

The Contributions of Nonresident Parents to Child Care Arrangements and Costs

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I. INTRODUCTION

Because most parents of young children work for pay—nonresident parents as well as resident parents, mothers as well as fathers—child care costs and logistics constitute important considerations in determining appropriate child support orders.¹ Wisconsin’s child support guidelines do not specify how child care costs should be allocated between parents; instead they allow for a deviation from the guideline amount based on parents’ contributions to the financial costs of child care. However, there is limited information available on how resident and nonresident parents make child care arrangements, and on whether or how these arrangements are reflected in child support obligations. This report focuses on the non-monetary contributions by nonresident parents to child care—including transporting children to and from child care providers and providing care themselves—since both non-monetary and financial supports, may shape families’ decisions about and experiences with child care in ways that differ from decision-making within intact families.² A companion report (Kim and Meyer, 2013) explores the extent to which child support orders contain explicit information on child care costs and/or designate which parent is responsible for paying these costs.

Funding provided by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families supported this study’s unique investigation of these issues as they relate to preschool-age children and their

¹We use the terms “resident” and “nonresident” to refer to parents as this is the language used in our survey, and because no award of custody has been made for some of these families.

²For ease of exposition, in this report “non-intact” means that the parent of a child who was eligible for public 4K reported that the child had a non-resident parent; “intact” includes all other children. The designation is thus child-specific, rather than family-specific (e.g., a different child may be living with both parents even if focal child is only living with one; or even if focal child is living with two parents, a different child in the family may have a nonresident parent).

parents. Using new data from surveys and in-depth interviews with parents, the study examines the roles that factors such as the timing, flexibility and stability of parents' job schedules and availability of time off and other supports play in parents' navigation of a range of caregiving and early-education options. I look specifically at how resident parents, any live-in partners, as well as nonresident parents (in the case of non-intact families) together navigate the choice and experience of preschool through sharing child care costs and logistics. The research was conducted in Madison, Wisconsin, which in recent years has initiated a hybrid approach to universal "4-year-old kindergarten" (4K), based in both public elementary schools and private child care centers, to provide children in their final year before kindergarten with three hours of daily programming on Tuesdays through Fridays during the district's academic year. The project thus provides information on the families eligible for the child support system, including how they negotiate an important area of their children's lives and whether these patterns are similar to those in intact families. This contextual information may be useful in considering current child support policy.

From this study, we learn that parents in non-intact families appear to face disproportionate employment-based challenges to accessing center-based child care for their young children relative to their peers from intact families. Days and hours of care coverage are a significantly greater priority for these non-intact families, and the programs in which their children are enrolled are modestly but significantly less often these parents' first choice. Many nonresident parents, in turn, offer non-monetary supports for child care access—in the forms of care for the child and transportation of the child to program care—that in some cases broaden non-intact families' choices of where to enroll their preschool-age children. These types of support may be integrated into child support orders less often.

II. BACKGROUND

Finding high-quality, affordable child care is a critical concern for families with young children and parents who are employed. This issue may be especially pressing for single-parent families, who do not have the support of another parent in the home to help address the child care need, to assist in paying for care, or to help with coordinating the details of care like transporting the child to and from care and managing the transitions (e.g., Skinner, 2005). Some of these parents are able to receive help from the non-resident parent (Kim and Meyer, 2014), but this does not occur frequently. Moreover, many of the child care options available are not well suited to the kinds of jobs low-income families have, whether they are single parents or not (Henly and Lambert, 2005). These issues are even more important because high-quality child care affects child development (e.g., Duncan et al., 2007).

At least 40 U.S. states fund universal public pre-kindergarten (pre-K) for an estimated 1.3 million 3- and 4-year-olds as a strategy to increase children's attendance in high quality preschools, the ultimate goal of which is enhancing school academic and social readiness and long-term educational success (Barnett et al., 2010). Pre-K programs have been further noted as helping to facilitate the employment of parents with young children, and thus promoting family economic security (Bartik, 2011). Parental employment has also been suggested as a factor that could influence family decisions about, and experiences with, pre-K programs. In studies by Zaslow et al. (2006) and Adams et al. (2006), parents reported that conflicts between work schedules and pre-K operating hours limited their choices of program options, and reduced their satisfaction with pre-K program participation.

