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Concepts and Definitions*
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* This document has not been formally edited.

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Concepts and definitions in the context of time-use surveys and statistics²

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List of acronyms

CAPI	Computer-Assisted Personal Interview
CATI	Computer-Assisted Telephone interview
CAWI	Computer-Assisted Web Interview
ESM	Experience Sampling Method
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPS	Global Positioning System
HETUS	Harmonised European Time Use Surveys
ICATUS	International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics
LFS	Labour Force Survey
ISIC	International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities
PAPI	Paper and Pencil Personal Interview
SNA	System of National Accounts

² Many definitions were taken from the UN “Guide to Producing Statistics on Time Use: Measuring Paid and Unpaid Work”, 2005 (https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/seriesf/seriesf_93e.pdf) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe’s “Guidelines for Harmonizing Time-use Surveys”, 2013 (http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/publications/2013/TimeUseSurvey_Guidelines.pdf).

Background

The Expert Group on Innovative and Effective Ways to Collect Time-Use Statistics initially reviewed and agreed on key definitions of terms related to time-use data and time-use surveys to facilitate discussions and common understanding among members of the Group, and to provide and promote consistent and harmonized terminology in the UN guidelines on time-use. Later on, the Group decided to also include country examples and practices, summarized in this document, for the Commission's attention and to be further developed into a dedicated chapter of the UN guidelines.

Introduction

Time-use statistics are quantitative summaries of how people spend or allocate their time in different activities over a given period, typically over the 24 hours of a day or over the 7 days of a week. Time-use statistics provide information about the activities that individuals engage in and how much time is spent in those activities.

Activity³ may be defined as the human behavior in terms of what is being done and may be characterized by the context in which it occurs, its timing, duration, sequence and the frequency with which it takes place. Activity classifications are used to classify activities into groups to support policymaking, and facilitate the collection and organization of statistics.

The **context** describes the conditions in which the activity is taking place, such as the location, the presence of other people, the beneficiary and the motivation.

Episode, also called an **activity episode**, refers to one occurrence of an activity, without a change in any of the contexts (on which information is being collected – where, who with, etc.). A change in any context elements identifies a new episode. In the case a person is performing two activities, then the ceasing of either one of the activities, would mark the end of the episode and the beginning of a new episode. The **number of episodes or frequency** refers to the frequency of occurrence of an activity.

Duration of an activity episode is the time spent in one episode. The **timing of an activity episode** refers to its start and stop time. The **sequence of activity episodes** refers to the order in which episodes occur. **Total time spent in an activity** refers to the total amount of time spent in all episodes of an activity during a given reference period. For example, a person may have reported three episodes of eating on one day: a quick breakfast of 10 minutes, a lunch lasting 90 minutes, and a dinner lasting 35 minutes. This person spent in total 135 minutes eating.

Time-use statistics are produced based on the information collected from a sample of the population. The sample can consist of individuals or members of the same household. Several

³ What become recognized more formally as 'activities' as they are defined in time-use statistics is typically a socially constructed aggregation of human behavior. For example, paid work is often counted as only one activity in many activity frameworks, whereas underlying that activity is an infinitely complex and diverse range of behavior which coders need to assess to determine whether it should meet the criteria of being classified as paid work or not.

survey design components, such as the instrument, mode of data collection and the type of survey, should be defined at an early stage and different combinations and alternatives of these design components translate into a wide variety of options to collect time-use statistics.

Instruments to collect time-use data

In general, an **instrument** is a tool used to consistently implement a survey to obtain data from respondents. It presents in a standard way the set of items (or questions) for which information is needed. The instrument is designed accordingly to address specific objectives. In the context of time-use surveys, the instrument collects information about the activities people engage in and the time allocated to them. The typical instruments used to collect time-use data are full diaries, light diaries and stylized questions. Instruments to collect time-use data are used in combination with questionnaires recording background information such as individual or household socioeconomic/demographic characteristics of respondents, allowing the analysis of time-use data for different groups.

