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Who's Minding the Kids in the Summer? Child Care Arrangements Summer 2006

Lynda Laughlin, U.S. Census Bureau[1]
Joseph Rukus, Cornell University

Abstract

This paper examines patterns in child care usage during the summer months for children of employed mothers. Using the 2004 Survey of Income and Program Participation, this paper offers a systematic evaluation of summer child care arrangements for preschool and school age children. A number of aspects are examined, including: type of care, hours in care, racial and economic differences in summer child care usage, as well as the role of fathers. Initial findings suggest that there is little variation in the types of child care families use between summer and non-summer months. Instead, the number of hours spent in certain types of child care increased during the summer. While the overall level of child care provided by fathers varied little between non-summer and summer months, findings indicate that there are importance difference in father care by income, race, and marital status.

Introduction

Each year, the end of spring brings about the end of the school year. While summer may bring smiles to nation's youngsters, it can present a challenging time for parents who need to make child care arrangements for children during the time they had previously been in school. Making such arrangements can be particularly difficult for families where all parents work during the day.

Even though summer vacation can have a dramatic impact on family child care needs, it is a subject that has received very little study. Raley et al (2000) suggest one reason for this might be that research into summer care arrangements is difficult to compare with care arrangements used throughout the majority of the year. As a result, most studies

[1]This paper reports the results of research and analysis undertaken by Census Bureau Staff. It has undergone a more limited review than official Census Bureau publications. This report is released to inform interested parties of research and to encourage discussion.

tend to focus on school year activity because this type of care is what children rely on most of the year and is of most concern to policy makers.

The few studies which have been done suggest that the child care void created when school closes has its most profound effect on school age children (Raley et al 2000). Studies indicate that relatives and organized activities, such as summer camp or athletic programs, are the care sources parents rely on most to fill the summer child care gap (Cappizzano, 2002; Chin and Phillips, 2004; Raley et al 2000). Chin and Phillips (2004) study of summer care for school age children notes that family income plays an important role in the type of care option parents chose and many low income parents must combine a variety of different care options to assure child care needs are met during the summer vacation period. The number of school age children who are "self cared" for, however, increases substantially over the summer period as many parents find it impossible to juggle the many pieces which must come together to provide continual care (Capizaano et al, 2002; O'Connell and Bachu, 1986).

One possible source of assistance to summer child care challenges would be an increase in father care. Although they provide significantly less care than mothers, normally considered a child's primary parent, fathers have taken a larger role in child care provision as more mothers have entered the labor force but still provide significantly less care than mothers (Bianchi, 2000; Goss as cited in Bryant and Zick, 1996; Johnson, 2005; O'Connell, 1993; Sandberg and Hofferth, 2001). Research has shown a number of variables influence a father's level of involvement including the amount of overlap in a mother and father's work schedule, the parent's marital status, the age and gender of the child, the race of the father , and household income (Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine,

1992; Caper, 1996; Casper and O'Connell, 1998; O'Connell, 1993; Price-Bonham and Skeen, 1979; Starrels, 1994). No research, however, has studied if fathers increase their child care involvement when external factors, such as summer vacation, create increased demand .

Using data from Wave 8 of the Survey of Income and Program Participation, this paper will look at differences in child care arrangements used by parents in the summer months. It will look at the type of child care parents use and the amount of time children use that care arrangement. In addition, this paper will look to see if summer increases the roles of fathers and siblings in providing child care. While data will be presented for preschool children, most of the analysis will focus on child care arrangements for school age children as these are the children whose schedule is most altered during summer vacations.

DATA

The 8th wave of the Census Bureau's 2004 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) provides unique opportunity to compare school year and summer child care arrangements. The 2004 SIPP is longitudinal study of approximately 37,000 households conducted over a 2 ½ year period to examine household income and use of government programs such as Head Start and Food Stamps. The survey is conducted in waves lasting four months each with participating households being interviewed once during the wave. Households are interviewed in rotations determined by the month within each wave they are interviewed, e.g. a household in rotation 1 would be interviewed in the first month of a given wave while someone in ration 3 would be interviewed in the third month of a given wave.

