

## Time use of working parents: a visual essay

Mary Dorinda Allard and Marianne Janes

**W**orking parents have many constraints on their time as they try to balance paid work, childcare, household activities, shopping, and leisure activities. Data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) are a rich source of information about how people spend their time doing various activities.<sup>1</sup> This visual essay highlights how working parents spend their time on an average day. Using ATUS data, one can examine what activities parents do and how long they do them.

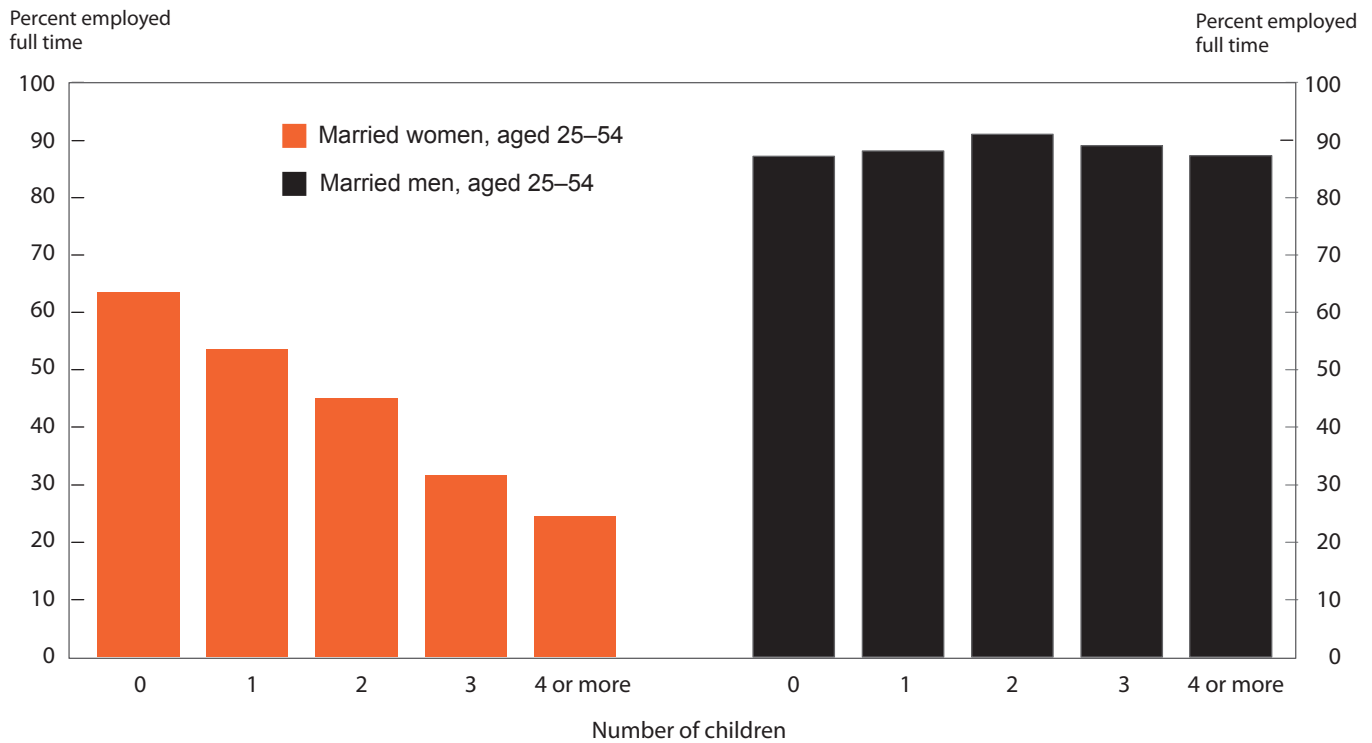
The ATUS enables analysts to measure how Americans spend their time in *primary* activities—their main activities, in other words. This includes the measurement of time all working parents spend providing *primary childcare*, which consists of physical care of children; playing, reading, or talking with children; travel related to childcare; and other childcare activities. For those parents with children

aged 12 or younger, it is also possible to measure the amount of time spent in more passive *secondary childcare*—that is, the amount of time that they have at least one child of that age group in their care while doing activities other than primary childcare. Focusing on both primary and secondary childcare gives a more complete picture of parents' time spent providing childcare.

Unless otherwise specified, all data in this visual essay refer to married parents between the ages of 25 and 54 who were employed full time at the time of the survey; that is, they were usually working 35 or more hours per week. Parents are those who live with at least one biological, step-, or adopted child aged 17 or younger. All data are taken from the 2003–06 ATUS.