Time-use diaries

Time-use diaries capture the full sequence of activity episodes performed during a specific reference period (e.g. a full 24-hour period, a weekday and a weekend day, a full week, etc.), together with the starting and ending time of each activity. As such, time-use diaries provide information on the **duration, timing, sequence and number of episodes** of specific activities during the reference period.

Full diaries

In a full diary, respondents report their activities as detailed as possible in the following aspects:

- If a predefined activity list is used, the number of categories is extensive (e.g. 150 to 200 categories that may be grouped according to a taxonomy) and the activities in the list are very detailed
- If respondents record their information in their own words, they are instructed to provide as many details as possible
- Probing for more details will allow the collection and recording of very detailed information
- Usually secondary or parallel activities are recorded
- Usually contextual information is recorded. The place (where?) and the interaction with other people (with whom?) are basic contextual information, but additional contextual variables are often collected such as for whom, for pay or profit, use of ICT, level of satisfaction, among others.
- Data obtained are very granular for analysis and dissemination

Examples:

- Traditional left-behind paper diary

- Japan questionnaire B: respondents provide the main activity, secondary activity, place and persons they are with; starting at midnight with 15-minute interval; covering 2 days.
- Countries following the Harmonised European Time Use Surveys (HETUS) guidelines
- Recall interview guiding the respondent to report chronologically all the activities and times (or beginning and ending times) when they were undertaken and contextual information:
 - USA and Canada: CATI
 - Thailand: CAPI
 - South Africa 2010: PAPI
- Digital self-completed “verbatim” diary where respondents record activities with their own words and associated times (or beginning and ending times) when they were undertaken, secondary activities and contextual information
 - Mongolia 2019: Mobile application with full diary together with paper diary – PAPI (mixed mode)
 - Finland (forthcoming)
- Digital self-completed pre-coded diary: Electronic tool where respondents select activities from a predefined/pre-coded list and together with additional contextual information (and background questions) activities will be coded automatically into a full hierarchical classification (in 2013 in Flanders, Belgium⁴; EG proposed option using ICATUS 2016, forthcoming)
- Digital self-completed “partially” pre-coded diary: the electronic tool has the most common activity list available to choose from, but also provides a free text entry option so that the respondent can describe the activity if different from the available pre-coded selection. This option allows for the most common activities to be clearly available and easy to select (reducing cognitive burden of searching a hierarchical classification) but also allows respondents to describe in their own words the activity they undertook. (Australia 2020)

Light diaries

To reduce respondents’ burden, cost and time (e.g. coding time), the content of a diary can be lightened up so that the information collected on the time-use of a respondent is reduced. This solution will provide less details in terms of activities, and/or contextual information, but should result in higher response rates and reduced cost and time.

In a light diary, respondents report their activities with less details in the following aspects:

- An activity list is used and the number of categories in the list is limited (country practices show that a practical number is between 20 and 35 activities) and the categories are less detailed (using only broader categories)
- Secondary or parallel activities, and contextual information are seldom captured
- Data obtained is less granular/more aggregated for analysis and dissemination

⁴ Respondents, a random sample from the national register, were asked to self-complete online diaries for a full week.

Examples:

- Traditional left-behind light diary
 - Japan questionnaire A: predefined list of activities, no secondary activity, only “with whom” as contextual information
- Digital diary where respondents record the times (or beginning and ending times) for a predefined list of activities
 - China 2018: predefined list of 20 activities, secondary activities, and with whom and use of internet)⁵

Stylized questions to capture time-use

When stylized questions are used to capture time-use, the respondent reports the total amount of time spent on selected activities during a specific reference period (e.g. 24 hours, a week, a year, etc.). The activities covered by the questionnaire may capture all possible activities, or may be limited to a specific subset or subsets of activities (e.g. leisure time, work activities, unpaid caring and domestic chores, etc.).

Stylized questions differ from diaries because only information on the **total time spent** in the activities is recorded. In general, stylized questions do not capture the **timing** of the activities, nor the **sequence** of activities, nor the **number of activity episodes** during a given reference period. Stylized questions, subject to their formulation, may also include the contextual information such as location and with whom the activity took place.

Countries that have used stylized questions include Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Paraguay, Peru, Panama, Mexico and Uruguay.