In order the better understand factors that influence household income and program participation, special topical modules are included in each wave. One of the modules contains questions about child care usage and is administered approximately every fourth wave of the SIPP survey period. Child care questions on the survey questionnaire ask participants about the child care arrangements they used in the previous month. The most recent SIPP child care data were collected in Wave 8 which occurred between the months of June and September, 2006. Depending in a household's rotation, information on a household's child care arrangements was obtained for either the months of May, June, July, or August.

This timing created an opportunity to compare child care usage patterns from a month when most students were in school, May (rotation 1), to a month when most students were on vacation, July (rotation 3). These two rotations will be the basis for comparisons made in this paper and reflect a snapshot of child care arrangements used by parents in the respective months.

The last time SIPP data has been able to be used to make a comparison between summer and school year child arrangements was in 1986. One rotation of this SIPP wave was done in August while the other rotations were based on reference months while school was in session, September, October, and November. This data, however, cannot be compared to data used in this paper due to differences in survey methodology. The 1986 survey asked parents to identify their primary care arrangement while the 2004 SIPP asked parents to identify all care types used.

One final note on methodology is the universe used in this study is families where the mother is employed. This universe was selected for analysis as it encompasses the households which are most likely to require child care assistance.

ARRANGEMENTS USED BY FAMILIES

Preschool Care

Results showed, that overall, there was little variation in the type of care parents used for their preschool children between spring and summer months among families with employed mothers (Table 1). The one exception to this was the number of parents reporting school as a source of child care, 13 percent in the spring versus 6 percent in the summer, a difference which can be explained by school vacation. The type of care parents relied on most was that provided by relatives which remained virtually constant in both spring and summer months with 46 percent of parents using relative care in May as well as in June.[2] The second most popular care option among families with working mothers was organized facilities which 21 percent of preschool children used in the spring compared to 19 percent in the summer. The only care option to show a decline in use were family child care homes which were used by 7 percent of children in families with working mothers in the spring compared to 6 percent in the summer. It should be noted that this change is not statistically significant. The reason for this lack of change is most likely due to the fact that parents with preschoolers already have child care arrangements in during the school year, which are not affected by schools closings during the summer.

[2] Relative care includes care from the mother, another parent, a grandparent, a sibling, or some other relative.

While there is little change overall, there does seem to be some racial variation in preschool child care use patterns. During the spring, Blacks are equally likely to use same amount of relative and organized facility care, at 29 percent. However, relative care increases to 39 percent in the summer while organized facility care decreased to 13 percent and use of family child care homes also drops from 10 percent in the spring to 2 percent in the summer. When looking at who is providing the relative care, it becomes apparent that Black families are taking advantage of siblings, whose provision of care increases from 1 percent in the spring to 7 percent in the summer, and other relatives, whose provision of care increases from 8 percent to 13 percent. During the summer, this additional child care resource may allow families to save the expense of other outside arrangements.

Asian American, however, rely more or paid care during the summer. Their use of organized facilities increases from 13 percent in the spring to 22 percent in the summer and their use of family child care homes increases 6 percent to 18 percent. Hispanics follow a similar pattern with their use of organized facilities increasing from 8 percent to 18 percent and use of family child care homes increasing from 2 percent to 6 percent. The reason for this increase is unclear but it does suggest that there may be need for more paid care options in inner city ethnic neighborhoods over the summer. Lastly, over the summer White non-Hispanics showed little change in their child care usage with the exception of a decrease in the use school as a source of child care.