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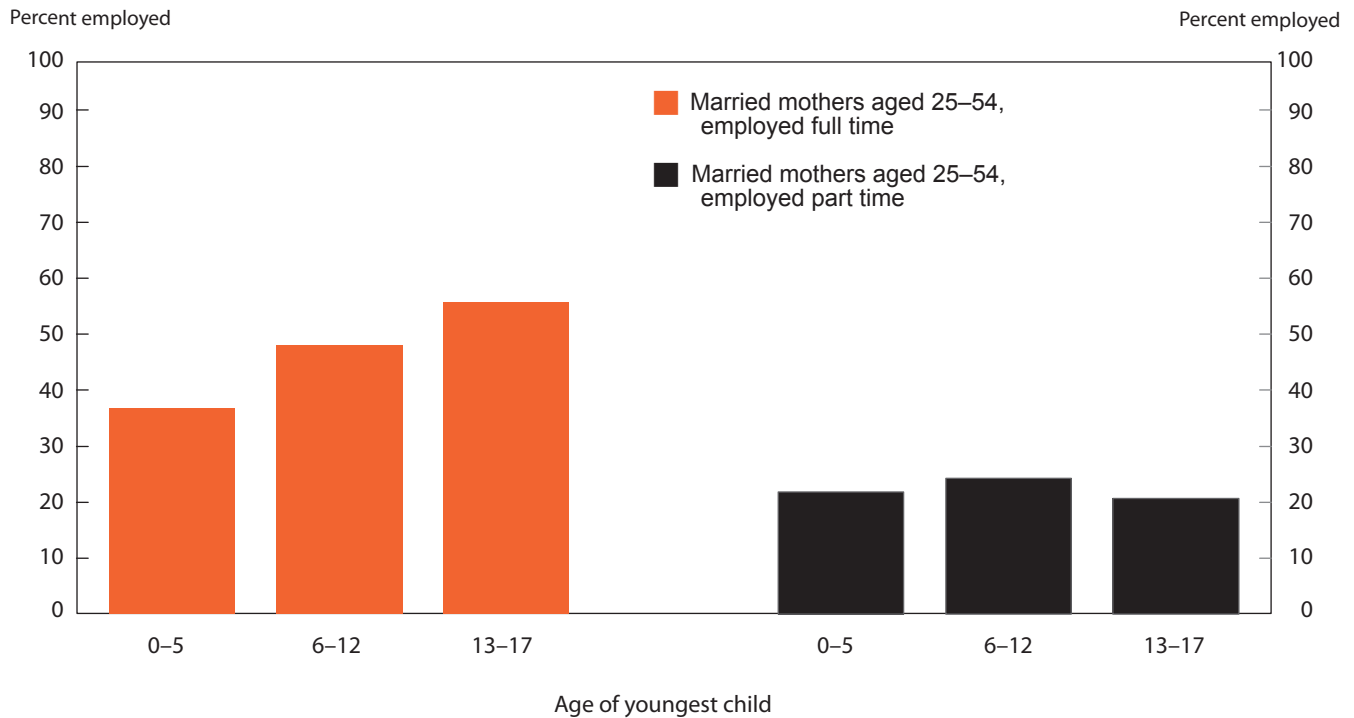
### 1. Women were less likely to be employed full time than were men, 2003–06



NOTE: Data refer to adults with or without biological, step-, or adopted children aged 17 or younger living in the household.

- Among married women aged 25–54, those with no children were more likely to be employed full time than were those with one child. Sixty-three percent of these women without children were employed full time, whereas 54 percent of those with one child were employed full time.
- Married mothers with one child were more than twice as likely to be employed full time as married mothers with four or more children. Fifty-four percent of married mothers with one child were employed full time, whereas 24 percent of married mothers with four or more children were employed full time.
- About 90 percent of married men aged 25–54 were employed full time, whether or not they had children.

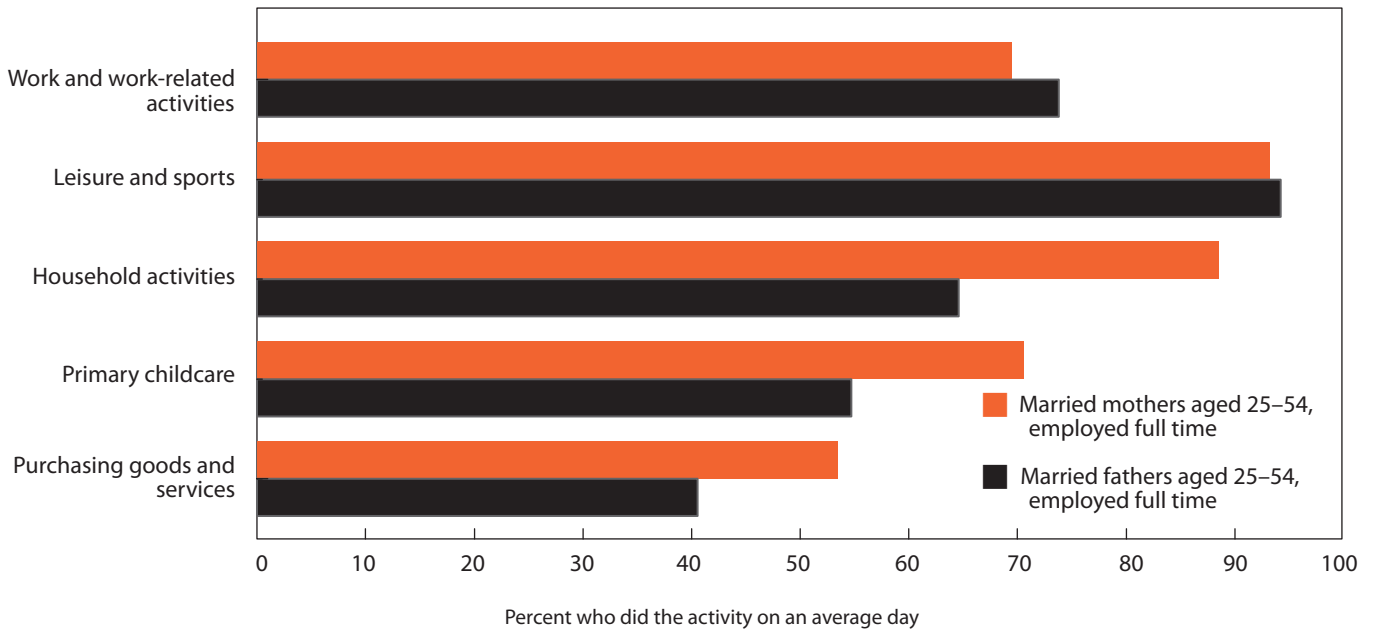
## 2. Mothers of older children were more likely to be employed full time, 2003–06



NOTE: Data refer to parents with biological, step-, or adopted children aged 17 or younger living in the household.

