



## After Great Recession, More Married Fathers Providing Child Care

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The U.S. economy lost 8.7 million jobs between December 2007 and January 2010.<sup>1</sup> Sixty-nine percent of the jobs lost during the recession were held by men,<sup>2</sup> and the employment rate of married fathers (whether working full or part time) with employed wives decreased from 92 percent in 2005 to 88 percent in 2011.<sup>3</sup> The large job losses and persistently high unemployment from the Great Recession and its aftermath prompted families to adapt to financial hardship and reallocate fathers' and mothers' time spent in the labor force and in the home.

Research on the Great Recession provides evidence of wives' increased labor force participation to help cushion the negative effect of a husband's job loss. Wives whose husbands stopped working during the recession were more likely to enter the labor force than wives whose husbands remained employed, and wives already employed part time were more likely to increase their hours working for pay.<sup>4</sup> It is perhaps not surprising, then, that employed wives' contribution to family earnings increased from 44 percent in 2007 to 47 percent in 2009 and remained at that level through 2012.<sup>5</sup>

As more wives enter the labor force and earn wages comparable to those of their husbands, gender roles can change. Research on the division of child care among married parents suggests that time available to care is an important factor in the decision making as to whether fathers care for their children during the time that the mother works for pay.<sup>6</sup> In addition, increases in father care are often in conjunction with economic constriction and job loss. The decline in fathers' employment during the Great Recession may have created conditions where families forego paid child care and instead rely on fathers to care for children not only to save money,

### KEY FINDINGS

31%

The share of married fathers providing care to their children under age 15 while their mother worked rose from 27 percent in 2005 to 31 percent in 2011.



The rise in father-provided child care was driven primarily by the rise in child care provided by black and Hispanic fathers. In 2005, a similar proportion of white, black, and Hispanic fathers provided care. From 2005 to 2011, the share of black fathers providing care rose by 11 percentage points (from 25 percent to 36 percent); among Hispanic fathers, the share rose by 7 percentage points (from 27 percent to 34 percent). For white married fathers, the increase was not statistically significant.



Between 2005 and 2011, the shares of rural and urban married fathers providing child care began to diverge. In 2005, rural and urban married fathers were equally likely to provide care to their children. By 2011, the share of urban married fathers providing care had risen by 4 percentage points, while rural fathers' care provision remained the same.

but also because these fathers now have fewer work commitments. This brief adds to our understanding about men's changing roles that resulted from their job losses during the Great Recession.

Using the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), this brief examines changes in father-provided child care among married fathers with an employed wife. The SIPP collects information on child care arrangements, but asks questions

### Box 1. Definitions

#### Types of Child Care by Married Fathers

*Any father care* means that the father cared for his child under age 15 on a regular basis one or more hours per week **during the time that the mother was at work.**

Consistent with Census Bureau definitions, *primary father care* means that the child under age 15 spent more time in the father's care than in any other arrangement, including self-care and school, on a regular basis per week **during the time that the mother was at work.**

#### Race and Ethnicity

Black and white refer to non-Hispanic black and white fathers, respectively. Hispanic fathers may be of any race.

about child care provided by married fathers only during the time the mother is employed. Our period of inquiry is focused on the change from 2005 to 2011, a period when wives' economic contribution increased and husbands experienced job loss and thus had more time available for child care. Because job loss and unemployment rates varied between whites, blacks, and Hispanics during the Great Recession,<sup>7</sup> this brief focuses on changes in married fathers' child care by race and ethnicity. In addition, given the different labor market conditions and child care options faced by residents of urban and rural places, this brief also considers differences by place between 2005 and 2011.

## Married Fathers' Employment Declines Over the Recession

As mentioned above, married fathers' employment rates declined from 92 percent in 2005 to 88 percent in 2011. Married fathers of all races and ethnicities experienced the decline, but it was most notable among black fathers, who experienced a drop of 8 percentage points. Hispanic fathers' employment rates declined by 5 percentage points over the same period, while rates for white fathers fell by 4 percentage points. Both urban and rural fathers' employment rates declined by 4 percentage points over this time. This decline in employment among married fathers suggests that fathers in 2011 had more time available to care for children than fathers did in 2005.