There also appears to be a regional variation in care choice. Children in the Midwest decrease their use of organized facilities over the summer. In the spring, 28 percent of all parents indicated they used this care choice and only 16 percent indicated the same in the

summer (data not shown in Table 1). The use percentage of children in organized facilities over the school year is higher than in any other region, most likely due to the fact that there are more child care establishments per capita in the Midwest than in any other part of the country (U.S. Census Bureau). The decline may be the result of the family nature of the agricultural industry in the region which utilizes children as source of assistance in running the farm over the summer. Meanwhile, organized facility use increases in the South, 20 percent to 24 percent. Explanations for the decrease cannot be found in SIPP and may be subject future researchers might consider studying. Other regions showed little change.

School Age Care

Like preschool children, SIPP data showed for grade-schoolers, aged 5-14, only minimal variations the type of care parents used over the summer (Table 2). The proportion of children using school decreased from 86 percent in May compared to 30 percent in July. This steep decline is not surprising as the closure of school eliminated it as an option for many parents, however, it is notable, that even during summer vacation, schools provide a substantial amount of support to parents with almost a third of children attending some sort of school type program during the summer period.

One other variation worth noting is use of activities, defined as sports, lessons, or clubs, as a care option for grade school children. During the spring, 15 percent of children were reported as participating in some sort of organized activity compared to 10 percent in the summer. This decline may add to parent's child care burden as it is in addition to a decline in the ability to count on school as a child care resource.

HOURS IN CARE

The decline in school care during the month of July was surprising as it differed from those found by two previous studies; one by O'Connell and Bachu in 1986 and one done by Capizzano et al. in 2002. While both studies showed the decrease in school care, they showed the decline accompanied by a substantial increase in other care types of a care, particularly relative care. To determine if there had a dramatic change in historical use patterns or if the difference was simply the result of a different surveying methodology, we looked at the number of hours school age children spent in each type of care arrangement to see if they would show increases in care usage which mirrored previous studies. The previous SIPP survey in 1986 defined primary care in terms of hours used, so it would not detect continued usage of the same arrangements if the hours shifted from one type to another.

An analysis of the hours does show there is a dramatic increase in the time children spend in child care arrangements over the summer. As seen in Figure 1, all categories of care, with the exception of school, show an increase in the number of hours they are used. The largest increases from spring to summer can be found in family child care homes, which increased 7 hours to an average of 26 hours per week, organized facilities, which increased 5 hours to an average of 28 hours per week, and relative care, which increased 5 hours to an average of 27 hours per week. It should, however, be noted that while school care decreased slightly, by 1 hours per week, school provided parents making use of it an average of 32 hours per week. Even though overall usage of school care fell from 86 percent in the spring to 30 percent in the summer (Table 2), it still represents a

substantial amount of child care assistance for those parents making use of it and demonstrates the importance of educational institutions to parents year round.

In addition to increases the number of hours spent in traditional forms of child care, SIPP data indicate that those parents who leave their children without outside supervision, i.e. self-care, are required to do so for more hours. The average amount of time that self care children are unsupervised increases from 8 hours in the spring to 10 hours over the summer (Table 3, not shown). The amount of increase, however, varied across racial groups. In Figure 2, White non-Hispanics, where average self care hours increased from 6 hours per week in the spring to 9 hours per week in the summer, and Blacks, where average self care hours increased from 11 hours per week in the spring to 12 hours per week in the summer. The 8 hours that Hispanic children spend without supervision average in self-care in the summer is twice what they spent in the spring.

These increases, for the most part, were consistent across all income levels with two notable exceptions. The first is the average number of hours children in families below 100 percent Federal Poverty Level (FPL) which used relatives as a care arrangement spent in that arrangement. Unlike other income levels, these families showed a decrease, from 22 hours in the spring to 19 hours in the summer, in the average number hours. The second is in the average number of hours children spent in family child care homes. As seen in Figure 3, those families with incomes below the Federal Poverty Line using family child care decreased from 15 hours in the spring to 8 hours in the summer. Families at higher income levels showed significant increases in hours per week. Those with incomes between 100 percent and 199 percent of the FPL increased usage from 11 hours to 32 hours while those with incomes above 200 percent of the FPL increased

usage by a more modest change from 20 hours to 25 hours. As a substantial number of families with incomes below the FPL receive subsidies that allow them to use organized facilities, the price difference would most likely affect parent choice at a higher income level. It is perhaps for this reason that family child care homes become an attractive alternative to those families with incomes between 100 percent and 199 percent FPL over the summer.

