

Single parents, living arrangements, and child care time

Single parenthood has been increasing over the last decades. Eight percent of households with children under age 18 were headed by single parents in 1960; this share was 33 percent in 2011 (Livingston, 2013). There is substantial variability in the composition of single parents' households. For example, 13 percent of children living with an unmarried parent reside with their parent's unmarried partner (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The remaining 87% of children may live only with their unmarried parent or live with their unmarried parent and other household members, such as grandparents. In this paper we will focus on single parents who do not have a cohabiting partner but may have other household members and examine gender differences in child care time, highlighting the moderating effect of the presence of another household member.

Structural-level, individual-level, and "doing gender" perspectives have guided literature on differences in child care between single fathers and single mothers. Structural-level perspectives suggest that there should be no differences in child care depending on the gender of single parents because they are in the same structural position of being a primary caregiver. However, individual-level perspectives expect differences in child care due to the innate characteristics of women and men (Risman, 1998). A "doing gender" perspective also predicts differences in child care because individuals behave in socially accepted gender standards and their behaviors are assessed based on these standards (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Hook and Chalasani (2008), selecting single parents living only with their children, found that single fathers spent significantly less time in physical care and more time in play than single mothers when their youngest child was aged 0 to 5. Except during this age range, single fathers and single mothers spend similar amount of time in primary care. Dufur et al. (2010) found differences in parenting behaviors between single fathers and single mothers, but some of the differences were explained by their demographic characteristics. However, they did not mention coresidence of single parents with other household members.

The presence of other household members may alter any gender differences in child care time among single parents. Given that mothers are expected to perform child care and fathers are expected to work, other household members may encourage single mothers to engage in child care and single fathers to work, leading to greater gender differences in child care time. In this case, other household members may act as the opposite-gender partner and help single parents perform their socially accepted gender roles. If other household members may substitute for caregiving for both single parents or for only single fathers, however, the gender differences in child care time may become small. We could not find the role of other household members for single fathers; single mothers living with parents are less likely to spend time with their children than either those living alone or married mothers in Japan (Raymo, Park, Iwasawa, & Zhou, 2014). This result shows that parents may play a caregiver role in the single mothers' households. Hence, further research regarding the influence of other household members on gender differences in child care time for single parents is necessary.

We expect any differences in child care time between single fathers and single mothers to be contingent on the presence of other household members. We examine its moderating effect in four types of child care activities (routine care, play, management, and teaching) because fathers

spend most of their child care time in play (Yeung et al., 2001) and mothers mainly take on routine care. There is no previous research as to which parent is particularly involved in the remaining two activities; we include them to study single parents' child care more comprehensively. This study will contribute to the single-parent literature by comparing the child care time of single mothers and single fathers and paying attention to the moderating effect of other household members.

Data and Methods

Data. The American Time Use Survey (ATUS) is a nationally representative survey of the time use of Americans age 15 and older (Hofferth, Flood, & Sobek, 2013). One participant is randomly selected from a household that completes its eighth and last survey of the Current Population Survey. The participant is asked to describe his or her activities over the 24-hour period, along with the location of the activities and who is present during the activities. From the 2003 – 2013 ATUS data we selected single parents aged 18 to 64 who live with own children under age 18 but without a spouse or unmarried partner. We also excluded those who have missing values in the variables used in the analysis. Our final sample consists of 1,670 single fathers and 8,471 single mothers.

Measures. The key independent variable is the gender of the single parent, and the moderator is the presence of another household member (except own children). Almost half of single fathers (51%) and 35% of single mothers reside with other household members in the sample. The dependent variables are single parents' primary child care time, comprised of routine care (e.g., physical care), play (e.g., playing sports with children), management (e.g., organization and planning for children), and teaching (e.g., reading to or with children). Socio-demographic variables (age, years of schooling, family income, and race), employment characteristics (whether they are professionally employed and work time), child characteristics (age of youngest child, number of children under age 18, and presence of a boy under age 18), and survey characteristics (whether the time diary was collected on the weekend) were measured and controlled in the analysis.

Analysis plan. Using a logistic regression analysis, we first compare whether single mothers and single fathers engage in child care activities on a given diary day. Using a sample of single parents who engage in each child care activity, we then regress the amount of time spent in it on the same set of variables. The interaction between the gender of single parents and the presence of other household member was included in the each of the models.

Results

Single fathers were less likely to report engaging in routine care, management, teaching, and any of the four primary care activities than single mothers; single parents who lived with other household members were also less likely to engage in routine care, management, and any child care than those who lived only with their children. However, the gender differences in the likelihood of engaging in any child care and routine care were greater when single parents lived with other household members than when they lived only with their children. Figures 1 and 2 show the predicted probabilities of single parents engaging in any child care and in routine care

by gender, using the average values of the control variables included in the analysis. The estimated probability of engaging in any child care when single parents lived only with their children was 85% for single mothers and 75% for single fathers. The comparable probability when single parents lived with other household members was 84% for single mothers and 55% for single fathers. Additionally, when single parents lived only with their children, the estimated probability of participating in routine care was 67% for single mothers and 52% for single fathers. When single parents lived with other household members, the comparable probability was 64% for single mothers and 32% for single fathers.