Yet in spite of this evidence of a conflict, we know surprisingly little about *how* parents' work demands interact with elements of pre-K program design— including hours of operation,

availability and cost of extended child care, and other features. The more incompatible these factors are, the more likely it is that children of economically vulnerable working parents—as well as some working parents with the financial means to choose fuller-coverage child care options—will opt out of pre-K program participation. Even for participating families, incompatibilities between employment obligations and pre-K program design may create new work-life challenges that affect parents' engagement in their children's learning in other ways. These possibilities represent hurdles for the accessibility and student body diversity of public pre-K program initiatives, including their effectiveness at closing racial and socioeconomic gaps in children's school readiness and achievement.

Moreover, the interaction of parents' work demands with pre-K and other child care options, an important and understudied issue, may operate differently in non-intact versus intact families. Non-intact families may face additional complications in negotiating which parent gets to select child care or pre-K, who pays for it, and how transportation occurs, given that the parents do not live together. If work demands make the connection between work and child care difficult for most intact families as has been suggested by the literature, separated families may face even more complex issues, yet little is known about how this is negotiated.

The rest of the report is organized by three areas of inquiry:

Inquiry 1: What are the characteristics of child care used by families with 4K-eligible children, and how do these compare across intact and non-intact families?

Inquiry 2: What are the conditions of employment encountered by families with 4K-eligible children, and how do these compare across intact and non-intact families? How do parents' jobs correlate with care choices by intact and non-intact families?

Inquiry 3: How does the existence of a child support order and the proportion of that order that is paid affect decisions about, and parents' experience with, child care in non-intact families? How do nonresident parents' logistical as well as financial contributions shape families' decisions about and experiences with child care?

The report closes with a brief discussion of implications for policy and future research.

III. METHODS

Sample Selection and Data Collection Procedures

This research was conducted in Madison, WI, which initiated 4K in the fall of 2011. New data were collected from parents who had children that, based on their age and city of Madison residence, were eligible to attend public 4K in Madison during the 2013–14 school year. Parents were accessed via my sampling of the population of 125 private child care centers and elementary schools that in 2013 served 4-year-old children. Fifty-five of the sites participated in public 4K, including 33 private child care centers and 22 public elementary schools. Seventy Madison child care centers did not participate in the 4K initiative for one of two reasons: (1) because the center had opted out of applying for 4K participation despite possessing the requisite certification and licensure for involvement (24); or (2) because the center did not qualify given a lack of such credentials (46). The “opt-out” centers may thus be considered to be of fairly high quality, while the “non-qualified” centers are less so, according to a set of locally (and in many cases nationally) prevailing standards.

As a first step to establishing a study sample frame, I mapped all of these sites, and then identified distinct geographic clusters in East, West, and South Madison featuring 43 sites arrayed across the four types. From those, I selected 34 sites serving children who by their age and residence were eligible to attend public 4K: 12 public 4K sites (six public elementary schools and six private child care centers) and 22 private child care centers not participating in the public 4K program (both non-qualified and opt-out types). The public elementary schools

were selected purposively to assure comparable demographic diversity within and to some extent across the three geographic clusters; the private child care centers were randomly selected.³

At each participating site, surveys were distributed by mail or in person to all parents of children attending the center or school who were eligible for the public 4K program in Madison (including 4-year-olds and some young 5-year-olds). Questions on the parent survey collected detailed information about parents' employment schedules and other working conditions as relevant, family demographic data, factors shaping decisions about education and child care arrangements for their 4K-eligible children, and their satisfaction with chosen child education and child care arrangements.

The final page of the parent survey asked whether parents were willing to be contacted about follow-up face-to-face interviews; 153 of 240 survey parents assented. A sample frame of 64 of these parents was selected after stratifying parents by race and ethnicity, household income, occupation type (broadly, professional versus blue collar or working class), and intact versus non-intact family status. I also sought to create comparable pairs of prospective interviewees in order to allow for potential variation in parental characteristics and experiences within these stratified categories. Parents of color were oversampled to try to enhance the capacity of interview data analyses to identify patterns among otherwise small numbers of survey respondents, though their numbers remain very small. The semi-structured interview protocol included questions about parents' employment conditions, work-life balance

³The purposive component of the selection of the school-based public 4K site selection may have introduced some degree of non-representativeness among the parent sample, such that the participating non-intact families here do not reflect the experiences of their peers in the general Madison population. That said, the sampling strategy—by trying to promote racial and socioeconomic diversity of families by focusing on schools with ample lower-income and racially/ethnically diverse student bodies, may in some ways have enhanced the proportion of and variation among non-intact families in the study.

navigations, and influences on their child care and early childhood education decisions and experiences. Parent interviewees received a \$25 pre-paid Visa card as a participation incentive.