A Comparison of Preschool and School Age

Overall, The type of care parents used over the summer for school age children, however, was substantially different from the type of care they used for preschoolers. Even though most schools close for summers, parents of older children relied significantly more on school-based programs, 30 percent for grade-schoolers in the summer compared with 6 percent for preschoolers. Parents of school age children also felt more comfortable using unsupervised care with 18 percent using self care compared to only 1 percent of preschool parents. Preschool parents made of use of organized facilities, 19 percent for preschoolers vs. 5 percent for grade-schoolers, and family child care homes, 6 percent for preschoolers vs. 2 percent for grade-schoolers.

FATHER CARE

With school being out, the summer provides an opportunity for fathers to increase their role in family child care. Since the SIPP survey distinguishes between care provided by the dependent parent, usually the mother, and the other parent, usually the father, Wave 8 of the 2004 SIPP provided a chance to compare father care in the spring and in the summer. As seen in Table 4, an analysis of this data showed, overall, little

variation in the amount of children being cared for by their father during the month of May or July (23 percent). During the month of May, 27 percent of preschoolers reported receiving father care compared with22 percent of grade-schoolers. In July, 27 percent of preschoolers reported receiving father care compared with 22 percent of grade-schoolers.

Income

There were, however, differences based on income. The SIPP has two measures of financial status, family income and family poverty level. Both measures showed that, over the summer months, households with lower incomes were more reliant on father care. During the month of May, 19 percent of school-age children in families below the poverty line relied on father care vs. 33 percent in the summer. Households with monthly income below $1,500 showed a similar pattern with preschoolers using father care 20 percent of the time in May and 39 percent of the time July.

Interestingly, income trends reverse at lower and middle-income levels for grade school children. While preschool children in lower income families had an increase in father care over the summer, school age children in lower income families had a decrease. In families with income below the federal poverty line, 15 percent of children received child care from their father in the spring vs. 10 percent in the summer and in families with income less than $1,500, 13 percent received child care from their father vs. 11 percent in the summer. This last difference was not statistically significant. Where preschool children in middle-income families showed a decrease in father care over the summer, school age children showed a different pattern. In families with income between 100%-199% FPL, 17 percent of children received child from their father in the spring compared with 21 percent in the summer. In families with income between $1,500

and $2,999, 18 percent of children received child care from their father in the spring compared with 21 percent in the summer. Differences in care patterns of families with higher income levels were not statistically significant.

Child's Gender

Starrels (1994) found fathers to be more involved in child care if the child is male. This survey showed increased involvement by fathers with their son's child care from May to July and also decreased involvement by fathers with their daughter's child care. Father care for preschool male children went from 25 percent in the spring to 29 percent in the summer[3], but father care for preschool female children declined from 29 percent in the spring to 22 percent in the summer. School age children showed a similar pattern, however, the difference between spring and summer was not statistically significant.

