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Are Diversifying Households Changing Travel Patterns?

Understanding Activities and Travel in Non-Traditional Households

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RESEARCH TOPIC

The era in which the male breadwinner's commute to work was the most important journey for transportation planners and engineers is over. While the story of women joining the workforce is well documented, it is less widely known that trips to work now account for only 16% of trips and are dwarfed by what is known as household-related travel: shopping, family errands, and trips to school and church (53%). The explosive growth in both household and child-serving travel is occurring within the context of a rise in so-called non-traditional households: single-parent families, same-sex partnerships, and three-generation families in which grandparents live with offspring. This study looks to answer three related questions about household-related labor and travel within varying family structures:

- What are the differences between men and women in household-serving travel?
- What are the time use and travel patterns in three-generation households?
- What are the differences between gay, lesbian, and straight families in household-serving travel?

RECOMMENDATIONS

The overarching theme of our research is the considerable role that women across a range of households serve in fulfilling household-related and child-serving trips. This burden makes it increasingly difficult for women to balance work and household chores with leisure and time for sleep. Transportation and city planners need to look for policy and planning strategies that take into consideration the growing prominence of household and child-serving trips.



STUDY

We examined data from the American Time Use Survey (2003-2012) in which respondents completed a detailed activity diary over the course of a single day. The presence of detailed socio-demographic data available for other members in a respondent's household allowed us to closely examine the time-use tradeoffs made by members of different household types.



MAIN FINDINGS

- **Being a woman, regardless of sexuality or household structure, is associated with higher child-serving travel patterns.** Women make many more child-serving and household-serving trips than men, and women who earn more, are better educated, and work more hours than their male partners still make on average 1.5 times as many child-serving trips and 1.4 times as many grocery trips, implying that cultural forces are at work.
- **Women in three-generation households spend 30-60 minutes less a day on housework each day than women in two-generation households.** The presence of a grandparent frees up time for women in a number of ways: women in the middle generation are more likely to work full-time, work longer hours each day, devote more time to leisure (20 minutes per day), and get more sleep (15 minutes per day). These household types represent a rising share (8%) of all households.
- **Though members of same-sex couples tend to share the division of household labor more equally, gendered differences in the total level of household-serving work and travel exist between gay men and lesbians.** Lesbians are more similar to straight women with respect to the total level of both household-serving work and travel, and gay men are more similar to straight men. Children appear to influence women's activity patterns and travel behavior more strongly than men's – gay or straight.

Smart, Michael J., Kелcie M. Ralph, Brian D. Taylor, Carole Turley, and Anne E. Brown. 2014. "Honey, Can You Pick Up Groceries On Your Way Home? Analyzing Activities and Travel among students and in non-traditional households," *University of California Transportation Center*.