



Questions and Answers about School-Age Children in Self-Care: A Sloan Work and Family Research Network Fact Sheet

Introduction

The Sloan Work and Family Research Network has prepared Fact Sheets that provide statistical answers to some important questions about work-family and work-life issues. This Fact Sheet includes statistics about Children in Self-Care. (Last updated: July 2009)



How many school-age children are in self-care?

- ✔ **Fact 1** In 2002, "...15 percent (6.1 million) of grade school-aged children [5-14 years old] cared for themselves on a regular basis without adult supervision" (Johnson, 2005, p. 12).
- ✔ **Fact 2** In 2002, "...7 percent of elementary school-aged children [5-11 years old] and 33 percent of middle school aged children [12-14 years old] living with their mother were in self-care" (Johnson, 2005, p. 12-13).
- ✔ **Fact 3** According to the 1999 interviews for the National Survey of America's Families, "older children (ages 10 to 12) are over four times more likely to be in self-care than are younger children (ages 6 to 9), even controlling for other relevant factors" (Vandivere, Tout, Zaslowe, Calkins, & Cappizano, 2003, Findings on Family Income and Child Age, para. 2).
- ✔ **Fact 4** "[I]n 1997 almost half (47 percent) of 14-year-olds regularly spent time in self-care" (Vandivere et al., 2003, The Prevalence of Self Care, para. 2).



What is the average time spent in self-care?

- ✔ **Fact 1** In 2002, "[t]he majority of children in self-care spent between 2 and 9 hours per week supervising themselves (65 percent)" (Johnson, 2005, p. 13).
- ✔ **Fact 2** In 2002, "[a]mong children 5 to 14 years old who were regularly in self-care situations, the average time spent in self-care was 6.3 hours per week" (Johnson, 2005, p. 13).
- ✔ **Fact 3** In 1997, the average number of hours per week that children ages 5-11 spent in self-care was 6.4, compared to children ages 12-14, who spent 9.2 hours per week in self-care. (Smith, 2002)



✔ **Fact 4** According to the 1999 interviews for the National Survey of America's Families, "older children spend slightly over 1 hour more per week in self-care than younger children (4.7 hours for 10- to 12-year-olds compared with 3.5 hours for 6- to 9-year-olds)" (Vandivere et al., 2003, The Prevalence of Self Care, para. 4).

✔ **Fact 5** "Children 12 to 14 years old spent an average of 9 hours per week in self-care compared with 6 hours per week for children 5 to 11 years old. The older group was more likely than the younger group of children to spend 10 or more hours per week in self-care (35 percent and 20 percent, respectively)" (Smith, 2002, p. 13).

✔ **Fact 6** "Children 5 to 14 years old spent an average of 8 hours per week in self-care among those who were reported to regularly be in self-care situations. Sixty percent spent 5 or more hours per week in self-care, and 30 percent spent 10 or more hours per week in self-care" (Smith, 2002, p. 13).



Which children are more likely to be in self-care?

✔ **Fact 1** According to the 1999 interviews for the National Survey of America's Families, "boys (16 percent) are slightly more likely than girls (13 percent) to be in self-care" (Vandivere et al., 2003, Child Demographic Characteristics, para. 2).

✔ **Fact 2** "[W]hen there are no other children under 13 in the household, a child is twice as likely to use self-care as when there is at least one other child under 13 present (23 percent versus 11 percent)" (Vandivere et al., 2003, The Parents' Available Time, para. 2).

✔ **Fact 3** "[C]hildren rated as poorly engaged in school are more likely than other children to use self-care (18 percent compared with 14 percent)" (Vandivere et al., 2003, Child Health and Behavior, para. 4).

✔ **Fact 4** "[A] larger proportion of children who participated in at least one activity during the prior year—lessons, clubs, sports, or some other organized activity—are in self-care (16 percent), compared with children who did not participate in any activities (10 percent)" (Vandivere et al., 2003, Child Health and Behavior, para. 4).

✔ **Fact 5** "[C]hildren's likelihood of using self-care does not differ according to their health or disability status" (Vandivere et al., 2003, Child Health and Behavior, para. 6).