Response Rates

Across the 34 sites included in the study, 638 parents were identified as having enrolled children of the age to be eligible for Madison's 4K program; of these, 240 completed surveys were returned (with another three survey recipients later identified as having ineligible children, and 34 surveys confirmed as being undeliverable), yielding a parent survey response rate of 40 percent. Of 153 parents who took the survey and who indicated willingness to participate in a face-to-face interview, 24 were interviewed and five declined participation after being contacted.⁴

Analyses

Analyses were conducted using SPSS statistical analysis software and Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software. This report draws on the data collected in parent surveys and interviews, elaborating on the employment conditions, characteristics of care chosen by those parents for their 4K-eligible child, the nature and extent of child support—both monetary and not—provided by nonresident parents involved with that child; and the role of such nonresident parent supports in the child's access to and experience with care.

Given the modest sample of survey respondents reporting the existence of a nonresident parent (n=47), I was constrained in the multivariate analyses of the survey data from isolating a range of potential differences between intact and nonintact families. I consequently utilize more

⁴One of the 24 interviews is not included in subsequent data analysis given the research team's assessment that a language barrier (he was a native Hmong speaker) had interfered with his understanding of the interview questions.

modest quantitative models and interview data together to identify potential patterns of difference and suggest directions for both future child support research and policy.

IV. FINDINGS

Table 1 provides a summary of basic demographic characteristics for the parent survey sample, showing separate results for those who reported their 4K-eligible child had a nonresident parent and those who did not. For context, it also shows characteristics of those who participated in the face-to-face interviews. The group reporting a nonresident parent for the focal child (47 out of the total 236 parents, roughly 20 percent) is somewhat more racially diverse than the group of survey respondents who did not have a nonresident parent, including about double the proportion of black parents. They are less advantaged in several ways; they have lower education levels, with a clustering of parents reporting a vocational or technical certificate or less (but also roughly a third of whom have bachelor's degrees), and lower household income. Not surprisingly, survey-responding parents indicating the existence of a nonresident parent also indicated higher rates of being single, married or partnered but not living with a spouse, as well as previously divorced.⁵

Inquiry 1: What are the characteristics of child care used by families with 4K-eligible children, and how do these compare across intact and non-intact families?

Information on child care characteristics among intact and non-intact families is summarized in Table 2. The 4K-eligible children of survey respondents without a nonresident parent were enrolled primarily in non-4K-qualifying child care centers (38 percent) and public

⁵Among the 236 cases in the survey data, 187 were parents who were in live-in relationships (married or not) and reported no nonresident parent; 13 were in live-in relationships and had a nonresident parent; and 34 were single (or indicated the existence of a non-live in partner) with a nonresident parent. A final two cases were parents without a live-in partner who also reported no nonresident parent (the second parent may have been deceased or else the child adopted by that single parent; no questions were asked to clarify this).

Table 1. Survey Respondent Demographics

	Survey Respondents w/out Nonresident Parents (n=189)	Survey Respondents w/ Nonresident Parents (n=47)	Interviewed Survey Respondents w/ Nonresident Parents (n=12)	
Geographic Cluster				
East	39.7%	40.4%	5	41.7%
South	20.6	31.9	6	50.0
West	39.7	27.7	1	8.3
Age (mean)	37.0 (4.7)	32.9 (6.7)		31.3 (6.12)
Race/Ethnicity				
White	83.6	74.5	10	83.3
Asian	10.6	6.4	0	0
Black	5.3	14.9	2	16.7
Hispanic	5.3	4.3	0	0
Born in U.S.	82.0	89.4	11	91.7
Education				
Less than high school	1.1	4.3	0	0
High School	4.3	19.6	4	33.3
Vocational/technical certificate (<2 years)	2.7	23.9	2	16.7
2-year college	5.9	8.7	1	8.3
4-year college	40.1	32.6	3	25
Master's	32.6	8.7	1	8.3
Doctorate	13.4	2.2	1	8.3
Gross Annual Income				
<\$15,000	2.2	25.5	3	25
\$15,000–\$24,999	3.8	19.1	1	8.3
\$25,000–\$34,999	2.7	10.6	3	25
\$35,000–\$49,999	4.8	17.0	2	16.7
\$50,000–\$74,999	17.7	14.9	2	16.7
\$75,000–\$99,999	21.0	6.4	1	8.3
>\$100,000	47.8	6.4	0	0
Received Public Assistance in 2013	11.2	59.6	8	66.7
Respondent Relationship Status				
Married, live w/ spouse	92.6	8.5	2	16.7
Married, not live w/ spouse	0.5	12.8	1	8.3
In relationship, living w/ partner	5.8	6.4	1	8.3
In relationship, not living w/ partner	0.0	17.0	1	8.3
Single	1.1	55.3	7	58.3
Ever Divorced	6.9	46.8	5	41.7
Unemployed for More Than 1 Month	22.0	25.5	3	25
Currently Employed	80.4	89.4	9	75