- Fifty-six percent of married mothers aged 25–54 whose youngest child was at least 13 were employed full time. By contrast, 37 percent of married mothers with children aged 5 or younger were employed full time. About 90 percent of married fathers aged 25–54 were employed full time regardless of the age of their youngest child.
- Among married parents aged 25–54, a little more than 20 percent of mothers and fewer than 5 percent of fathers were employed part time, regardless of the age of their youngest child.

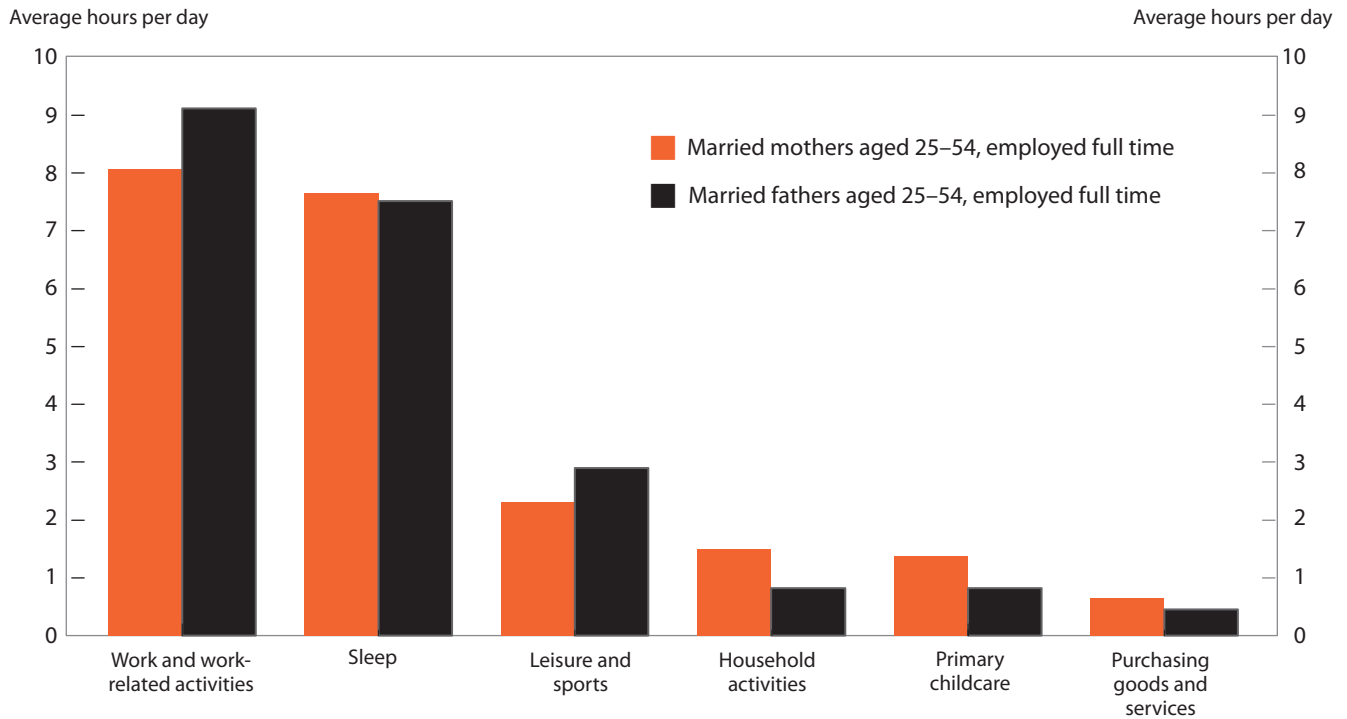
### 3. Fathers were more likely to do paid work on an average day than were mothers, 2003–06



NOTE: Data are averages of all days of the week. All activity categories include associated travel. Data refer to parents with biological, step-, or adopted children aged 17 or younger living in the household.

- Among married parents aged 25–54 who were employed full time, fathers were more likely to work or do work-related activities than were mothers on an average day (74 percent, compared with 69 percent).
- More than 90 percent of full-time employed married mothers and fathers aged 25–54 engaged in leisure and sports activities on an average day. Leisure and sports activities include socializing, watching television, and exercising.
- Fewer fathers aged 25–54 who were employed full time provided primary childcare—such as physical care of children and talking with children—than did their female counterparts on an average day (55 percent, compared with 71 percent).
- Forty-one percent of married fathers aged 25–54 who were employed full time purchased goods and services, compared with 53 percent of full-time employed married mothers aged 25–54.

