 to 9				
Single-parent	38 ^a	29 ^a	8 ^a	1,400
Two-parent	23	19	4	3,961
Age 10 to 12				
Single-parent	36 ^a	32 ^a	4	1,017
Two-parent	20	17	3	2,799

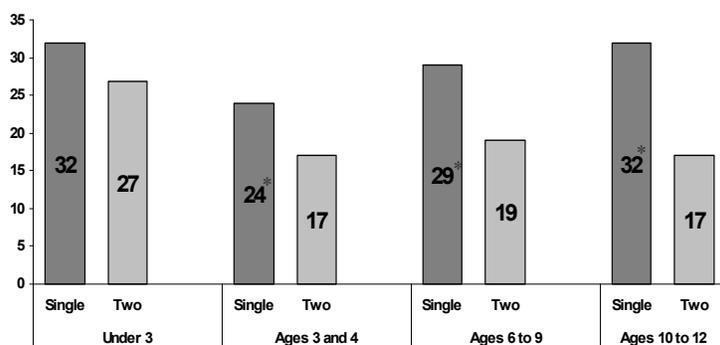
Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Notes: "Any Relative Care" equals the sum of the percentage of children only in relative care ("Only Relative Care") and the percentage of children in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements ("Relative Care in Combination"). Sums may not equal the "Any Relative Care" figure in this table because of rounding.

a. Indicates a statistically significant difference at the .10 level between single- and two-parent estimates.

In addition, within most age groups, children of single-parent families are also more likely than children of two-parent families to be in *only* relative care as their care arrangement (figure 4). The only exception is for children under 3, where children from single-parent and two-parent families are equally likely to have relative care as their only arrangement. For the other age groups, approximately one-quarter to one-third of children from single-parent families are in only relative care, compared with approximately one-sixth of children from two-parent families.

Figure 4. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent in Only Relative Care, by Family Structure



Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

* Indicates that the percentages of children in only relative care are significantly different for single- and two-parent families at the .10 level for that age group.

How does relative care use vary by parental availability?

The previous section examined relative care use by whether the child was part of a single- or two-parent family. However, the availability of these parents to provide care can depend both on the family structure and the number of hours parents are working. As noted earlier, single-parent families are more likely to use relative care than two-parent families. Additionally, while parents working full time likely have more need for child care overall, research suggests that parents working part time are more likely to rely on relative care (Casper 1997). This may be because centers and family child care providers do not always offer part-time care options. In this analysis, we examine both family structure and work status to see if relative care use varies by parent availability. Our analysis of parent availability focuses on four types of families: single parents working full time, two parents both working full time, single parent working part time,¹⁴ and two parents where there is partial employment (i.e., the spouse/partner not working or one or both parents working part time). Single parents working full time have the least amount of time available to provide care on their own, while partially employed two-parent families have the most.

¹⁴ Part-time is defined as working 34 hours or less.

The distinction in relative care use is primarily related to whether the child is in a single- or two-parent family (as shown in table 6). Children from single-parent families are more likely to be in relative care than children from two-parent families regardless of parent's work status. This difference by family structure is not surprising given the differences noted earlier between these two groups.

Comparing relative care use by parent's work status within different family structures, we find some additional differences between single- and two-parent families (table 7). In particular, children with single parents working full time and children with single parents working part time are equally likely to spend any time in relative care *and* for it to be their *only* arrangement for most age groups except 6- to 9-year-olds. In contrast, for most age groups (except 3- and 4-year-olds), children with two parents working full time are more likely than children with partially employed parents to spend any time in relative care—and for it to be their only arrangement.