## Reliance on Fathers as Child Care Providers Increases

Table 1 shows that father-provided child care increased from 2005 to 2011. In 2005, prior to the Great Recession, 27 percent of married fathers provided child care to their children under 15 years old while

the mother worked. In the aftermath of the Great Recession, this proportion rose to 31 percent by 2011. A lower proportion of married fathers—about 9 percent in 2005 and 2011—were their children's primary child care provider, meaning that the child spent more time per week in the father's care than in any other arrangement while the wife worked. That share was higher for fathers of preschool-age children (about 20 percent) than for fathers of grade-school-age children (about 7 percent), primarily because grade-school-age children spend large amounts of time at school, in enrichment activities, and in child care arrangements that promote social interaction and academic learning.<sup>8</sup> From 2005 to 2011, the share of fathers who cared for their preschool- and grade-school-age children increased (see Table 1).

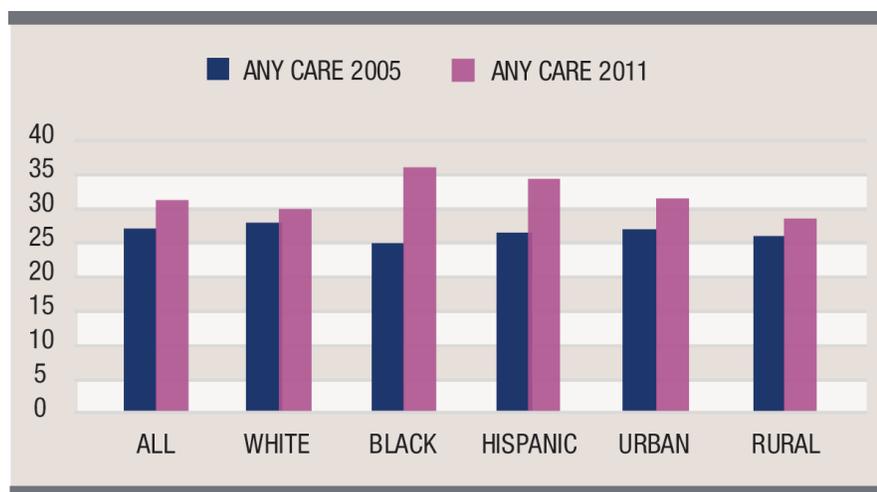
## Racial and Ethnic Gaps Emerge in Care by Fathers

Figure 1 shows married fathers' engagement in child care by race and ethnicity. In 2005, the shares of married fathers providing child care while the wife was at work varied little among whites, blacks,

**TABLE 1. PERCENT OF MARRIED FATHERS PROVIDING CARE FOR CHILDREN IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH EMPLOYED MOTHERS, 2005 TO 2011**

	PROVIDING CARE TO CHILDREN UNDER 15		PROVIDING CARE TO CHILDREN UNDER 5		PROVIDING CARE TO CHILDREN 5–14	
	ANY CARE	PRIMARY CARE	ANY CARE	PRIMARY CARE	ANY CARE	PRIMARY CARE
2005	27	9	30.1	20.2	27.2	6.6
2011	30.7	10.1	35.5	21.9	30.2	7.2

Source: Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) 2004 and 2008 Panels.

**FIGURE 1. PERCENT OF MARRIED FATHERS PROVIDING CARE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 15 IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH EMPLOYED MOTHERS**

Note: Asian, American Indian, and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander fathers are omitted due to small sample size.

Source: SIPP 2004 and 2008 panels.

and Hispanics.<sup>9</sup> Yet by 2011, care by black and Hispanic fathers had increased substantially, to 36 percent and 34 percent, respectively, representing a jump of 11 percentage points for black fathers and 7 points for Hispanic fathers. In contrast, care by white fathers remained unchanged, despite employment declines among this group. The result is a racial gap in father-provided child care. The remainder of this brief focuses on fathers who provide any child care due to the small sample size of fathers who are the primary child care provider by race and ethnicity.