Whose children are in self-care?

✔ **Fact 1** According to the 1999 interviews for the National Survey of America's Families, "the responding parent's educational status is related to children's use of self-care, with higher education (specifically, college degree or higher) related to a higher likelihood of self-care (19 percent) than a high school degree (14 percent) or less than a high school degree (13 percent)" (Vandivere et al., 2003, Family Resources, para. 1).



- ✔ **Fact 2** "6- to 9-year-olds are about twice as likely to use self-care if their parents were fully employed" (Vandivere et al., 2003, p. 15).
- ✔ **Fact 3** In 2002, "[f]ifteen percent of grade school-aged children [5-14 years old] of an employed but not self-employed mother were in self-care, compared with 7 percent of children whose mother was not employed" (Johnson, 2005, p. 14).
- ✔ **Fact 4** "[F]or 10- to 12-year-olds, high levels of parent aggravation and stress are associated with a greater likelihood of self-care, controlling for other factors" (Vandivere et al., 2003, p. 15).
- ✔ **Fact 5** "[C]hildren whose parent reported symptoms of poor mental health are nearly twice as likely (1.7 times for 6- to 9-year-olds and 1.8 times for 10- to 12-year-olds) to use self-care as those whose parent did not report symptoms" (Vandivere et al., 2003, p. 15).



How does race affect the prevalence of children in self-care?

- ✔ **Fact 1** In 2002, 8 percent of children with Hispanic mothers were in self-care situations (Johnson, 2005, p. 14).
- ✔ **Fact 2** In 2002, "[n]early one in every five 5 to 14 year olds with a non-Hispanic White mother were in self-care situations (18 percent)" (Johnson, 2005, p. 14).
- ✔ **Fact 3** "The average number of hours spent in self care increased for Hispanic children in the summer (5 hrs to 9 hrs), but decreased for Asian/PI children (8 hrs to 4 hrs)" (Laughlin & Rukus, 2009, p. 12).



How does marital status affect the prevalence of children in self-care?

- ✔ **Fact 1** "In winter 2002, grade school-aged children (5-14 years old) living with a previously married mother were more likely to be in self-care (18 percent) than were those living with a married mother (15 percent) or a never-married parent (10 percent)" (Johnson, 2005, p. 13).
- ✔ **Fact 2** "[F]or children of a single, employed parent, their chance of being in self-care declined from 24 percent in 1997 to 21 percent in 1999 and 18 percent in 2002" (Johnson, 2005, p. 14).
- ✔ **Fact 3** According to the 1999 interviews for the National Survey of America's Families, "children whose parent has a spouse or partner (14 percent) are less likely than those who do not (18 percent) to be in self-care" (Vandivere et al., 2003, The Parents' Available Time, para. 1).
- ✔ **Fact 4** "[C]hildren who have two parents spend 36 percent less time in self-care than do children with single parents" (Vandivere et al., 2003, p. 19).



✔ **Fact 5** "[C]hildren who live with a single parent working full-time, or with two parents working full-time, are more likely to be in self-care (21 percent) than children who live with a single nonworking parent or with two nonworking parents (10 percent) or children whose parents have some other work schedule (11 percent)" (Vandivere et al., 2003, *The Parents' Available Time*, para. 1).



Does family income affect the amount of time children spend in self-care?

✔ **Fact 1** According to the 1999 interviews for the National Survey of America's Families, "children whose family incomes are at or above 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level are almost twice as likely to be in self-care (19 percent) as children whose family incomes are below the poverty level (10 percent)" (Vandivere et al., 2003, *Family Resources*, para. 1).

✔ **Fact 2** "[L]ow- and higher-income children relying on self-care on a regular basis spend about the same amount of time in self-care on average (4.2 and 4.4 hours, respectively)" (Vandivere et al., 2003, *The Prevalence of Self Care*, para. 4).

✔ **Fact 3** "[H]igher-income children also are more likely than low-income children to care for themselves 10 or more hours per week (17 percent compared with 13 percent)" (Vandivere et al., 2003, *The Prevalence of Self Care*, para. 5).