Table 7. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent Using Relative Care, by Parent Availability

	Any Relative Care (Only + Combination)	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination	Sample Sizes
Single-Parent Families				
Under 3				
Single parent working full-time	43 ^c	29 ^c	13 ^{b,c}	519
Single parent working part-time	48 ^e	39 ^e	9	183
Age 3 and 4				
Single parent working full-time	46 ^{b,c}	23 ^c	23 ^{b,c}	558
Single parent working part-time	48 ^{d,e}	28 ^{d,e}	20	160
Age 6 to 9				
Single parent working full-time	42 ^{a,b,c}	31 ^{a,b,c}	11 ^{a,b,c}	1,100
Single parent working part-time	24 ^e	23 ^e	1 ^d	300
Age 10 to 12				
Single parent working full-time	34 ^{b,c}	30 ^{b,c}	4 ^c	836
Single parent working part-time	48 ^{d,e}	41 ^{d,e}	7	181
Two-Parent Families				
Under 3				
Two parents working full-time	40 ^f	33 ^f	7 ^f	1,383
Two parents partial employment	26	22	4	1,418
Age 3 and 4				
Two parents working full-time	28	17	11	1,109
Two parents partial employment	27	16	10	1,079
Age 6 to 9				
Two parents working full-time	27 ^f	21 ^f	6 ^f	2,033
Two parents partial employment	18	16	2	1,924
Age 10 to 12				
Two parents working full-time	25 ^f	21 ^f	3	1,551
Two parents partial employment	15	13	2	1,245

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Notes: Part-time employment is defined as working 34 or less hours a week. Partial employment is a two-parent family where one parent is not employed or one or both parents work part-time. "Any Relative Care" equals the sum of the percentage of children only in relative care ("Only Relative Care") and the percentage of children in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements ("Relative Care in Combination"). Sums may not equal the "Any Relative Care" figure in this table because of rounding.

Statistically significant differences at the .10 level are noted for the following comparisons of estimates: a = single-parent full-time and single-parent part-time, b = single-parent full-time and two-parent full-time, c = single-parent full-time and two-parent partial employment, d = two-parent full-time and single-parent part-time, e = single-parent part-time and two-parent partial employment, f = two-parent full-time and two-parent partial employment.

How does relative care use vary by parent's work schedule?

Parents working nontraditional hours (i.e., evenings and weekends) require more flexibility in the timing of when care takes place. Some research indicates that kith and kin providers are a more flexible option for parents (Fuller and Kagan 2000) since centers and family child care homes are often not open beyond a traditional work schedule. Our analysis examines children with parents who worked between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. (referred to as “traditional hours” in this analysis) and children with parents who worked between 6 p.m. and 6 am (referred to as “nontraditional hours” in this analysis). This analysis looks at the work schedule of the MKA.

Interestingly, few differences exist in the use of relative care by whether the child's parent worked traditional or nontraditional hours (table 8). It is important to note, though, that while children with parents working nontraditional hours appeared more likely to be in relative care than children with parents working traditional hours, most of these differences were not statistically significant. Specifically, within most age groups, children with parents working nontraditional hours and children with parents working traditional hours are equally likely to spend *any* time in relative care.¹⁵ For children under 5, there are also no differences in the percentage of children spending time *only* in relative care for children with parents working different schedules. However, school-age children with parents working nontraditional hours are more likely to be in relative care only than similar age children with parents working traditional hours—for example, 31 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds with parents working nontraditional hours spent time in only relative care, compared with 19 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds with parents working traditional hours.

The similarity in relative care use across families with different work schedules is surprising, given research that suggests that informal arrangements, such as relative care, are more likely to be used during nontraditional hours than other types of arrangements (Brandon et al. 2002). It is not clear why there are so few differences and why the only

¹⁵ The only exception is for 6- to 9-year-olds, where children with parents working nontraditional hours are more likely to spend at least some time in relative care than children with parents working traditional hours (36 percent compared with 25 percent).

Table 8. Percentage of Children with an Employed Parent Using Relative Care, by Parent’s Work Schedule

	Any Relative Care (Only + Combination)	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination	Sample Sizes
Under 3				
Works between 6 pm and 6 am	39	32	7	720
Works between 6 am and 6 pm	34	27	6	2,791
Age 3 and 4				
Works between 6 pm and 6 am	33	22	11	589
Works between 6 am and 6 pm	31	17	14	2,318
Age 6 to 9				
Works between 6 pm and 6 am	36 ^a	31 ^a	4	980
Works between 6 am and 6 pm	25	19	5	4,381
Age 10 to 12				
Works between 6 pm and 6 am	29	27 ^a	2	587
Works between 6 am and 6 pm	23	20	3	3,229

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America’s Families.