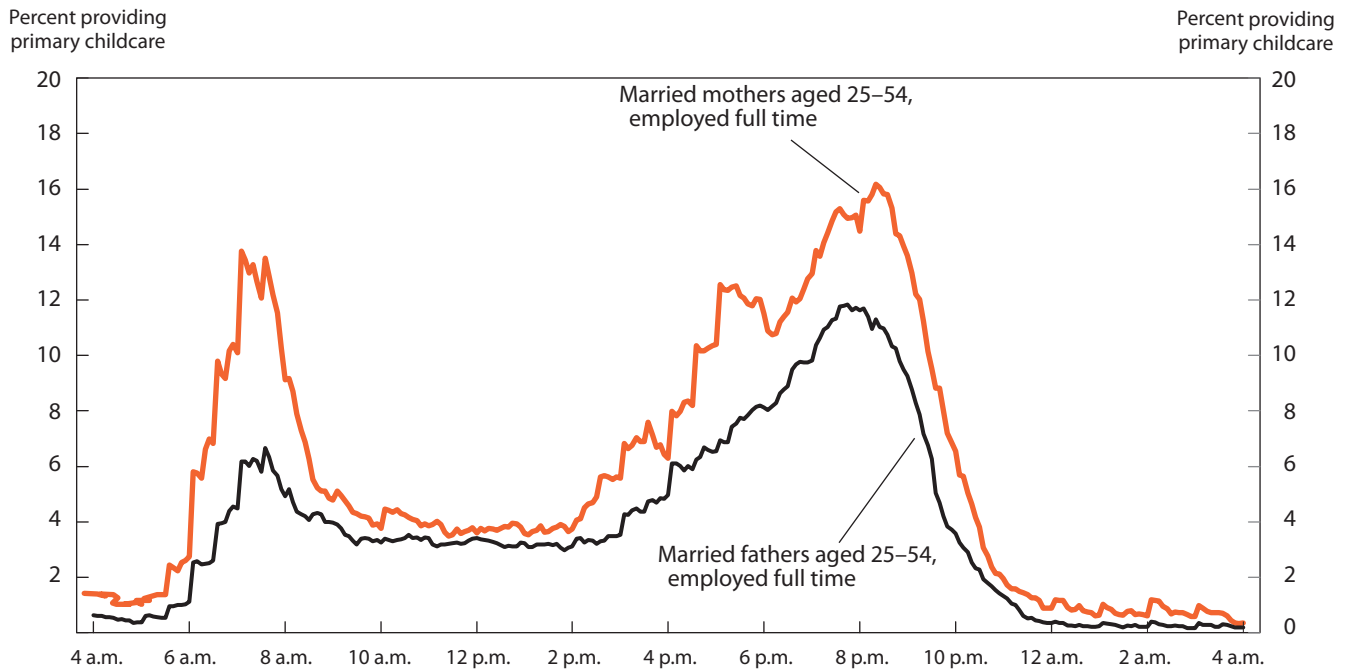
#### 4. On days that they did paid work, fathers worked an hour more than did mothers, 2003–06



NOTE: Data are an average of all days of the week on which people did at least some work. All activity categories except for sleep include associated travel. Data refer to parents with biological, step-, or adopted children aged 17 or younger living in the household.

- On days that they worked, full-time employed married fathers aged 25–54 spent an hour more in work and work-related activities, on average, than did full-time employed married mothers aged 25–54 (9.1 hours, compared with 8.1 hours).
- Married mothers aged 25–54 who were employed full time spent less time in leisure and sports activities than did full-time employed married fathers aged 25–54 on days that they worked (2.3 hours, compared with 2.9 hours).
- Among parents aged 25–54 who were married and employed full time, mothers spent more time on work days doing household activities—such as housework, cooking, or lawn care—than did fathers (1.5 hours, compared with 0.8 hour).
- On days that they worked, married mothers aged 25–54 who were employed full time spent 1.4 hours providing primary childcare, while their male counterparts spent 0.8 hour.

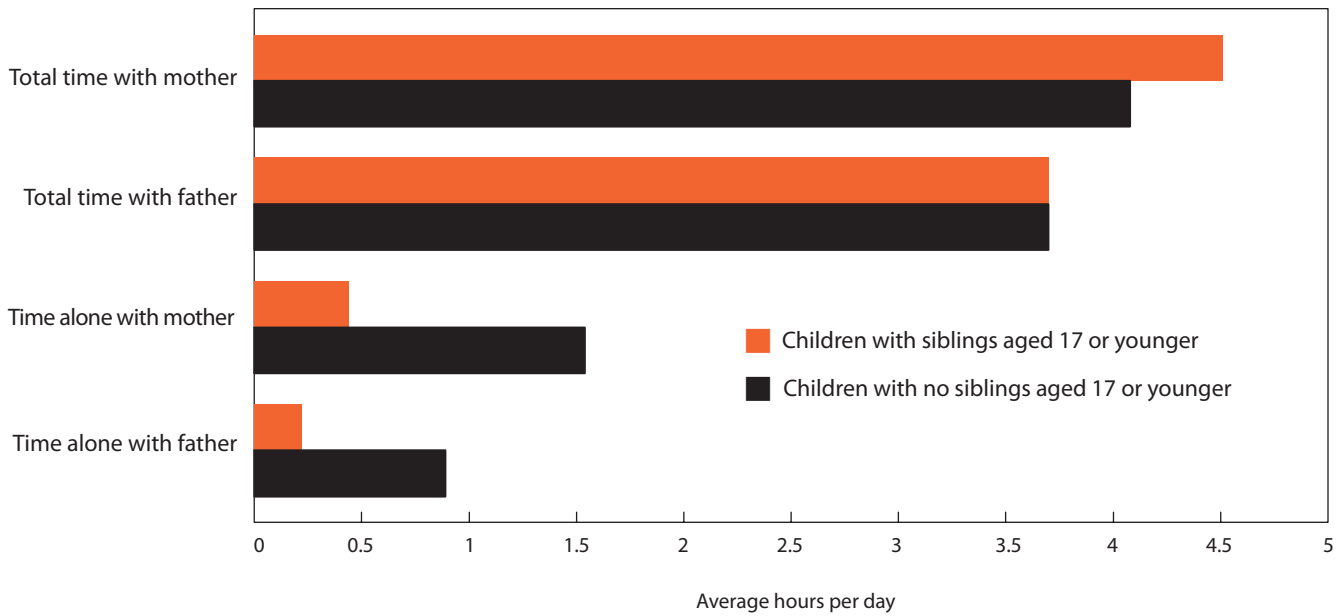
### 5. More parents provided primary childcare in the mornings and evenings than at other times of the day, 2003–06