Difference between stylized questions and diaries

	Duration	Number of episodes	Timing	Sequence
Stylized questions	Yes (<i>aggregated</i>)	No	No	No
Diary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Instruments may vary in several characteristics as follows:

Interviewer-assisted vs. self-completed (self-reporting)

The information to be entered in the instrument could be collected and entered by an interviewer or the respondent could self-complete it (paper or digital).

⁵ Paper questionnaire was used in 10 provinces and an ad-hoc app was used in Shanghai.

Tomorrow or current or “left-behind” diary vs. “yesterday” or retrospective instrument

When self-reporting, respondents could record the activity as or just after it occurs (tomorrow or current or “left-behind” diary approach). Alternatively, respondents could recall and record activities performed over a specified period that occurred in the past, such as the previous day or over the past week (“yesterday” or retrospective diary approach).

Fixed vs. open interval

Activities in a diary can be recorded in fixed intervals (e.g. 10- or 15-minute slots), or open intervals in which respondents record for each activity or episode the exact starting and ending time.

Own words (verbatim) vs. activity list / taxonomy/pre-coded or pre-defined list

Activities in a diary may be recorded using the words of the respondents (which are later coded by experts using a predefined activity list or classification) or using a predefined activity or taxonomy list.

Reference period

The reference period of the instrument is usually 24 hours (one day), but it could be longer (e.g. one weekday and one weekend day, three consecutive days, one week, etc.). When using diaries, this could result in the completion of multiple diaries.

Other parts of the instrument

Contextual information refers to information collected in the instrument that captures the context or the physical, psychological, social and temporal features of the environment in which a specific activity takes place (location, for whom, with whom), additional defining characteristics of the activity (paid/unpaid), or subjective aspects such as enjoyment, stress and wellbeing.

Screening questions are used to determine eligibility and which set of questions the respondent should be asked. Note that some background questions could be used as screening questions. For example, the respondent’s age may be collected as background information, but it could also be used to determine eligibility for the survey or for certain questions.

Probing questions or probes are questions asked during the application of the instrument that:

- (1) Ask respondents to provide more information about an episode so that it can be coded correctly, or
- (2) Ask respondents to correct inconsistencies and errors. For example, if two consecutive activities took place in different locations--with no transportation activity in between, a probing question would ask how the respondent got from place A to place B. In the same manner, if no eating or sleeping activity was reported for the 24-hour diary, a probe would ask the respondent if he or she ate or slept on the diary day. When using stylized questions, probes are important to avoid double counting times.

The probing may take the form of a pop-up question in a self-administered diary using an electronic/digital instrument, or a follow-up question asked by an interviewer during computer assisted interview or face-to-face interview.⁶

Summary questions are asked after the diary/set of time-use stylized questions has been completed. They are designed to elicit additional information about the respondent's activities during the reference period.

Examples include:

- Income-generating activities: Were there any activities that you were paid for or will be paid for? If yes: "Which ones?"
- Childcare: "During what times or which activities was a child under age 13 in your care?"
- Job-related activities: Please identify which of the activities that you just described were done for your job/business (list activities if necessary).

Mode of data collection

The **mode of data collection** refers to the method or approach used for the collection of data, such as computer-assisted personal interview (CAPI), computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI), computer-assisted web interview (CAWI), paper and pencil personal interview (PAPI). Modes can be combined (mixed mode) depending on the study objectives. There are several dimensions that differentiate modes, such as the presence of interviewer, how questions are recorded, the technology used, etc.

Collecting time-use data has traditionally been undertaken through three main approaches: (1) **recall interview by an interviewer**, (2) **self-reporting by respondent**, and (3) **direct observation**. Each of these approaches are benefiting from the use of modern technologies, resulting in more effective and cost-efficient collection of time-use data.

(1) In the **recall interview**, the respondent is asked to report about time use in the recent past—usually the past day, past two days or past week. Recording is done by someone other than the respondent (usually interviewers). Face-to-face interviews are still very common, using paper questionnaires (PAPI) (South Africa in 2010, Mongolia in 2015) or computer-assisted solutions (CAPI) (Mexico in 2019). Computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) have also been used in selected countries (Canada and USA).