Marital Status

O'Connell's (1993) previous analysis of SIPP data found that fathers in married families were more involved in child care. Wave 8 of the 2004 SIPP, for the most part, confirmed that finding. Children in married families received more child care from their father than those not in married families. The level of father care for those children remained essentially unchanged over the summer for children in married couple families for both age groups. Children in unmarried families received less child care from their fathers and that care had seasonal variations. Children in families where parents were divorced, separated, or widowed saw an increase in father care from May to June, for

[3] Between May and July, preschools living in households with an income $1,500 to $2,999 per month showed declines in fathers care usage from 25 percent to 18 percent.

both preschool-age children, increasing from 21 percent to 29 percent, and school-age children, increasing from 14 percent to 21 percent. This was not unexpected as many custody arrangements provide for children to spend increased time with the non-dependent parent over the summer. This pattern, however, did not hold true in families where parents had never been married. In these families, fatherly involvement in child care was higher in spring than during the summer for both preschool-age and school-age children. Fathers providing care for preschoolers dropped from 26 percent in May to 18 percent in June and dropped from 13 percent in may to 8 percent in June for grade-schoolers.

Race and Hispanic Origin

While there were not any statistically significant racial differences in summer care patterns for school age children, there were significant summer variations for preschoolers. Black and Asian fathers of preschoolers both decreased their involvement. Black children received father care 17 percent of the time in May compared to 12 percent of the time in July and Asian children received father care 38 percent of the time in May compared to 27 percent of the time in July. Hispanic fathers, however, increased their involvement in child care over the summer with 22 percent of Hispanic children receiving father care in May compared to 29 percent in July. White non-Hispanic fathers showed no statistically significant seasonal difference in their involvement.

Interestingly, over the spring, there was a substantial racial difference in the percentage of preschool children receiving father care. This gap closed over the summer, so that most preschool children, with the exception of Blacks, had similar levels of father care. During spring, the percent of children receiving father care were, by racial group, 30

percent for White non-Hispanics, 38 percent for Asians, 22 percent for Hispanics, and 17 percent for Blacks. Over the summer, the levels were 27 percent for White non-Hispanics, 27 percent for Asians, 29 percent for Hispanics, and 12 percent for Blacks. With the exception of Blacks, all racial groups were within 2 percentage points of each other.

Age of Parent

Younger fathers were more apt to be involved summer with child care for younger children while older fathers were more apt to increase their involvement in child care for older children. In families where the dependent parent was between ages 15-24, 36 percent of preschoolers received father care over the summer while only 20 percent of preschoolers received father care when the dependent parent was over 35 years of age. As noted above, this trend reversed itself for older children. In families where there dependent parent was between ages 15-24, only 10 percent grade school children received father care while 23 percent of grade school children received father care when the dependent parent was over 35 years of age.

Mother's Employment

A mother's work/school status made little difference in a father's seasonal level of child care involvement. Father care levels, when classified by mother's employment, showed no change between spring and summer with the exception of instances where a mother is self employed. In these instances, fathers became less involved over. Fathers provided care to preschool children of self-employed mothers 28 percent of the time in

May compared to 21 percent of the time in July and provided care with grade school children 27 percent of the time in May compared with 22 percent of the time in June.

Summary and Plans for Future Analysis

By using a unique national data source, we are able to illustrate the seasonal differences in child care usage and to identify some of the demographic factors that are associated with seasonal variations for preschool and grade-school age children. Preliminary findings indicate that there is little seasonal variation in the types of child care families use. Instead, children spend more hours in similar care arrangements when summer arrives, this is especially true for older children. Initial findings also suggest important racial/ethnic and economic differences in the type of child care used by families in spring and summer months. Future analysis will further flesh out social, economic, and demographic differences in child care usage between spring and summer. Multivariate egression techniques will also be used to analyze the relationship between changes in child care usage and family and child characteristics. Our findings will add to our understanding of child care seasonal variations in child care usage as well as inform public policies about how to best met the needs of families year around.