This racial gap in father care can also be seen when considering the proportion of the mother's work hours covered by father care. In 2011, black and Hispanic married fathers covered 54 and 50 percent of the mothers work hours, respectively, while white fathers covered 43 percent.

### Differences Emerge by Rural/Urban Location

In 2005, rural and urban married fathers provided child care in similar proportions while the wife worked for pay. But by 2011, the share of fathers in urban locations providing care had increased by 4 percentage points, from 27 percent to 31 percent, resulting in a gap in father care by place.

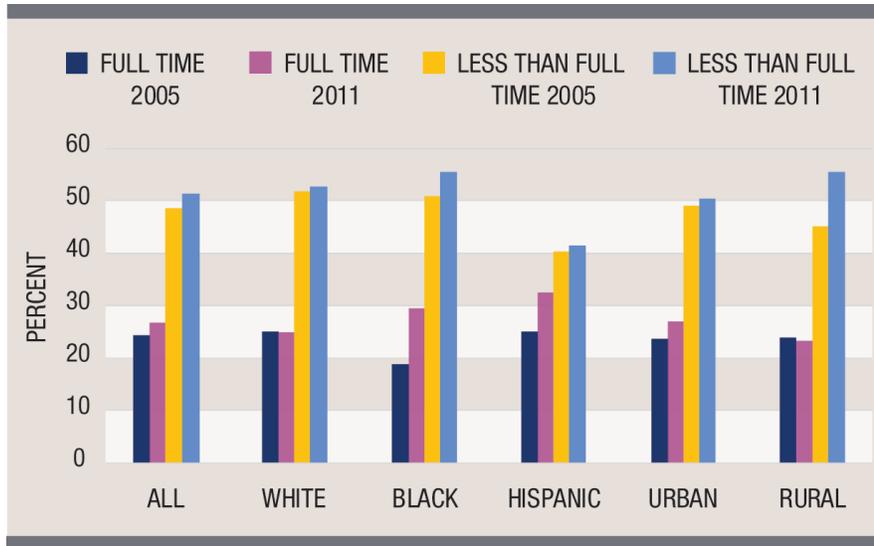
### Share of Black and Hispanic Fathers Working Full Time and Providing Care Increases

A father's employment status is one factor that determines whether he provides care for his children. Typically, fathers who work fewer hours have more time to care for their children. Figure 2 shows the percent of fathers who had an employed

wife and who cared for their children under 15 by whether the father worked full time or less than full time (which includes working part time, looking for work, or being out of the labor force).<sup>10</sup> In both 2005 and 2011, married fathers who worked less than full time were two times more likely (about 50 percent compared with 25 percent) than married fathers who worked full time to provide child care while the mother was working. Among black and Hispanic married fathers employed full time, the share providing child care while the mother worked rose by 11 and 8 percentage points, respectively.

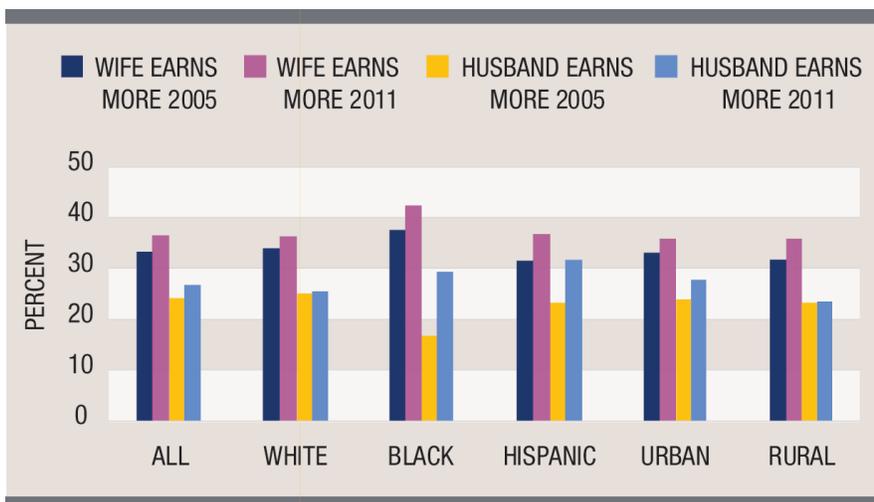
### Share of Black and Hispanic Fathers Earning More Than Their Wives and Providing Child Care Increases