Notes: This table examines relative care use depending on the MKA’s work schedule.

“Any Relative Care” equals the sum of the percentage of children only in relative care (“Only Relative Care”) and the percentage of children in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements (“Relative Care in Combination”). Sums may not equal the “Any Relative Care” figure in this table because of rounding.

a. Indicates a statistically significant difference at the .10 level between traditional and nontraditional work schedule estimates.

differences are with school-age children. Analysis of 1999 NSAF data indicates that parents working nontraditional hours are more likely than parents working traditional hours to report that they and their spouse/partner take turns caring for their children while the other person worked, which suggests that many families may use parent care when one parent works nontraditional hours (an option that may only be available to two-parent families). Interestingly, though, when we focus only on single-parent families we still find few differences in the use of relative care by the parent’s work schedule. This is an issue that should be explored in future research.

Characteristics of the Relative Care Setting

Relatively little is known about relative caregivers, though some recent studies have looked at their characteristics (see, for example, Brandon et al. 2002). The NSAF provides the following information about the relative care setting:

- whether the relative provides the care in the child’s own home, in the relative’s home, or a combination of both;
- whether the caregiver is above or below the age of 18;
- whether the child is being cared for in a multi-child setting (i.e., one or more other children being cared for at the same time); and
- whether the caregiver lives in the child’s home.

These data provide descriptive insights into the relative care settings in which children with an employed parent are spending time. This next section examines these characteristics for those children who are in *any* relative care.

Where does the care take place?

One characteristic of the relative care setting is where the care takes place—i.e., is the child cared for in his or her own home, in the relative’s home, or a combination of both? Where children are cared for varies by the age of the child, though the patterns look similar for the two preschool age groups (children under 3 and 3- and 4-year-olds) and the two school-age groups (6- to 9-year-olds and 10- to 12-year-olds) (table 9). In particular, preschool children are more likely to be cared for in the relative’s home than school-age children. Forty-six percent of 3- and 4-year olds and 44 percent of children under 3 in relative care are cared for in the relative’s home, compared with 36 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds and 37 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds. School-age children in relative care are more likely to be cared for in their own home than preschool children—54 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds and 55 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds are cared for in their own home, compared with 38 percent of children under 3 and 36 percent of 3- and 4- year-olds. A smaller, but not insignificant, proportion of preschool and school-age children are cared for in both their home and the relative’s home, though preschool children

Table 9. Characteristics of the Relative Care Setting for Children with an Employed Parent Using Any Relative Care

	Child's Age			
	Under 3	3 and 4	6 to 9	10 to 12
Where Children Are Cared for				
In the child's home (in-home)	38 ^{a,b}	36 ^{c,d}	54	55
In the relative's home (out-of-home)	44 ^{a,b}	46 ^{c,d}	36	37
Both	18 ^{a,b}	18 ^{c,d}	10	8
Age of Caregiver				
In-home caregivers > 18	96 ^{a,b}	95 ^{c,d}	81	72
Out-of-home caregivers > 18	100	99	99	98
Multi-Child Setting				
In-home caregivers	25 ^{a,b}	33 ^c	46	38
Out-of-home caregivers	33	42 ^{c,d}	34	32
Sample sizes				
In-home caregivers	661	456	763	544
Out-of-home caregivers	772	556	738	388

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Notes: Characteristics are for children who spend any time in relative care.

Statistically significant differences at the .10 level are noted for the following comparisons of estimates: a = children under 3 and children age 6 to 9, b = children under 3 and children age 10 to 12, c = children age 3 and 4 and children age 6 to 9, d = children age 3 and 4 and children age 10 to 12.

are more likely to have this arrangement than school-age children. Approximately one-fifth of children under 5 are in a combination of an in-home and out-of-home relative care arrangement, compared with one-tenth of school-age children.

How old is the caregiver?