Table 2. Summary of Care Characteristics for Respondents' 4K-Eligible Children

	Survey respondents w/out nonresident parents (n=189)	Survey respondents w/ nonresident parents (n=47)	Interviewed respondents w/ nonresident parents (n=12)
Type of Center Child Attends			
Public 4K—school	33.3%	27.7%	16.7%
Public 4K—center	9.5	27.7***	16.7
Center that opted out of 4K participation	19.1	8.5*	8.3
Center that did not qualify for participation	38.1	36.2	58.3
# hours per week at center	26.6 (14.7)	32.1 (13.4)**	34.8
Attends center 4 or 5 days per week	87.3	90.6	100
Arrives before 8am 4 or 5 days per week	33.5	48.9	33.3
Always leaves center before 6pm	98.9	97.8	100
Child's current main program was first choice	92.9	83.0**	83.3
Family considered other programs	46.7	47.8	50.0
Importance of Factors in Choice of Main Program^a			
Number of hours available	3.3	4.3***	4.1
Which hours were available	3.5	4.2***	4.1
Number of days available	3.3	4.2***	4.0
Which days were available	3.2	4.2***	4.0
Other Caregiving Help Used			
Non-center, paid caregiver	23.0	31.8	9.1
Unpaid caregiver (friend or family)	26.0	45.7***	50.0
Sibling	4.4	12.2*	18.2
Number of different types of care used in a typical week	1.3	2.0***	1.9
Monthly child care costs for 4K-eligible child	\$593.43 (414.93)	\$506.82 (394.3)	\$453.06 (342.9)
Government agency, employer, friend or relative helps pay for 4K-eligible child's care	10.4	42.6***	50.0

Notes: Comparisons between all survey respondents and survey respondents reporting that their 4K-eligible child has a nonresident parent were conducted using an ANOVA one-way difference of means test.

*** $p \leq .01$; ** $p \leq .05$; * $p \leq .10$.

^aOn 5-point Likert scale (1=not at all important, 5=extremely important).

4K sites based at elementary schools (33 percent), with just 19 percent of those children attending centers that had opted out of the public 4K program and 10 percent at public 4K sites operating within private centers.

In total, 43 percent of parents in intact families made use of Madison's public 4K program. They overwhelmingly indicated that the programs in which their 4K-eligible children were enrolled—of whatever type—were their first choice (93 percent). They also reported high use of days of coverage (87 percent sent children to programs at least four days a week), though fewer than full-time hours on average (27 hours per week). They additionally drew substantially on complementary forms of child care, including other paid providers (23 percent of these parents) and unpaid friends or family members who cared for 4K-eligible children during parents' work hours (26 percent). The average cost for all forms of paid care for the 4K-eligible child among survey respondents in intact families was \$593 per month. Just 10 percent of these parents reporting having assistance with payment from a governmental agency, employer, friend or relative (Table 2).

Survey-responding parents with nonresident parents for their 4K-eligible children exhibited a somewhat different profile for child care use. 55 percent of these children were enrolled in public 4K sites, evenly split between public elementary schools and private child care centers; use of the latter form of care was statistically significantly higher among this group (Table 2). Significantly fewer of these parents than in the intact family group utilized opt-out centers (just 9 percent), thought to be of higher quality, while a comparable proportion to parents in intact families had placed children in non-4K-qualified centers (36 percent). Thus, among families not using public 4K programs, a greater proportion with than without nonresident parents make use of possibly lower-quality, non-qualifying centers. The programs where these

children were enrolled were significantly less often these parents' first choice (83 percent), and used for significantly more hours per week (32) than among survey respondents in intact families (Table 2).