Another correlate of father care is a wife's earnings relative to her husband's. Typically, as wives' earnings increase, fathers' provision of child care also increases. This may be because wives with higher relative earnings are better able to negotiate a more equitable division of labor in the home.<sup>11</sup> Figure 3 shows the percent of married fathers with employed wives who cared for their children under age 15 by whether the wife earned equal to or more than the husband, or whether the husband earned more than the wife. In 2005, a higher proportion of fathers married to wives who earned more than they did provided child care while the wife was at work in comparison to fathers who earned more than the wife (33 percent and 24 percent,

**FIGURE 2. PERCENT OF MARRIED FATHERS PROVIDING CARE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 15 IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH EMPLOYED MOTHERS, 2005 AND 2011**

Note: Asian, American Indian, and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander fathers are omitted due to small sample size. Less than full time includes fathers working part time, fathers looking for work, and fathers who are out of the labor force. "Care" refers to any father care on a regular basis one or more hours per week during the time that the mother was at work.

Source: SIPP 2004 and 2008 panels.

**FIGURE 3. PERCENT OF MARRIED FATHERS PROVIDING CARE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 15 IN HOUSEHOLDS WITH EMPLOYED MOTHERS, 2005 AND 2011**

Note: Asian, American Indian, and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islander fathers are omitted due to small sample size. "Care" refers to any father care on a regular basis one or more hours per week during the time that the mother was at work.

Source: SIPP 2004 and 2008 panels.

respectively). This pattern also appears in 2011 across all racial and ethnic groups and for both urban and rural residents.

White fathers' provision of child care rose slightly from 2005 to 2011 among couples in which the wife earned more than the husband, but the change was not significant. In contrast, the share of black and Hispanic fathers who provided care increased among couples in which the wife earned more, resulting in a gap in father care by race.

In 2005, white fathers who earned more than their wives were more likely to provide care to their children than corresponding black fathers (25 percent and 17 percent, respectively). But by 2011, a higher proportion of black fathers who earned more than their wives provided care to their children while the wife was at work than corresponding white fathers (29 percent and 25 percent, respectively), due to an increase in the share of black fathers' provision of child care. In fact, the share of black fathers who earned more than their wives and provided child care increased by 13 percentage points.

In terms of urban/rural location, the share of urban fathers who earned more than their wives and cared for their children increased from 24 percent to 28 percent. No other changes by place were statistically significant.

## Conclusion

Economic shocks such as recessions can prompt families to reallocate fathers' and mothers' time and change the gendered division of work inside and outside of the home. The results presented here demonstrate that the share of married fathers

who provide care to their children increased during the Great Recession. Married-couple families adapted to husbands' job loss by increasing their reliance on fathers as caregivers and on wives as breadwinners.

That black and Hispanic fathers increased their involvement in the care of their children by substantial amounts is noteworthy. These fathers experienced large decreases in employment, yet employment rates of white fathers also decreased, albeit to a lesser extent, and no discernible increase in father-provided child care ensued among white married fathers. This research points to shifting gender roles among black and Hispanic married fathers and highlights the role of economic shocks in stimulating change in the division of labor in the home. Further research is needed to tease apart the factors that determine father care by race and ethnicity.

Equally important to consider further is that the high cost of child care may prompt married-couple families to forego paid child care in favor of care by fathers while mothers are at work, particularly in times of constrained family budgets during economic downturns. That the proportion of black and Hispanic married fathers who worked full time and also provided care to their children increased from 2005 to 2011, and that caregiving by married fathers who worked less than full time remained high but constant, may be indicative of money constraints or perceived instability in the job market among these families.