A second issue is the age of the caregiver. The implications of younger caregivers regularly providing care to a child depend on a variety of factors, including the skills and training of that caregiver, the environment the care is provided in, and the age of the child.¹⁶ We find that the vast majority of children in relative care are cared for by a relative over the age of 18, but this does vary by the age of the child and whether the child is cared for in his or her own home or the

relative's home (table 9).¹⁷ Children cared for *in the relative's home* are generally cared for by an individual over the age of 18—only 1 to 2 percent of children in this situation are cared for by a relative under 18. However, the percentage cared for by someone under 18 is higher—particularly for older children—when focusing on children cared for *in their own homes*. When looking at children cared for in their own homes, 4 percent of children under 3, and 5 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds, 19 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds, and 28 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds are cared for by a relative under the age of 18.

How many other children are being cared for?

A third characteristic is whether the relative cares for more than one child at the same time (which we refer to as a multi-child setting). Again, the implications vary by the age of the child. A multi-child setting may provide opportunities for social interactions for older children. At the same time, this situation can be less than ideal for infants who often need more supervision and attention—and who benefit from small child-to-adult ratios (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 1996).

While less than half of children in relative care are in a multi-child setting, the percentage varies by the age of the child and whether the child is cared for in his or her own home or in the relative's home (table 9). For children cared for *in their own home*, infants and toddlers are least likely to be in a multi-child setting, though a significant minority of this age group are in this type of setting. Twenty-five percent of children under 3 are cared for in a multi-child setting in their own home, compared with 33 percent of 3- to 4-year-olds, 46 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds, and 38 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds. For children cared for *in the relative's home*, 3- and 4-year-olds are more likely than any other group to be cared for in a multi-child setting—42 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds are cared for in a multi-child setting, compared with 33 percent of children under 3, 34 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds, and 32 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds.

¹⁶ There are implications for the caregiver also in terms of the influence of these responsibilities on their school attendance and engagement.

¹⁷ For children who were reportedly in both in-home and out-of-home relative care, the age of the in-home caregiver was counted with in-home, while the age of the out-of-home caregiver was counted with the out-of-home care. Therefore, in the case where a provider serves a child both in and out of home, the provider's age is counted in both in-home and out-of-home relative care.

Does the caregiver live in the child's home?

Another interesting question is how often children are cared for by relatives who live with them. As noted earlier, the NSAF asks parents who report relative care in their own home if the relative lives with them. The majority of children in relative care in their own home are cared for by a relative who does *not* live with them, but the percentage varies by the child's age, with younger children less likely to be cared for by a live-in relative than school-age children. Eighteen percent of children under 3 and 22 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds cared for in their own home are cared for by a live-in relative, compared with 32 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds and 35 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds.

Conclusions

Almost 10 million children regularly spend time in the care of relatives while their parents are at work, making relative care one of the more common forms of care for children. Many of these children spend significant amounts of time in relative care, particularly children under 5. As noted earlier, there are many reasons parents may choose to have their children cared for by relatives—it may be the only option they can find or afford, or it may provide them with a more flexible option that allows children to be cared for by someone parents know and trust. The prevalence of relative care use—and the significant role these caregivers play in the lives of families—underscores the importance of developing strategies for supporting these caregivers and the care they provide. Connecting with these types of providers, though, can be more difficult than regulated forms of care, such as center-based care and family child care, that are a more formal part of the child care market and more easily identifiable.

Our analysis indicates that some characteristics of relative care use and the relative care setting may be important for policymakers and the child care field to consider as they think about ways to connect with these providers. First, while this paper indicates that relative care is used in different ways by different families (i.e., as a child's only arrangement versus one of a combination of arrangements), many families are relying exclusively on relative care for their children. The implications of solely relying on relatives to care for children depends a lot on the quality of care provided within the setting—an issue beyond the scope of this paper.

Relying exclusively on relative care, however, may be a particular issue for 3- and 4-year-olds. It may mean they are missing out on settings that can prepare them for school, particularly given research that indicates informal arrangements have a less educational focus than center-based care (Brown-Lyons, Robertson, and Layzer 2001).¹⁸ While almost one in five 3- and 4-year-olds are in relative care only while their parents are at work, some families—such as low-income families, single-parent families, and Hispanic families—are more likely to rely exclusively on relatives to care for 3- and 4-year-olds. These are also groups that are of particular interest to policymakers concerned about children at risk of school failure. These findings again point to the importance of reaching out to relative caregivers and working on ways to support and enhance the quality of care provided by these caregivers. It also highlights the importance of continuing to identify ways to ensure that these children have access to high-quality preschool experiences.