The two parent groups also exhibited statistically significant differences in the respective importance to their child care program decision-making of the number and timing of both hours and days of child care coverage available, with respondents who reported having nonresident parents rating these factors on average between "very" important and "extremely" important, in contrast to survey respondents as a whole rating these considerations as between only "somewhat" and "very" important (Table 2). In addition, parents who were part of non-intact families indicated significantly greater use of unpaid caregiver coverage (46 versus all parents' 26 percent) and use of older siblings to provide care (12 versus 4 percent). These parents, finally, indicated that in a typical week their 4K-eligible children experienced significantly more types of care than parent survey respondents as a whole (two types versus one). They paid on average just over \$500 monthly of their 4K-eligible child's care, and over 40 percent—in statistically significant contrast to survey respondents from intact families—reported receiving support for these costs from other sources.

These findings suggest, promisingly, that parents whose 4K-eligible children have nonresident parents are more likely to use public 4K programs than parents in intact families, though they are less likely to use the opt-out programs that may be of comparably high quality. In this sample, they use institutional preschool-type programs for their children for more hours than parents in intact families, and appear to face more constrained choices in such care given the importance of securing the right, and right quantity, of hours and days of coverage. They also show greater reliance on informal and unpaid forms of care—friends and family including older

children—to round out the coverage that they need. They do appear to access sources outside of their households for helping pay for child care costs.

Inquiry 2: What are the conditions of employment encountered by families with 4K-eligible children, and how do these compare across intact and non-intact families? How do parents' jobs correlate with care choices by intact and non-intact families?

Table 3 examines only those respondents who reported paid employment; this is 78 percent of those in intact families (n=147) and 89 percent of those in non-intact families (n=42); the two groups are not statistically different on this measure. A large majority of parent survey respondents from intact families held full-time (71 percent) employment, averaging 36 hours per week. They indicated fairly low levels of work schedule and hour disruptions such as last minute changes, including cuts, to hours; being called to work unexpectedly or sent home from work early; and having to call into work on the same day to get hours: these rates fell between “never” and “rare.” They also reported wide access to flexible scheduling on their jobs that allowed them to fulfill their nonwork obligations, and to both paid and unpaid time off (82 and 77 percent, respectively; Table 3).

By comparison, survey respondents reporting a nonresident parent showed somewhat higher, though not significantly so, rates of full-time jobs (81 percent). They were also significantly more likely than the other parents to hold more than one job (22 versus 10 percent). They reported modestly but significantly higher frequencies of schedule and work hour insecurity, as reflected in rates greater than respondents from intact families of having hours cut by a manager, having to call in to get hours the day of work, being called into work unexpectedly, and being sent home early. They exhibited lower, though not significantly so, access to paid and unpaid time off (76 and 64 percent, respectively), and comparable levels of scheduling flexibility.

Table 3. Employed Survey Respondent Job Characteristics

	Employed Survey Respondents w/out Nonresident Parent (n=147)	Employed Survey Respondents with Nonresident Parent (n=42)	Employed Interviewees with Nonresident Parents (n=12)
Main job is full-time	70.8%	81.0%	100.0%
Have more than one job	10.2	22.0**	22.2
Typical weekly hours in main job	36.3 (12.0)	36.5 (10.9)	43.2 (7.7)
Scheduling and Hours^a			
How often manager changes or cuts hours without employee consent	1.2	1.3*	1.1
How often employee must call in the same day to see if s/he must come into work	1.1	1.3***	1.0
How often employee is called into work unexpectedly	1.4	1.7**	1.3
How often employee is sent home early	1.2	1.4*	1.1
Time-Related Job Benefits			
Amount of scheduling flexibility for fulfilling non-work obligations ^b	3.6	3.4	3.6
Job offers paid time off	82.3	76.2	88.9
Job offers unpaid time off	76.6	64.3	77.8

Note: Comparisons between all employed survey respondents and survey respondents reporting that their 4K-eligible child has a nonresident parent were conducted using an ANOVA one-way difference of means test.

*** $p \leq .01$; ** $p \leq .05$; * $p \leq .10$.

^aOn 5-point Likert scale (1=never, 5=extremely often).

^bOn 5-point Likert scale (1=none, 5=a very great deal).

These analyses suggest a somewhat greater vulnerability of parents whose children have nonresident parents to needing hours of child care sufficient and at the right times of day to cover expected, usually full-time, hours; as well as to cover unexpected shift variations such as working at unplanned times, or earlier or later than expected.