NOTE: Data are averages of all days of the week. Data refer to parents with biological, step-, or adopted children aged 17 or younger living in the household.

- On an average day, parents aged 25–54 who were married and employed full time were more likely to provide primary childcare during early morning hours (between 6 a.m. and 8 a.m.) and in the late afternoon and evening hours (between 4 p.m. and 10 p.m.) than at other times of the day.
- The gap between the percentage of married mothers and the percentage of married fathers providing primary childcare was greatest in the morning.

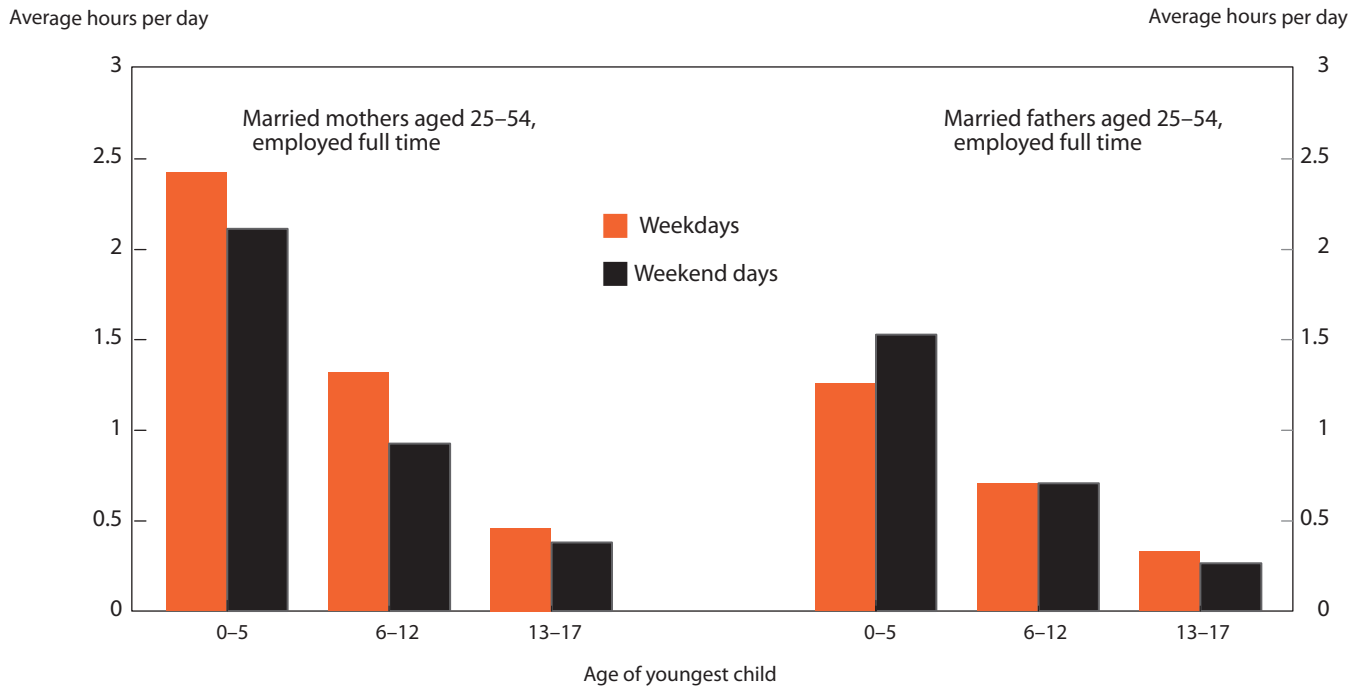
**6. Children with siblings aged 17 or younger spent slightly more total time with their mothers than did children with no siblings in that age group, 2003–06**



NOTE: Data refer to parents 25–54 who were married and employed full time with at least one household child aged 17 or younger. Siblings are other biological, step-, or adopted children aged 17 or younger living in the household. Data are averages of all days of the week. Estimates do not include times when parents were working or sleeping.

- On an average day, children with siblings aged 17 or younger spent slightly more total time with their mothers than did children without siblings in that age group—4.5 hours, compared with 4.1 hours. Both children with and without siblings aged 17 or younger spent the same amount of total time with their fathers—3.7 hours.
- Children with no siblings aged 17 or younger spent 1.5 hours alone with their mothers and 0.9 hour (54 minutes) alone with their fathers. Children with siblings, by contrast, spent 0.4 hour (24 minutes) alone with their mothers and 0.2 hour (12 minutes) alone with their fathers.