Second, analysis also suggests that children spend time in a wide range of types of relative care settings. Specifically, children may be cared for in their own homes, their relative's homes, or some combination of these settings. Relative caregivers may live with the child, may be of varying ages (with some under the age of 18), and may be caring for other children at the same time. These characteristics differ by the age of the child—for example, younger children are more likely than older children to be cared for in their relative's home. Some characteristics can also vary by whether the child is cared for in his or her own home or the relative's home. This variation in relative care settings may pose a challenge for policymakers interested in designing policies to reach relative caregivers. Any policies designed to affect the care provided by relatives needs to take this variation into account, so that the policies can be appropriately targeted to, for example, a grandmother caring for a grandchild in the grandmother's house, as well as teenage siblings caring for a child after school in their home.

Overall, these findings indicate that relative caregivers provide an important support for working families and affect the lives of millions of children. This form of care is also relied on more heavily by families of particular interest to policymakers. As a consequence, addressing the needs of these caregivers and the families they serve is a critical issue in the United States.

¹⁸ This is not to say that all children exclusively in relative care are not being prepared for school. Nor does this mean that children in other settings are always in an arrangement that prepares them for school.

Appendix 1. Relative Care Use for Children with a Nonemployed Parent

Relative care also provides an important support for nonemployed parents—particularly for those looking for work or training for other jobs—who may need low-cost and flexible care. The analysis in this appendix focuses on the use of relative care by families where the parent is not working but is using relative care while looking for work or in school.¹⁹

As is true for all children, relative care is one of the most common forms of care for children with a nonemployed parent.²⁰ Approximately one-tenth of all children birth to nine with a nonemployed parent are in some regular relative care while their parent is looking for work or in school (11 percent of children under 3, 10 percent of 3- to 4-year-olds, and 9 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds).²¹ Two percent of 10- to 12-year-old children are in relative care while their parents are looking for work or in school. For the most part, relative care is also the only arrangement these children are in. The hours that these children spend in relative care vary slightly by age: children under 3 spend an average of 18 hours a week with a relative, while older children are in relative care for fewer hours—specifically, 14 hours a week on average for 3- and 4-year-olds; and 11 hours a week for 6- to 9-year-olds.²²

Differences by income, race and ethnicity, and family structure among children with a nonemployed parent are similar to those seen for children with an employed parent. In particular, use of *any* relative care while the parent is looking for work or in school among children with a nonemployed parent is higher among children from lower-income families, children with black parents, and children in single-parent families for children under 3, 3- and 4-year-olds, and 6- to 9-year-olds (see table A-1). Among 10- to 12-year-olds, children in single-parent families are more likely to be in relative care while their parent is looking for work or in school. There are, however, no significant differences in relative care use by education level.

¹⁹ The universe consists of all children with a nonemployed MKA, regardless of the employment of another parent or guardian and regardless of the MKA's participation in work-related activities such as job search, school, or training.

²⁰ Compared with relative care, the use of other nonparental arrangements such as nannies, babysitters, or family child care settings is smaller for all age groups. The use of center-based care or before- and/or after-school care is also much smaller than the use of relative care for infants and 6- to 9-year-olds, but about the same for 3- and 4-year-olds and 10- to 12-year-olds.

²¹ Not all children in this universe have a parent looking for work or in school.

Relative care may also provide an important source of child care for some low-income families transitioning from welfare to work—particularly for some age groups. Children age 3 to 4 and age 6 to 9 in *low-income* families with a recent connection to TANF are much more likely to be in relative care while their parents are looking for work or in school than are similar age children in low-income families who have never received TANF (26 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds and 22 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds with a recent connection to TANF, compared with 8 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds and 7 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds with no TANF history).²³

²² Given that the percentage of 10- to 12-year-olds is so few, the sample size of 10- 12-year-olds in relative care was too low to estimate the average hours in care.