✔ **Fact 4** According to the National Survey of America's Families, "15 percent of higher-income children are in self-care during the summer, three times more than low-income children (5 percent). This is not significantly different than the proportion of either income group reported to be in self-care during the school year" (Capizzano, Adelman, & Stagner, 2002, para. 7).

✔ **Fact 5** "[A]mong low-income children, 10- to 12-year-olds are six times more likely than 6- to 9-year-olds to use self-care" (Vandivere et al., 2003, p. 17).



How often are children in self-care during the summer?

✔ **Fact 1** According to the National Survey of America's Families, "children in self-care tend to spend more hours on their own in the summer than during the school year (10.3 hours compared with 4.8 hours respectively)" (Capizzano, Adelman, & Stagner, 2002, para. 5).

✔ **Fact 2** "[O]ver one in ten children regularly spend time in self-care (either alone or with a sibling younger than 13) during the summer" (Capizzano, Adelman, & Stagner, 2002, para. 5).

✔ **Fact 3** "11 percent of 6- to 12- year-olds are regularly in self-care during the summer—about the same proportion as during the school year..." (Capizzano, Adelman, & Stagner, 2002, para. 5).



✔ **Fact 4** "28 percent of 10- to 12-year-olds are in self-care during the summer compared to 1 percent of 6- to 9-year-olds" (Capizzano, Adelman, & Stagner, 2004, para. 9).



How and when are inadequate supervision situations reported to the authorities?

✔ **Fact 1** "Results from the review of neglect referrals in Prince George's County indicated that sixteen percent of the inadequate supervision referrals involved another type of neglect or abuse related incident and 30 percent involved substance abuse by the caregiver" (Zielewski, Malm, & Geen, 2006, p. 22).

✔ **Fact 2** "The average number of neglect reports on school vacation days or early dismissal days was less (6.3 reports) than the average number of reports (7.3) on a 'normal' school day. However, when only inadequate supervision calls were analyzed, there was an average of 2.6 reports on vacation or early dismissal days and 2.4 on regular school days" (Zielewski, Malm, & Geen, 2006, p. 9).

✔ **Fact 3** "Of the known reporters of inadequate supervision, 21 percent were school personnel, 29 percent were neighbors, and 13 percent were an estranged or divorced parent. The remainder of reporters (39 percent) were other individuals including medical personnel, other community members, or the child him- or herself" (Zielewski, Malm, & Geen, 2006, p. 12).

The Network has additional resources related to this topic.

1. Our database of academic literature contains the citations and annotations of literature related to the issue of Children in Self-Care. You can connect to this database at:
http://library.bc.edu/F?func=find-b-0&local_base=BCL_WF



References

Capizzano, J., Adelman, S., & Stagner, M. (2002). *What happens when the school year is over? The use and costs of child care for school-aged children during the summer months* (Occasional Paper No. 58). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310497_OP58.pdf

"The National Survey of America's Families (NSAF) provides a comprehensive look at the well-being of adults and children and reveals striking differences among the 13 focal states. The survey provides quantitative measures of the quality of life in America. It pays particular attention to low-income families. The survey is representative of the noninstitutionalized, civilian population under age 65 in the nation as a whole and in each of the 13 focal states, which are: Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Jersey, New York, Texas, Washington, and Wisconsin. Together, these states are home to more than half the nation's population and represent a broad range of fiscal capacity, child well-being, and approaches to government programs. ANF conducted three rounds of the NSAF—1997, 1999, and 2002. In each round, over 40,000 households participated providing detailed information on more than 100,000 people. The size of the sample and the nature of the questions asked make it one of the largest, most comprehensive surveys on well-being of American adults and children. Each survey round includes questions on economic, health, social, and demographic variables not combined together in any other national survey".



