

MEMORANDUM

TO: Tom Freedman, Mary Smith
FROM: David Hochschild
DATE: August 3, 1998
RE: Children in the After School Hours

**How Children Spend Their After School Hours
Now That More Women Are in the Workplace**

It turns out that this is an understudied question. What I was hoping to find - some sort of recent national study that breaks down, by age and activity, how children spend their time - does not exist. Instead, there are a number of unrelated studies that examine various portions of that subject and cumulatively provide evidence for the same conclusion: most children suffer when they are forced to spend less time with their parents. Some important findings:

- **Latchkey kids are more isolated.** A 1992 study done by the American Academy of Pediatrics showed that latchkey children were more socially isolated than other children since they were not allowed to play outside or have a friend visit home as often. The study showed that children in the care of older brothers and sisters ranked themselves lower in self-worth, social acceptance and physical appearance. ✓
- **Latchkey kids are about twice as likely as supervised children to smoke, drink alcohol and use marijuana.** Another Academy study found that when eighth graders were asked whether they expected to get drunk in the future, 27% of latchkey kids and 15% of others said yes. ✓
- **Time apart from parents is particularly damaging to young children.** A 1981 study of 8-10 year olds in Connecticut found higher levels of misbehavior and greater withdrawal from the company of others among those who had been in day care as infants, no matter what the educational level of their parents. Similarly, a study of kindergarten and first-grade children in North Carolina found that the early day care kids were more likely to hit, kick, push, threaten, curse and argue with their peers. ✓

In addition to a host of organizations that study children's issues, there is now the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, housed at Wellesley College, which is specifically devoted to the issue of how children spend their time. Their main findings:

- **Children spend less than 20% of their waking hours in school.** Schools are open less than half the days of the year, and when they are open, they provide care only until the mid-afternoon. So because school is a relatively modest slice of child's life, how children spend their time outside of school is critical to their development.

- **Children's activities outside school have a critical impact on school achievement and long-term success.** Whether or not their mother is employed, research indicates that the activities children engage in and the quality of adult supervision they receive are as important as family income and parents' education in determining academic success. One longitudinal study found that high amounts self-care at an early age are associated with poor behavior and academic performance in the sixth grade.
- **Children spend more of their out-of-school time watching television than any other single activity.** On average, American children spend 40 hours a week watching television and playing video games, more hours than they spend in school. Children in low-income households are estimated to spend 50% more time watching television than their more affluent peers. Research indicates that children who watch more television than average are more likely to be obese, read less, play less, and have more stereotyped views of sex roles than their peers. They also tend to be more aggressive and more fearful of violence.
- **Juvenile crime data reflects the importance of school-age care.** An FBI report based on data from eight states found that the juvenile crime rate triples from 3pm to 8pm, when children are out of school.
- **Unlike pre-school children, school-age children are likely to be in many different care arrangements.** According to the National Child Care Survey in 1990, 76% of school-age children with employed mothers spend time in at least two child care arrangements during a typical week, in addition to time in school.
- **Experts estimate that nearly 5 million school-age children spend time without adult supervision during a typical week.** Although exact figures are not available due to parents' reluctance to report leaving children alone, older children are much more likely than younger children to spend time on their own. Less than 5% of children under age 8 are regularly in self-care compared to nearly 35% of 12 year olds.

While there is no nationally representative study on how kids spend their after school time, there have been a number of surveys. However, there are some discrepancies between the surveys. Here are three of them, illustrating the range of responses:

Who takes care of your children during the day when they are not in school?

Care Provider	1994 Family Circle Magazine Survey	1990 National Child Care Survey	1989 University of North Carolina Poll
Parent or guardian	58%	33%	24.5%
Brother or sister	5%	n/a	n/a
Relative	12%	23%	38%
Babysitter at child's house	3%	n/a	4.2%
Babysitter at sitter's house	4%	3%	4.2%
Day care/after school program	11%	21%	13.6%
Child takes care of self	4%	4%	11.5%
Other	3%	15% (lessons)	n/a

On the important question of what portion of America's school-age children are left alone to care for themselves, most surveys put the number between 4% and 12%, but it's probably closer to 12% (a 1990 Urban Institute study found that 12% of children between age 5 and 12 take care of themselves either before or after school). Ultimately, where a child spends the hours after school is not as important as what happens in that setting. Obviously, this a point that makes after school hours a troublesome issue to study because the difference between the care two children might receive from their respective relatives, for example, can be so great as to make a comparison unfair.

When it comes to children under 5, the form of care is somewhat different. A 1997 National Study of the Changing Workplace by the Families and Work Institute found that two-thirds of all employed parents with pre-kindergarten children rely on partners and relatives as the primary source. When one member of a dual-earner couple has to take time off to care for a child, 83 percent of employed mothers say they are more likely to take time off while 22 percent of fathers make this claim. How many children are we actually talking about? The National Association for the Education of Young Children estimates that some 80,000 day care centers looks after four million preschool children and a million school age children. Another 3.1 million are in family day care or the homes of non-relative (for more information on making child care work, see the Child Care Action Campaign's report, "Not Too Small to Care," that shows how 29 small businesses found imaginative child care solutions from worker flex-time to on-site care).

Understanding the time bind

Interestingly, the Families and Work Institute found that the amount of time employed mothers spend with their children (3.2 hours each workday) has actually remained constant over the last 20 years. And the time employed fathers spend with their children (2.3 hours each workday) has increased significantly by one-half hour per workday. The result is that children are receiving somewhat more attention from their *employed* parents than they did in 1977. However, since there are many more mothers working today than in the past, many children, on balance, are getting less time with their parents. And 70 percent of all parents still feel they do not spend enough time with their children, and that both father and mothers have less time for personal activities.