### 7. Parents spent more time providing primary childcare when their children were young, 2003–06

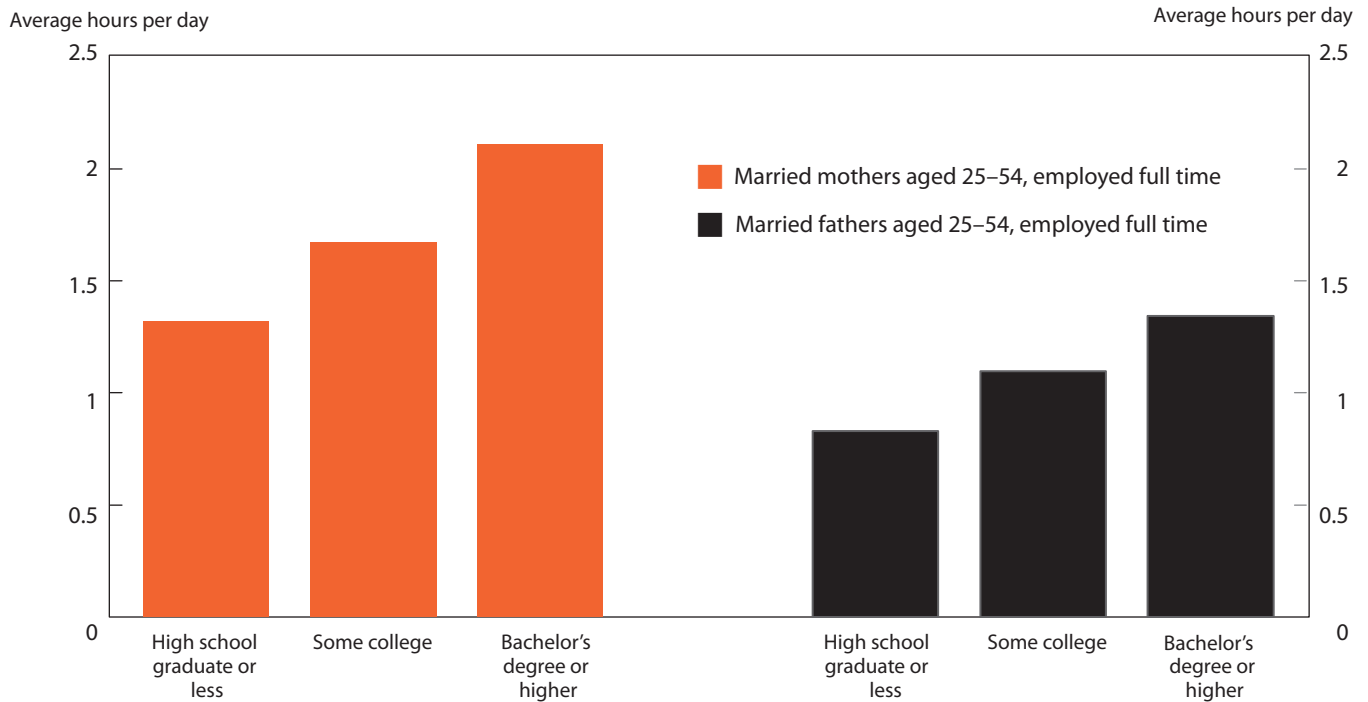


NOTE: Data refer to parents with biological, step-, or adopted children aged 17 or younger living in the household.

- On both weekdays and weekend days, married parents aged 25–54 who were employed full time and had children aged 5 or younger spent more than triple the amount of time per day providing primary childcare than did their peers whose youngest children were teenagers.
- Fathers with at least one child aged 5 or younger spent slightly less time per day on weekdays than they did on weekend days providing primary childcare—1.3 hours, compared with 1.5 hours. By contrast, mothers spent more time providing primary childcare on weekdays than on weekend days when at least one child was aged 5 or younger. (Both mothers and fathers spent more time providing secondary childcare on weekend days than they did on weekdays. See chart 9.)



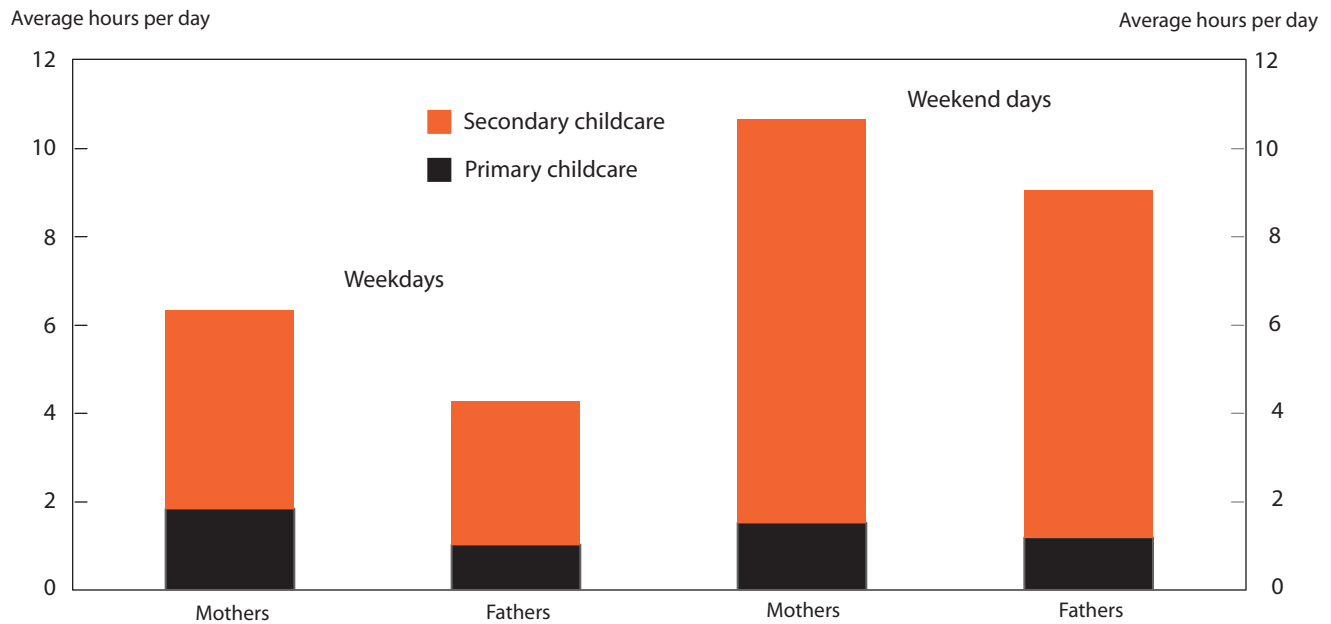
**8. The amount of time that parents with children aged 12 or younger spent in primary childcare varied by the parents' educational attainment, 2003–06**