I conducted logistic regression analysis to examine multivariate relationships between parents' employment characteristics and their enrollment of their 4K-eligible children in a public 4K program at a Madison public school or approved private child care center (results are summarized in Table 4). I included four job-scheduling features, discussed in descriptive analyses above, that by causing instability in parents' work hours may impose particular limitations to parents' selection of child care center arrangements: (1) parents' amount of advance job schedule notice (1=less than one week to 4=more than four weeks), (2) how often an employed parent experiences cuts or changes to work hours without his or her consent, (3) being called into work unexpectedly, and (4) having to work longer than planned on a given shift (1=never, 5=extremely often). A dummy variable was used to capture the existence of a nonresident parent. Control variables included a respondent's being white; the number of children in the respondent's home at least half of the time; gross annual household income, captured in two dummy variables, one for under \$35,000 per year and another \$75,000 or more (the reference group was income between \$35,000 and \$75,000); presence of a live-in spouse or partner; and four dichotomous variables reflecting the respondent's education level (high school diploma/GED or less, vocational-technical certification or Associate's degree, and graduate degree; those with bachelor's degrees were the reference group).

Table 4 presents both logistic regression coefficients and odds ratios, or the exponentiation of the coefficients; odds ratios smaller than one indicate a reduced chance of the

Table 4. Job Characteristics of Employed Survey Respondents as Predictors of Public 4K Enrollment of Their Children

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Nonresident Parent	.792	.949	2.207
Controls			
White	-.404	.465	.667
Number of children in home at least half time	.650	.200	1.916***
Gross annual household income \$75,000 or more	-.860	.462	.423*
Gross annual household income less than \$35,000	.928	.744	2.530
Graduate degree	-.333	.385	.717
Vo-tech or associate's degree	.259	.596	1.296
HS diploma/GED or less	.642	.924	1.899
Live-in spouse or partner	1.429	.972	4.175
Job Characteristics			
Amount of advance job schedule notice	.192	.207	1.212
How often manager cuts or changes hours	.304	.411	1.355
How often called into work unexpectedly	-.476	.268	.621*
How often must work longer than planned	-.030	.183	.970
Constant	-2.347	1.468	.096
Chi-square	37.911***		

Note: The binary dependent variable in this logistic regression model is 4K-eligible child's enrollment in a public 4K site (school- or center-based), coded as 1 for yes and 0 for no.

outcome occurring in relation to an explanatory variable, while a larger than one odds ratio represents an increased chance. The odds ratio for the presence of a nonresident parent, though suggesting increased likelihood of public 4K enrollment, was not found to be significant. This model suggests that parents who are called into work unexpectedly, as one dimension of variable and unpredictable work hours, are significantly less likely to have enrolled their child in a public 4K program (Table 4). Relationships with the remaining employment variables were not statistically significant. Among the control variables, the number of children in the respondent's home was significantly positively associated with public 4K enrollment and gross annual household income was significantly negatively associated with public 4K enrollment (Table 4).

Inquiry 3: How does the existence of a child support order and the proportion of that order that is paid affect decisions about, and parents' experience with, child care in non-intact families? How do nonresident parents' logistical as well as financial contributions shape families' decisions about and experiences with child care?

Of the 47 parent survey respondents and 12 face-to-face interviewees reporting that their 4K-eligible child had a nonresident parent, 57 and 50 percent respectively, have legal child support orders in place, as shown in Table 5. Among survey-takers, level of payment of the order was fairly evenly distributed (a third indicated full payment, just over a third "some" payment, and 29 percent said none of the amount had been paid). Interviewees reported double the rate of non-payment (nine of the twelve interviewees said they had received none of the mandated funds).

Levels of non-monetary support were somewhat greater than monetary for both groups, however. 40 percent of survey respondents and nearly two-thirds of interviewees indicated that the nonresident parent was "sometimes" or more often involved in caring for the 4K-eligible child. In addition, one-third of each group reported receiving help in the form of the nonresident parent dropping off a child from their child care program, picking the child up, or both (Table 5).

Table 5. Summary of Child Support and Other Help Provided by Nonresident Parents, as reported by Survey Respondents

	Survey Respondents w/ Nonresident Parents (n=47)	Interviewed Respondents w/ Nonresident Parents (n=12)
Court Ordered Child Support		
Legal order in place	57.4%	50.0%
All has been paid	33.3	0.0
Some has been paid	37.5	33.3
None has been paid	29.2	66.7
Non-Monetary Support from Nonresident Parent		
Sometimes, very often or extremely often helps with caring for child	40.0	63.6
Help with dropping off and/or picking up child	32.6	33.3

Parental interviews provide an opportunity to examine in greater depth how financial and logistical supports from a second parent—one who is part of an intact relationship or a nonresident parent—shapes child care decisions and the day-to-day experience of balancing having a child attend care with other responsibilities (e.g., parental employment and responsibility for caring for other children).