(2) In the **self-reporting method**, the respondent personally records the time-use information on the survey instruments. Depending on the designated period specified in the survey design, the self-reporting method can provide information for either a past or an ongoing period.

Self-reporting requires respondents to record their activities in a designed time diary as or just after they occur (tomorrow or current or "left-behind" diary approach), or recalling and recording activities performed over a specified recall period—usually the previous day or over the past

⁶ HETUS guidelines include a check list at the end of the self-administered paper diaries.

week (“yesterday” or retrospective diary approach). Another, not very common approach within the self-reported method is the “experience sampling method” (ESM) or “beeper” studies approach in which respondents are prompted by a beeper to record specified objective (e.g. what are you doing now?) and/or subjective (e.g. how do you feel now?) information at the time of the beep.

Until recently, paper diaries were used for self-reporting time-use surveys (most European countries). More recently, some countries have been developing websites for the self-reporting of the activities (Canada, Serbia, Japan). The development of mobile apps for the collection of diary information is being explored more and more by countries as an option to collect time-use information and lowering the cost related to processing and the time to produce outputs (in 2018 Shanghai, China; in several studies in Flanders, Belgium⁷).

(3) In the **direct observation method**, the time use of the respondent is observed and recorded by the survey enumerator or device (video or/and audio). The observation can be carried out continuously (the respondent is observed and recorded throughout the recording period), or randomly (the respondent is observed and recorded only at random points in time during the recording period). In the direct observation, the time-use information pertains to the current or ongoing period of observation.

With observational methods, respondents do not have to remember all the activities. With new technologies, it is possible to recreate all the activities undertaken by a person by reviewing video or audios, ensuring proper recording of the activities.

Observational approaches should be considered only for data quality checks, in-depth small-scale studies, studies of activities in certain location, for example, given the high cost they entail – labour intensive – and their intrusive approach. There could be changes in patterns given of the awareness of the monitoring. However, it is getting more common for people to use devices that are continuously monitoring their behavior, for example, location with GPS, or physical activity with accelerometers, etc. Less intrusive methods have been used, such as programs tracking the use of time in computers at work or school (time spent checking email, time spent in applications, time spent on the web, etc.).

Type of time-use data collection

Time-use data may be collected through: (a) **Dedicated/standalone** time-use surveys; and (b) time-use component **incorporated in another survey**.

Dedicated/standalone survey is a survey that is not attached to any other. It can be:

⁷ The research Group Tempus Omnia Revelat (TOR) has conducted several studies in Flanders, Belgium, using MOTUS (online app) to collect time-use information from university professors (2016), people working in public administration (2017), school teachers in Flanders (2018), a longitudinal time-use survey among employees from a women’s organization transitioning to a 30-hour week in 2019 (twice in 2018, twice in 2019 and 1 survey to be organized in 2020).

1. Fully independent: designed specifically for the purpose of the topic, including consideration of the sample, purpose-trained interviewers, and targeted and specific content. (Examples: Canada, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, South Africa)
2. Sample linked to another survey: independent survey designed for the specific measurement objectives, with independent operations, but whose sample is derived from another survey. (Examples: Thailand (LFS), USA, Belgium (in 1999 and 2005 coupled with the National Expenditure survey, and in 2013 coupled with the Labour Force Survey))

A time-use component **Incorporated in another survey** is an instrument focusing on the topic, that is attached to another survey (usually fielded at the same time as the host survey) as:

1. Module attached to the parent survey with specific implementation procedures (Example: Uruguay 2013 – module in the Continuous Households Survey)
2. Section fully integrated within a household survey on related topics (Example: Dominican Republic 2016 – section in the National Multipurpose Household Survey)

Time-use surveys collect **background information**, usually demographic, provided by respondents that will allow for a better understanding of the time-use data. Background information can be collected through household and individual questionnaires (and from registers if possible):

Household questionnaire

Questionnaire used to collect information about (a) the members of the household (sex, age, relationship to the head of the household⁸, education, etc.) and (b) household characteristics (drinking water, assets, toilet facilities, etc.).