NOTE: Data are for parents with biological, step-, or adopted children aged 12 or younger living in the household. Data are averages of all days of the week.

- Among married mothers aged 25–54 who were employed full time and had children aged 12 or younger, those with bachelor's degrees spent more time providing primary childcare than did those with a high school diploma or less (2.1 hours, compared with 1.3 hours).
- Of married full-time employed fathers aged 25–54 who had children aged 12 or younger, those with a bachelor's degree spent half an hour more providing primary childcare than did those with a high school diploma or less (1.3 hours, compared with 0.8 hour).

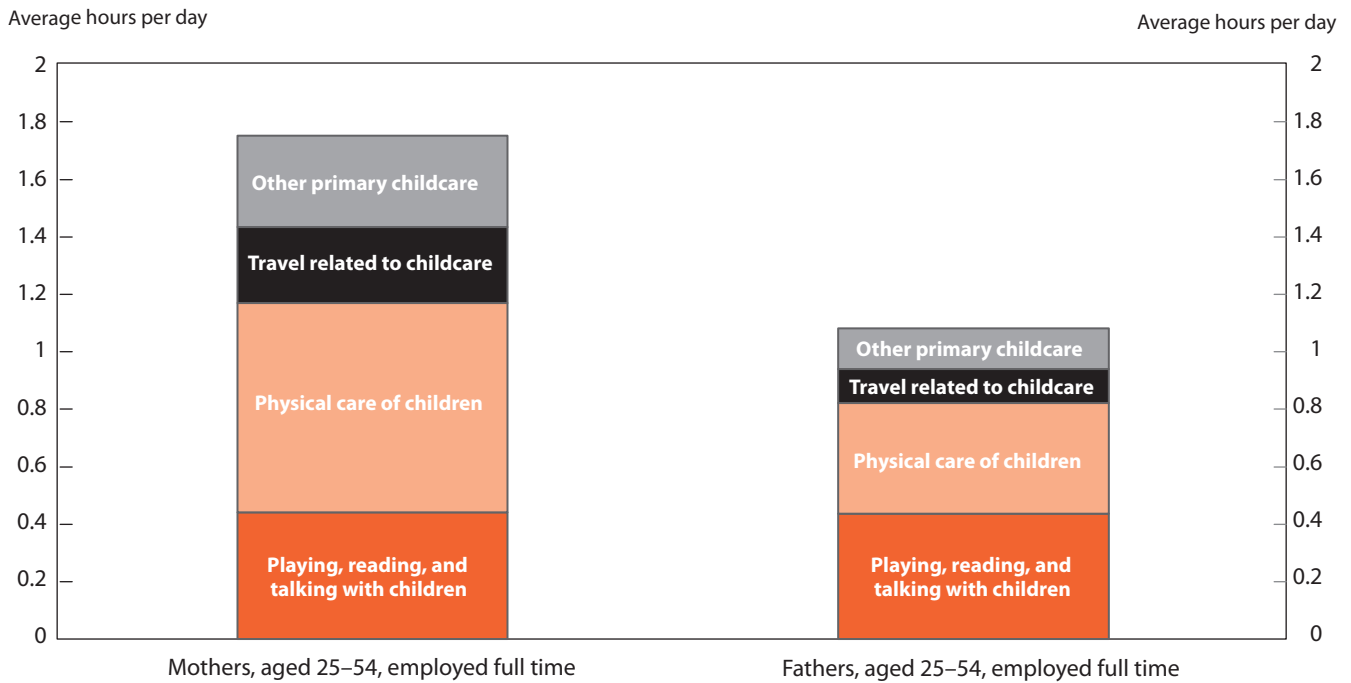
**9. Parents with children aged 12 or younger spent more time providing secondary childcare than primary childcare, 2003–06**



NOTE: Data refer to parents aged 25–54 who were employed full time, were married, and had biological, step-, or adopted children aged 12 or younger living in the household. Secondary childcare includes a small amount of time caring for other household children aged 12 or younger (such as grandchildren).