Interviews with parents in intact families (with either two co-parents, or a parent with a new spouse or partner) provide insights on the collaborative logistical process that co-parents in non-intact arrangements can engage to facilitate access to child care. Amy, married with a preschool-age daughter, noted that on Mondays and Tuesdays,

“[My daughter] is at school until we pick her up at 5:30pm. Which is when I leave work or when my partner goes to get her. Yes, we coordinate. Usually me. Unless I have to work late, then we make sure someone gets her.... Wednesday and Thursdays,... I work, so my partner is with my daughter all day and they kind of occupy themselves with stuff. Reading, playing outside.”

In addition to rotating days, some parents with current partners worked staggered job shifts to cover morning drop-offs and afternoon or early evening pick-ups of children from child care. Stephanie explained,

“[My husband] wakes [my daughter] up about ten to seven, and they have breakfast and go to school. She is usually there by 8:00. And then I pick her up anywhere from 4:00 to 5:15pm. So Jason drops off and you pick up—which is why you have to go into work earlier in the mornings. Yes. So by the time she usually gets to school, I am at work for four hours.”

Stressing how the cooperation between her and her husband around child care logistics had been central to being able to send their daughter to a center-based program, she continued, “If I had to do the drop off, than we probably wouldn’t have been able to [enroll in the current child care center].” Martha echoed this arrangement, noting that her husband “does all of the

drop offs and I do the pick-ups. We are very uniform” about arranged logistics for combining both parents’ employment with child care.

Interviews with parents no longer in relationships with their preschool child’s other parent offer a range of scenarios for their navigations of support, or lack thereof, from those co-parents. Greg, whose 4K-eligible child attended a private child care center on Madison’s west side that was unqualified to participate in the public 4K program, noted that his decisions about program placement were driven by quality and consistency, supported by the fact that he and his ex-wife evenly split child care costs. At the point of potential transition of their son from his past child care to a public 4K program, Greg felt that having their son remain in a familiar environment was preferable to transitioning to a new one, even if it was a more credentialed (public 4K-providing) program. He also believed that his son’s non-qualifying center was providing a “4K curriculum.” As a result of prevailing upon his ex-wife to accept that preference, he assumed greater responsibility for transporting his son to and from the center than his ex-wife.

Conversely, Mark, whose son was enrolled in an east side child care center not qualified to participate in public 4K, reported that though he and his ex-wife evenly split care costs, she made the decision about where their son would attend because “I just didn’t care as much.” As a result, the center is far—about an hour’s drive—from Mark’s home, leading the mother to assume most responsibility for day-to-day parenting and child care transporting. Mark described his ex-wife’s job as an apartment complex manager as full-time but very flexible, “pretty informal because she doesn’t have to go into the office” (she works and lives onsite).

Sam, whose child attends a qualified but non-participating child care program on Madison's south side, reported that all costs as well as decision-making about where their daughter is enrolled are shared equally, as well as her transportation to and from the center.

Sandra, whose child is enrolled in a public elementary school providing 4K programming on the south side, indicated that she alone finances and makes and implements decisions about child care. Though a legal order is in place, her former partner has never paid any of the mandated amount and has been otherwise uninvolved in her son's life. She expressed particular frustration over her sense that in spite of this lack of support, ex-partners like hers "still have the right to make the decisions, you know, about child care or visitation. They still have the right ... even if they don't, you know, show up or be parents, or whatever."

Tanya's daughter attends a publicly-funded 4K program in a south side child care center. She does not have a formal child care order with her ex-partner, but reported that he "helps out sometimes"—though not primarily through monetary payments. Rather, his family complements their daughter's 4K hours by watching her while Tanya is at work.

Rachel has two children, one 4K-eligible. She was the sole decision maker for where that child attends care outside the home, in this case a non-4K-qualifying center on Madison's east side. She was separated from her husband during the prior year (final year before kindergarten for this child); at that time, roughly 60 percent of the center costs were paid through a Dane County subsidy program, with Rachel and her husband evenly splitting the rest by informal agreement. Now that the couple is back together, this shared financing continues, but she receives little more logistical help as a result of her husband's intense and inflexible, often 70+ hour per week work schedule in two restaurant industry jobs (kitchen manager and cook). She

noted, “When he is home, he is very engaged.... But he is not there most of the time, which puts most of the child care on me.”