Individual questionnaire

Questionnaire used to collect information about the individual, such as wellbeing status, employment status (if employed, employed full- or part-time), education, school enrollment status, demographic information, general health status including disability status, migratory status, income, etc.

Other aspects in the collection of time-use data

Designated day or period refers to the specific day or period that has been assigned to the respondent about which to provide time-use information.

Substitute day and postponed day are alternative days that may be available for the respondent to complete their diary or report information if the respondent could not participate on the designated day. The **designated day with postponement methodology**⁹ involves respondents

⁸ The 2018 Harmonized European Time Use Surveys (HETUS) guidelines recommend collecting all relationships between household members.

⁹ Stewart, Jay (2002). Assessing the Bias Associated with Alternative Contact Strategies in Telephone Time-Use Surveys. Vol 28, No. 2, pp. 157-168. Statistics Canada, Catalogue No, 12-001.

being given another opportunity to complete the diary – on the same reference day (e.g. Monday) in the subsequent week(s). This approach maintains the representative distribution of days across the sample. Countries using designated day with postponement include Canada and USA.¹⁰ Completing the diary or reporting information for a Tuesday when the original designated day was a Monday is an example of a **substitute day**.

Reference day or period refers to the specific day or period respondents actually reported about. In HETUS it is referred to as “real date”.

Simultaneous or parallel activities are two or more activities engaged in by a person over an interval of time or at the same time. The **primary activity** is the one whose value added exceeds that of any other activity carried out within the same time unit. In other words, it is the activity that the respondent determines as main activity, within a given time unit, because it has the highest value in terms of concentration, interest, etc. or meaning for him/her, compared to other possible activities within the same time unit. The **secondary activity** is carried out at the same time as another activity (primary activity), and is considered of less importance by the respondent. In other words, it is the activity whose value added does not exceed that of another activity (primary activity) carried out within the same time unit or simultaneously.

Although it adds to the respondent’s burden, the collection of secondary activities enhances the accuracy of the data. The collection of secondary activities allows to identify specific types of activities that otherwise may not appear or would typically be underestimated if only primary activities are covered. Childcare is a classic example of an activity performed in parallel with others, like domestic work, that respondents tend to report as secondary activity only. Respondents tend to report as primary activities those that require most of their attention. Activities that would typically be reported as secondary activities or simultaneous are, for example, listening to radio, housework and childcare.

An activity classification system categorizes different activities into groups to provide a picture of how people spend their time, and identify how much time is spent on different activities to support policymaking, and facilitate the collection and organization of statistics. It defines the framework for assigning activities to numeric activity codes and provides a basis for defining analytical categories of activities. It is usually hierarchical in nature with each successive tier made of more detailed codes.

When collecting time-use data in the respondent’s own wording (verbatim), activities can be **after-coded** (activities are coded after the collection of data by coders or experts into a list of activities or classification of activities) or **on-the-fly coded** (activities are coded at the time of the interview by the interviewers into a list of activities or classification of activities).

The International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics 2016 (ICATUS 2016) was endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in 2017 for use as an international statistical classification. ICATUS has been developed based on internationally agreed concepts, definitions and principles in order to improve the consistency and international comparability of time-use and other social and economic statistics. ICATUS 2016 is consistent with the System of National

¹⁰ Postponement rules are defined in the HETUS guidelines.

Accounts (SNA), in response to requests received from countries in need of better statistics on all forms of work, allowing for the development of satellite accounts on unpaid household services, including unpaid domestic work and caring for household members. Accordingly, activities are classified in ICATUS on the basis of their “productive” nature, as productive and personal activities. ICATUS is also consistent with the forms of work identified by the nineteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians,¹¹ which have been used as a basis for the further classification of productive activities (see Figure 1). Finally, relevant categories contained in ICATUS 2016 are consistent with the International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities (ISIC Rev. 4), to promote coherence between time-use statistics and statistics on employment classified by industries and economic activities.