- Among people aged 25–54 who were employed full time, married, and had children aged 12 or younger, mothers spent more time than fathers providing primary childcare on both weekdays (1.8 hours, compared with 1.0 hour) and weekend days (1.5 hours, compared with 1.2 hours). Primary childcare is childcare that is done as a main activity, such as physical care of children and reading to or talking with children.
- Married mothers with children aged 12 or younger spent 4.5 hours on weekdays and 9.1 hours on weekend days providing secondary childcare—that is, they had at least one child aged 12 or younger in their care while doing activities other than primary childcare. By contrast, married fathers with children aged 12 or younger spent 3.3 hours on weekdays and 7.9 hours on weekend days providing secondary childcare.
- Both mothers and fathers spent more of their total childcare time providing secondary childcare than they did providing primary childcare, regardless of the day of the week.

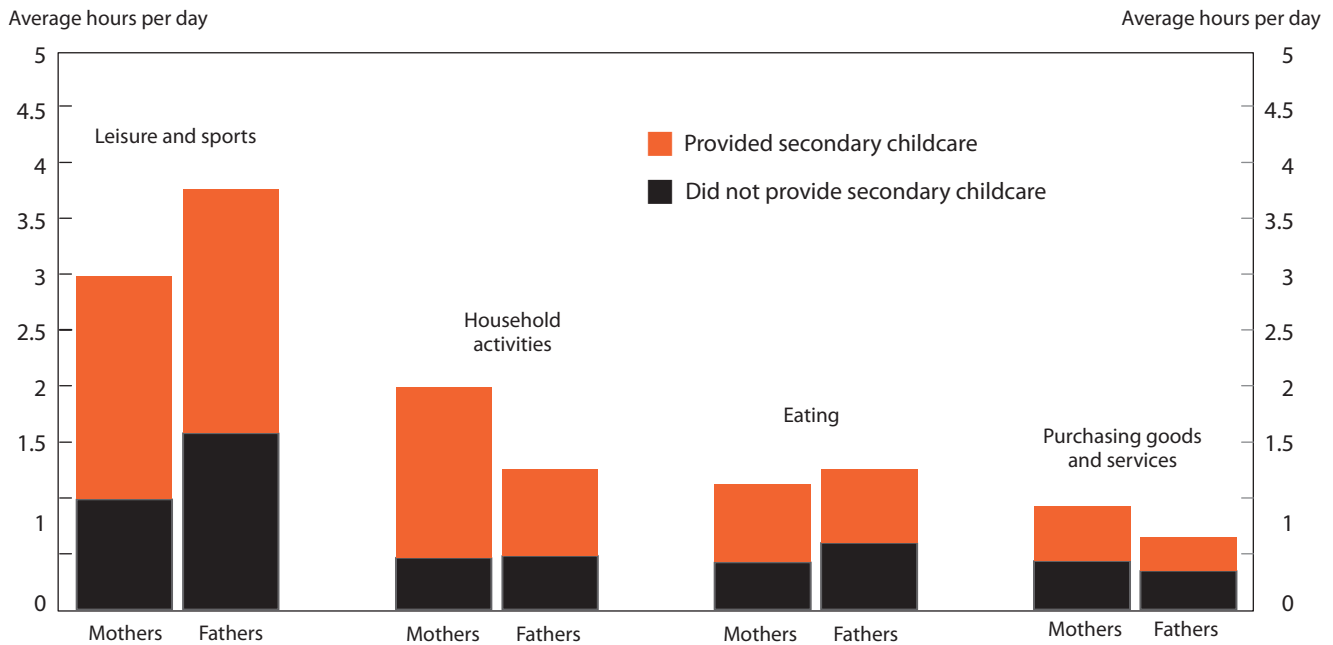
**10. Among those with children aged 12 or younger, mothers spent more time providing primary childcare than did fathers, 2003–06**



NOTE: Data refer to married parents with biological, step-, or adopted children aged 12 or younger living in the household. Data are averages of all days of the week.

- Among married parents aged 25–54 with full-time jobs who had children aged 12 or younger, mothers spent more time providing primary childcare (1.8 hours) on an average day than did fathers (1.1 hours).
- Married mothers and fathers aged 25–54 with full-time jobs who had children aged 12 or younger spent the same amount of time per day reading, playing, and talking with children (0.4 hour or 24 minutes). The difference in the total amount of time spent in childcare by these mothers and fathers is due to differences in the amount of time spent in physical care of children (such as feeding or bathing children), travel related to childcare, and other childcare.

### 11. Parents provided secondary childcare during more than half of the time they spent in leisure and sports activities, 2003–06



NOTE: Data refer to married full-time employed mothers and fathers aged 25–54 with biological, step-, or adopted children aged 12 or younger living in the household. Data are averages of all days of the week. All activity categories include associated travel.

- Married fathers with children aged 12 or younger provided secondary childcare for about 58 percent of the total time they spent doing leisure and sports activities (2.2 hours out of 3.8 hours). By contrast, married mothers provided secondary childcare for about 67 percent of the total time they engaged in leisure and sports activities (2.0 hours out of 3.0 hours).
- Of a total of 2.0 hours they spent doing household activities, married mothers spent 76 percent of that time (about 1.5 hours) providing secondary childcare. Married fathers spent 62 percent of their total time spent in household activities providing secondary childcare (0.8 hour out of 1.3 hours).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The American Time Use Survey is sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. ATUS is the first federally administered survey on time use in the United States. It provides estimates of how, where, and with whom Americans spend their time. More information is available on the Internet at [www.bls.gov/tus](http://www.bls.gov/tus) (visited June 12, 2008).