²³ Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) is the current welfare program. Families who currently receive TANF or received TANF within the last two years were counted as having a recent connection to TANF. Families receiving welfare benefits more than two years ago were excluded from this analysis. Note that this analysis focuses only on low-income families.

Table A-1. Percentage of Children with a Nonemployed Parent in Relative Care

	Child's Age			
	Under 3	3 and 4	6 to 9	10 to 12
<u>All Children under 13</u>				
Any relative care	11	10	9	2
Only relative care	10	7	8	2
Relative care in combination	1	3	1	< 1
<u>Children under 13 in Any Relative Care</u>				
Income				
Higher-income	6 ⁺	4 ⁺	4 ⁺	1
Low-income	15	13	13	3
Race				
White	8 ^a	4 ^{a,b}	6 ^a	2
Black	29 ^c	31 ^c	19 ^c	3
Hispanic	9	12	9	2
Family Structure				
Single-parent	25 ⁺	29 ⁺	22 ⁺	5 ⁺
Two-parent	8	5	6	1
Education				
Less than H.S. diploma	10	14	11	2
H.S. diploma	14	11	9	3
College degree	4	< 1	6	2
Attached to Cash Assistance (low-income families only)				
No welfare history	15 ^c	8 ^d	7 ^d	2
Recent/Current history	15	26	22	4
Off welfare before 97	6	21	19	6

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families.

Notes: The universe consists of all children with a nonemployed MKA, regardless of the employment of another parent or guardian and regardless of the MKA's participation in work-related activities such as job search, school, or training.

Statistically significant differences at the .10 level are noted for the following comparisons of estimates: a = white and black, b = white and Hispanic, c = black and Hispanic, d = never on welfare and recently or currently on welfare, e = never on welfare and on welfare before 1997. (+) indicates significant difference between higher- and low-income families or between single- and two-parent families.

Appendix 2. Relative Care Use for Five-Year-Olds

Child care arrangements for 5-year-olds vary depending on whether the child has started school (Capizzano, Tout, and Adams 2000). Forty-five percent of 5-year-olds were enrolled in school (kindergarten or higher) in 1999. Approximately one-quarter of 5-year-olds spend time in relative care regardless of whether they are in school. For these children, it appears that relative care acts as a supplementary arrangement to either another arrangement (for children not yet in school) or school (for children in school). In particular, those children not yet in school are less likely to be in relative care as their *only* arrangement than 5-year-olds in school (8 percent compared with 16 percent), but are twice as likely to be in relative care in *combination* with other arrangements (20 percent compared with 10 percent). A similar pattern—i.e., less use of only relative care/more use of relative in combination for children not yet in school, and visa versa for children in school—exists for low-income children and children from single-parent families. This pattern does not exist for higher-income children and children from two-parent families, which may reflect the fact that relative care use is low for this group overall.

Table A-2. Percentage of Five-Year-Olds with an Employed Parent Using Relative Care, by School Attendance

Child not yet in school				
	Any Relative Care	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination	Sample Sizes
All Children Age 5 (not yet in school)	28	8 ^a	20 ^a	851
Income				
Higher-income	25	6	20 ^a	582
Low-income	33	12^a	^a	269
Family Structure				
Single-parent	38	10 ^a	28^a	211
Two-parent	24	7	17	640
Child has started kindergarten				
	Any Relative Care	Only Relative Care	Relative Care in Combination	Sample Sizes
All Children Age 5 (in kindergarten)	26	16 ^a	10 ^a	610
Income				
Higher-income	22	10	11 ^a	384
Low-income	32	25^a	7 ^a	226
Family Structure				
Single-parent	40	34^a	7 ^a	171
Two-parent	20	9	11	439

Source: Urban Institute calculations from the 1999 National Survey of American Families.

Notes: Low-income is defined as below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, and higher-income as at or above 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

“Any Relative Care” equals the sum of the percentage of children only in relative care (“Only Relative Care”) and the percentage of children in relative care as part of a combination of arrangements (“Relative Care in Combination”).

a. Indicates a statistically significant difference at the .10 level between children who have not started school and children who have started school. **Bold** indicates significant difference between low- and higher-income families or between single- and two-parent families.

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