When we regressed the amount of time spent in each child care activity for those who engaged in it, being a single father and living with other household members significantly predicted a smaller amount of time spent in management. Their interaction effect was not significant in management, but it was significant in play and teaching. We found that gender differences in time spent in play and teaching were greater when single parents lived with other household members than when they lived only with their children. Using the average scores of the variables controlled in the analysis, we estimated the amount of time spent in play and teaching, shown in Figures 3 and 4. Single mothers who lived only with their children were estimated to spend 112 minutes per day in play and single fathers with the same characteristics were estimated to spend 136 minutes in play. This pattern was reversed when single parents lived with other household members. Single mothers living with other household members were estimated to spend 126 minutes in play and single fathers in the same living arrangement were estimated to spend 109 minutes. The pattern for teaching was similar to that in play. The estimated amount of time spent in teaching for single mothers living only with their children was 55 minutes per day and for single fathers was 60 minutes per day. The comparable estimates when single parents live with other household members were 60 minutes for single mothers and 37 minutes for single fathers.

Next steps

In this proposal, we tested the moderating effect of the presence of other household members in the association between the gender of single parents and child care time. The preliminary findings show that single parents adjust their engagement in some of the child care activities and the amount of time spent in child care depending on their coresidence with other household members. Interestingly, being a single parent consistently predicts a lower probability of reporting engagement in any child care and routine care for fathers than for mothers but the difference is greater when single parents live with other household members than when they live only with their children. For those who spend time in child care, being a single father predicts greater time spent in play and teaching than mothers when single parents live only with their children but it predicts smaller time spent in both of the activities than for mothers when they live with other household members. To help understand these moderation effects, we plan to examine the socio-demographic characteristics of other household members, such as age, employment status, and their relationship to the single parent. This additional information would help us describe how these characteristics of other household members influence gender differences in child care time among single parents.

References

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Figure 1. Predicted Probability of Engaging in Any Child Care, by Gender of Single Parents and Living Arrangements

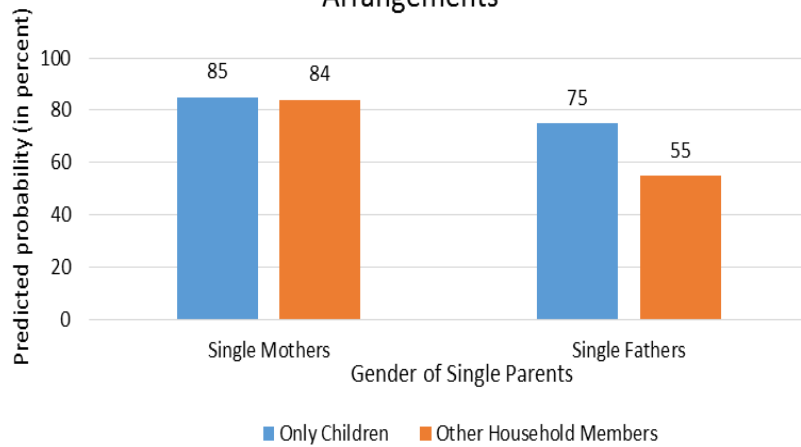


Figure 2. Predicted Probability of Engaging in Routine Care, by Gender of Single Parents and Living Arrangements

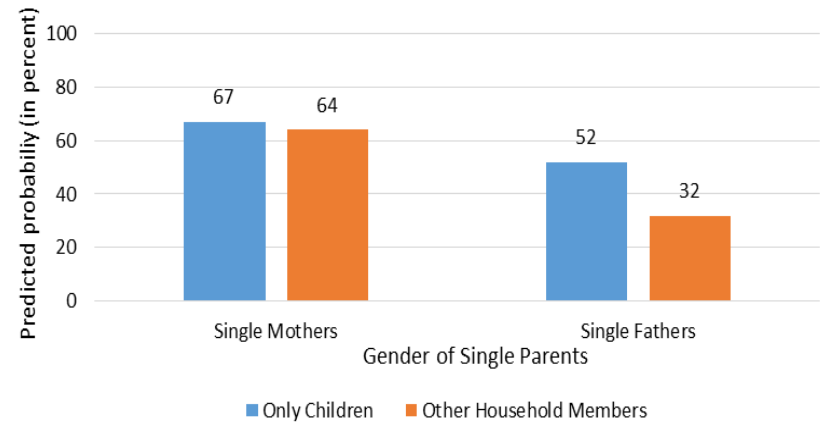


Figure 3. Estimated Amount of Time Spent in Play, by Gender of Single Parents and Living Arrangements

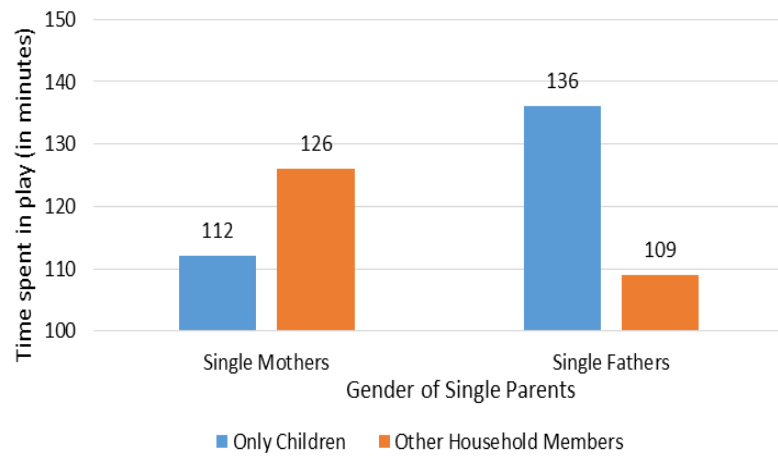


Figure 4. Estimated Amount of Time Spent in Teaching, by Gender of Single Parents and Living Arrangements