Beth’s son attends an east side child care center that is also non-qualifying. She described a process by which she and her son’s father share financing as well as decision-making and logistics related to child care: “We did it together. Anything that we decide for him, we have always done together. Like he will do his search and I will do mine, and we will come together and see what we like.” Both parents work in human services and, though full-time, have a fair amount of work schedule predictability and flexibility. In her ex-partner’s case, “[I]f there is some doctor appointment or something with our son, he is usually able to get off and be there.”

These excerpts show a range of arrangements—though not all are intentional, or preferred—by which resident and nonresident parents navigate covering the costs and logistics of their preschool children’s care. There are numerous examples of nonresident parents who provide logistical help, in addition to or in the absence of court-ordered or informal monetary payments. This in-kind support modestly corresponds with those parents having more decision-making involvement in what center their children attend.⁶ When enrollment decisions are left to one (typically the primary resident) parent, that parent also typically assumes most or all of the logistical responsibilities for implementing the decision.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings reported here provide important context for understanding the lives of parents in the child support system and provide information for those designing and

⁶Information about legal custody (formal decision-making power over issues like child care arrangements) was not collected.

implementing 4K programming. The findings suggest that parents whose children have nonresident parents disproportionately face time-based demands from their paid employment that constrain decision-making about child care programming; as a result, factors such as center operating hours and days and hours of availability of care may be prioritized over other considerations, such as personal comfort and perceived quality. Given that the city of Madison's public 4K program is offered just four days per week (Tuesdays through Fridays), and just three hours per day—and that these parents on average report using paid center care for 32 hours per week with their 37-hour per week jobs—accessibility of public 4K for these and even other (intact) families may be substantially limited. While some extended care is available at public 4K-participating child care centers, not all of those programs provide it to all spots offered, and costs for extended care vary. Meanwhile, non-qualified centers can often provide more and more stable hours and a competitive cost, meaning parents with work hour coverage needs and budgetary constraints may necessarily favor those opportunities over quality. This has implications for the capacity of a public program like universal pre-K to reach all families evenly, and to in turn achieve the stated goals of enhanced school preparation and reduction of race- and class-based achievement gaps.

With respect to child support, this study finds that both monetary and in-kind (caregiving) assistance play a role in where preschool-age children receive care and what the experience of the primary caregiving (resident) parent is in navigating it. Nonresident parents were described in surveys and interviews with their resident co-parents as offering important and non-trivial levels of caregiving and transportation help. This likely serves to widen the range of options for care that may be considered for that child (and allow emphasis on factors beyond logistical day and hour issues), reduce the work-life conflict of the primary parent who is otherwise navigating

employment, home, and child care choice and attendance largely alone, and keep the nonresident parent engaged in the daily life of his or her child. The contribution of such logistical and emotional resources by a nonresident parent is thus non-trivial. However, further research may be prudent in that the surveys took place in a single city and the extent to which they are representative of a larger population is unknown.

If this level of support from nonresident parents is considered important, as is suggested by the reports of these resident parents, child support policy could encourage non-monetary contributions of nonresident parents, in tandem with a monetary contribution, to provide more well-rounded support to the child's household of primary residence while encouraging nonresident parents in a range of types of family engagement. For example, such a policy could encourage (or even require) the negotiation of parenting plans in all cases of separation, rather than just those cases where legal custody or physical placement is disputed, and then make mediation services available to them if these plans broke down. Parenting plans would ideally also specify who is to do transportation at the front and back ends of each child care day, and who provides "bridge care" during gaps between when program care is available and when one of the parents must work. Given the instability of work schedules reported by many of the resident parents in this study, mediation services may also be helpful in assisting both parents adjust an agreement for non-monetary, care-related supports when work hours change (often at the hands of the employer rather than working parent). Such arrangements could be incentivized by somewhat reducing the financial expectations of the nonresident parent in exchange for providing support with these child care logistics, while replacing that reduction in monetary contribution through increased public child care subsidy.

This report is intended to provide context for discussions about this issue, rather than being focused on explicit options for how the guidelines could consider these costs. Future research could address this, along with the advantages and disadvantages of various approaches.

VI. REFERENCES

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