The recession is drawing attention to a trend that has been emerging for some time. Fathers are spending more time with their children and their involvement in the family has increased since at least the 1970s.

Overall, however, mothers still spend more time than fathers caring for children.<sup>12</sup> Increased reliance on fathers as care providers has broad implications. First, research shows that children with involved, caring fathers have better educational outcomes and are more emotionally secure.<sup>13</sup> Second, mothers' labor force outcomes may improve with increased father involvement in child care. With father involvement, mothers may be more likely to remain in the labor force, maintain or increase their work hours, accept promotions, and take on more demanding jobs, all of which may improve their wages.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, expectations surrounding what it means to be a good father are changing. Being a good economic provider is still an important facet of fatherhood, but emphasis is also being placed on active involvement in family life. The burden of these dual roles has contributed to an increase in work-family conflict among employed married fathers in dual-earner households.<sup>15</sup>

The findings from this brief show that married fathers are typically engaged in both market work and the care of their children. Policies to support working families, such as paid sick leave and paid family leave, are thus not only critical for employed mothers, but are also salient for employed fathers. In addition, flexible career pathways for fathers and mothers that allow for time off or reduced schedules should be explored. Workplace culture often assumes that workers with family responsibilities are less committed to the workplace, and a change in culture that removes this stigma would go a long way toward enhancing family health, economic security, employee loyalty, and worker capabilities.

## Data

This brief uses data from the 2005 and 2011 Child Care Topical Modules from the 2004 and 2008 Panels of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, all of the SIPP child care topical modules collected in the spring on these panels. All analyses are weighted using person-level weights provided by the Census Bureau. Differences presented in the text are statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) unless otherwise indicated.

### Box 2. Definitions of Rural and Urban

There are multiple ways to define place types such as rural and urban. Data for this brief come from the Survey of Income and Program Participation, which indicates whether or not each household is located in a metropolitan area. The Office of Management and Budget defines a metropolitan area as: (1) a central county (or counties) containing at least one urbanized area with a population of at least 50,000 people, and (2) the counties that are socially and economically integrated with the urbanized area, as measured by commuting patterns. In this brief, urban refers to such metropolitan places, and rural refers to nonmetropolitan places outside these boundaries.

## Endnotes

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Economic and Employment Data” (Washington, DC: BLS, 2012), [www.bls.gov/data/#unemployment](http://www.bls.gov/data/#unemployment) (retrieved November 2, 2012).
2. Ibid.
3. Author’s calculations using the Survey of Income and Program Participation.
4. Marybeth Mattingly and Kristin Smith, “Changes in Wives’ Employment When Husbands Stop Working: A Recession-Prosperity Comparison,” *Family Relations*, vol. 59 (2010): 343–357.
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7. Marybeth Mattingly, Kristin Smith, and Jessica Bean, “Unemployment in the Great Recession: single parents and men hit hard,” Issue Brief No. 35 (Durham, NH: Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire, 2011).
8. See Lynda Laughlin, “Who’s Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: Spring 2011” (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013) for a breakdown of all the child care arrangements parents use for their children; [www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2013/demo/p70-135.pdf](http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2013/demo/p70-135.pdf).
9. This brief focuses on differences in father-provided child care among only white, black, and Hispanic married fathers because the sample size is too small to show estimates for Asian, American Indian, and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Pacific Islanders.
10. Fathers working part time, who are looking for work, or who are out of the labor force are combined because the small sample size by race and ethnicity prohibits examining these groups independently.
11. Raley, Bianchi, and Wang, “When Do Fathers Care?”
12. Suzanne Bianchi, John Robinson, and Melissa Milkie, *Changing Rhythms of American Family Life* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006).

13. M. E. Lamb, ed., *The Role of Fathers in Child Development*, 3d ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2004), 1–18, 309–313.

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15. Ellen Gallinsky, Kerstin Aumann, and James T. Bond, “Times Are Changing: Gender and Generation at Work and at Home” (New York: Families and Work Institute, 2011).

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