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Figure 1. Average Hours by Type of Child Care Arrangement for Gradeschoolers 5 to 14 by Month

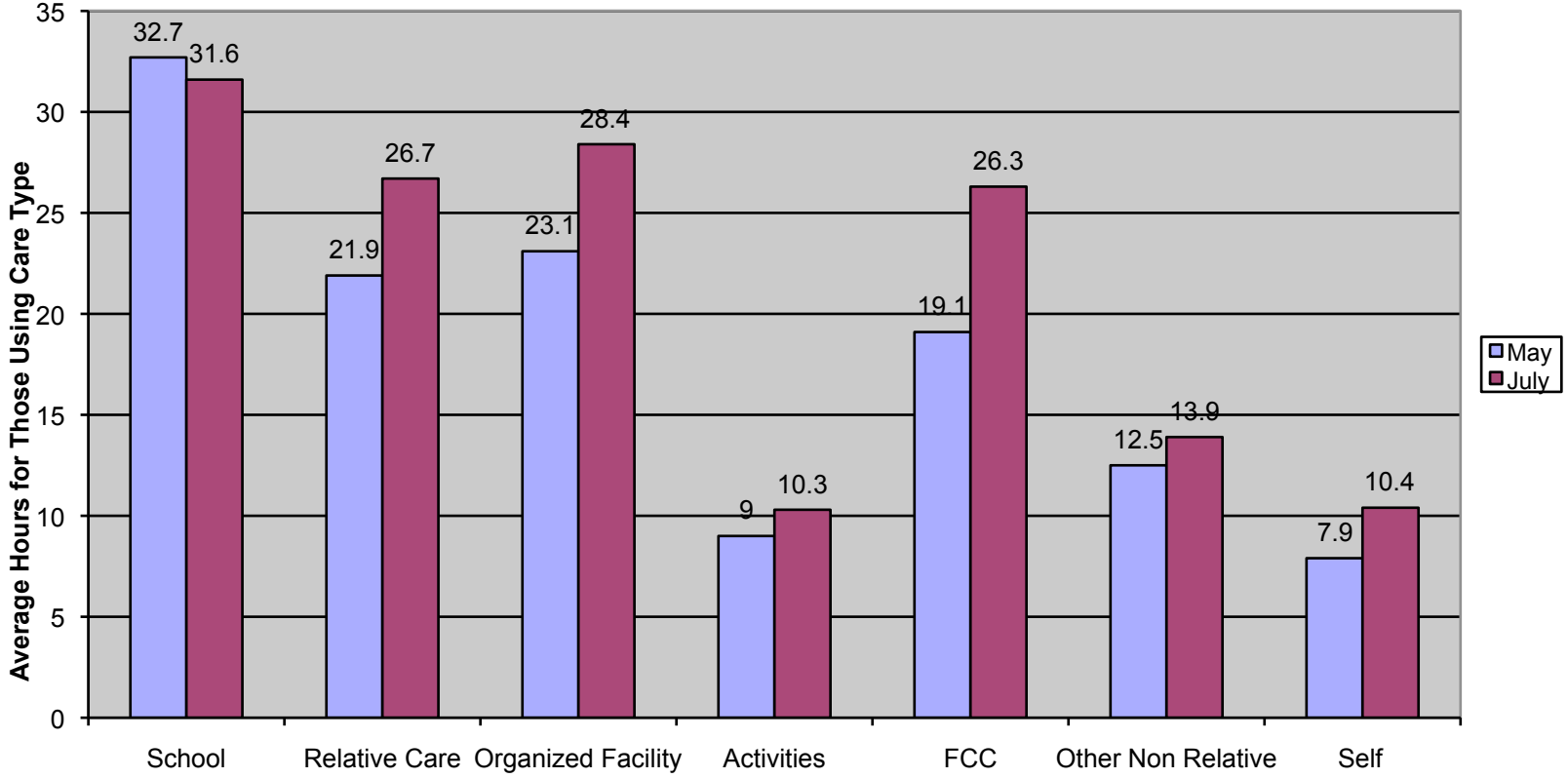