Johnson, J. O. (2005). *Who's minding the kids? Child-care arrangements: Winter 2002* (Current Population Reports, P70-101). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved from: <http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/p70-101.pdf>

"The population represented (the population universe) in the 2001 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) is the civilian noninstitutionalized population living in the United States. The SIPP is a longitudinal survey conducted at 4-month intervals. The data in this report were collected from February through May 2002 in the fourth wave (interview) of the 2001 SIPP. For the 2001 SIPP Panel, approximately 50,500 housing units were in sample for Wave 1. Of the 40,500 eligible units, 35,000 were interviewed. In the fourth wave, about 27,000 out of 31,000 eligible housing units were interviewed. All household members aged 15 and over were eligible to be interviewed, with proxy response permitted for household members not available at the time of interview. The universe of respondents for the SIPP child care topical module consists of adults who are the parents of children under 15 years old. The data presented in this report reflect the experiences of respondents during the month preceding the interview. Since the interviews are spread out over 4 months, the actual months represented by the data are from January to April 2002. The institutionalized population, which is excluded from the population universe, is composed primarily of the population in correctional institutions and nursing homes (91 percent of the 4.1 million institutionalized population in Census 2000)" (Johnson, 2005, p. 20).

Laughlin, L., & Rukus, J. (2009, April). *Who's minding the kids in the summer? Child care arrangements for summer 2006*. Poster presented at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, Detroit, MI. Retrieved from http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/child/child_care_summer_2006-poster.ppt

"Since the 1984 panel, the Census Bureau has collected information on child care usage through special supplements to SIPP (Survey of Income and Program Participation and Child Care) (called topical modules). The 8th Wave of the 2004 SIPP provides a unique opportunity to compare school year and summer child care arrangements. The universe is limited to children ages 0 to 14 with a employed mother. Usually child care data is collected in the spring or fall. In the 2004 panel, data was collected between May and August providing a unique opportunity to examine summer child care activities. We compare child care usage between May (a school month) and July (a summer month) to highlight differences in school year and summer child care arrangements" (Laughlin & Rukus, 2009, p. 4).

Smith, K. (2002). *Who's minding the kids? Child-care arrangements: Spring 1997* (Current Population Reports, P70-86). Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

"The estimates in this report come from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), collected in Spring 1997 by the U.S. Census Bureau. The data highlighted in this report come primarily from the child care topical module in the fourth interview (wave) of the 1996 SIPP panel. The SIPP is a nationally representative longitudinal survey conducted at 4-month intervals by the Census Bureau" (Smith, 2002, p. 19).

Vandivere, S., Tout, K., Zaslowe, M., Calkins, J., & Cappizano, J. (2003). *Unsupervised time: Family and child factors associated with self-care* (Occasional Paper No. 71). Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

"Data for the analyses in this paper are from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families (NSAF). In households with children under 18, up to two focal children, one under age 6 and one between the ages of 6 and 17, were randomly selected to be the focus of questions about a range of topics including children's health, behavior, and child care arrangements. Our sample consists of all focal children between the ages of 6 and 12 whose parents were interviewed during non-summer months (since child care patterns are likely to differ during the summer). The NSAF respondent was the adult most knowledgeable about the child. Since this adult was the child's mother in more than three-quarters of the interviews and the father in almost one-fifth of the interviews, we refer to this adult as the child's parent." (Vandivere et al., 2003, p. 2)

Zielewski, E., Malm, K., & Geen, R. (2006). *Children caring for themselves and child neglect: When do they overlap?* Washington, DC: The Urban Institute. Retrieved from http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/311323_DP06-03.pdf

"The research was designed to obtain information from front-line practitioners on cases involving inadequate supervision or children caring for themselves. Screeners, staff tasked with screening calls to the child protective services agency, were asked about the types of individuals who are likely to report these types of occurrences and the screening criteria. Investigators, staff tasked with investigating reports that are screened in, were asked more specific questions about the agency's response to these types of cases including the factors used to make decisions regarding whether to substantiate the neglect and/or open an ongoing child protective services case. Researchers also spoke with administrators and managers in



each locality, as well as law enforcement officials in two localities. The primary methods of data collection included focus groups and in-person interviews" (Zielewski et al., 2006, p. 7).