Figure 2. Average Hours in Self Care for Gradeschoolers 5 to 14 by Month

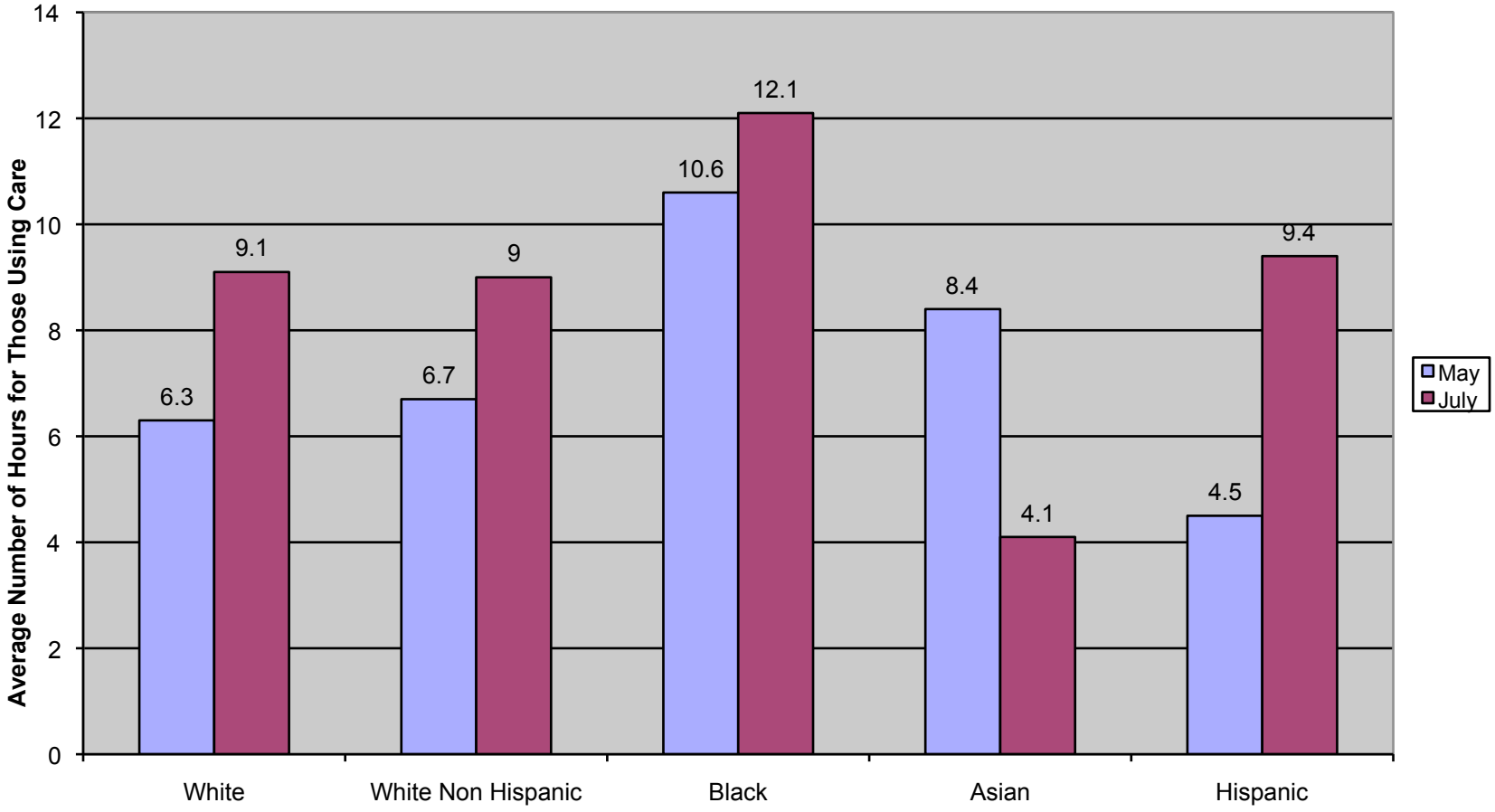

Figure 3. Comparison of Family Child Care by Poverty Status School Age