Figure 1 ICATUS 2016 and its relation to the forms of work and the SNA

Intended destination of production	for own final use		for use by others							
	Own-use production work		Employment (work for pay or profit)			Unpaid trainee work	Other work activities	Volunteer work		
Forms of work	of services		of goods					in market and non-market units	in households producing	
								goods	services	
ICATUS 2016	4. Unpaid caregiving services for household and family members 3. Unpaid domestic services for household and family members 2. Production of goods for own final use		1. Employment and related activities			5. Unpaid volunteer, trainee and other unpaid work				
			11. Employment in corporations, government and non-profit institutions	12. Employment in household enterprises to produce goods	13. Employment in households and household enterprises to provide services	53. Unpaid trainee work and related activities	59. Other unpaid work activities	51. Unpaid direct volunteering for other households ^b 52. Unpaid community - and organization-based volunteering ^b		
Type of work	Unpaid work (unpaid care work, domestic work and production of goods for own final use ^a)					Unpaid work (community, volunteer, trainee work)				
Relation to 2008 SNA			Activities within the SNA production boundary						Activities inside the SNA general production boundary	

Time-use data has been historically used for the development of household production satellite accounts that contribute to the tracking of the value of unpaid work done in the home (such as childcare, adult care, household services, and volunteering) that is mostly missing from regular economic statistics such as gross domestic product (GDP). **Satellite accounts** provide a framework within which to accommodate elements that are included in the central accounts, explicitly or implicitly, plus complementary elements (either monetary or in physical quantities), and possibly alternative concepts and presentations. Specifically, the household production satellite accounts show the relation between the monetary value of unpaid work to the total GDP providing relevant information that complements the GDP. Hence the importance of using the System of National Accounts (SNA) as the basic framework to distinguish/classify activities.

¹¹ The Statistics Division worked closely with ILO to align ICATUS with the definition of work adopted in 2013 by the nineteenth International Conference of Labour Statisticians, to ensure that activities in employment that are difficult to capture in labour force surveys and other forms of work, including those beyond the SNA production boundary, are properly identified through time-use data.

According to SNA 2008, a **productive activity** is carried out under the control and responsibility of an economic agent that uses inputs such as labour, capital, and goods and services to produce outputs in the form of goods or services¹² and falls within the general production boundary. Basic human activities such as eating, drinking, exercising, etc. are not productive from an economic point of view (**personal activities**), and in these cases, it is impossible for one person to hire another person to perform the activity instead. One person can pay another to exercise, but the benefit will be for that who exercised. Activities such as cooking, washing, caring for children or a sick person are all activities that can be provided by other units (person) and therefore productive. Some households, for example, hire paid domestic staff to undertake these activities for them.¹³

A **household (housekeeping concept)** is a group of persons who share the same living accommodation, who pool some, or all, of their income and wealth and who consume certain types of goods and services collectively, mainly housing and food.¹⁴ This concept assumes that there could be more than one household sharing one housing unit or one household occupying two or more housing units. Some countries use the **household-dwelling concept according to which** all persons living in a housing unit are considered as belonging to the same household.¹⁵

Future focus of the Group¹⁶

Although this document presents definitions for the following terms, the Group will further discuss them and provide more precision and recommendations in the future:

Response rate should be calculated as the total number of completed interviews divided by the total number of eligible units. Note that it is necessary to define “completed interview”—that is, how much of the diary or questionnaire needs to be completed to be used for analysis. Countries usually define ‘eligible units’ as every respondent/household that was invited to participate to the survey, minus the contacted persons for which it is clear that they do not belong to the target population (e.g. do not fall in the target age group, are deceased, etc.).

- If more than one household member is sampled, then the response rate could be calculated at the household level (for household analyses) or the individual level (for individual-level analyses).
- If only one respondent is selected, it should be calculated at the person level.

Given that countries have different practices on how the response rate is calculated (who is included – for example, if substituted respondents are included or not), the Group will further discuss the calculation of the response rate in the context of time-use surveys.

Passive care refers to monitoring or supervising another person’s activities. The distinguishing aspect of passive care is that the respondent is not interacting with the person being monitored or supervised. Thus, activities such as supervising kids getting dressed, and supervising family

¹² SNA 2008 paragraph 6.24

¹³ SNA 2008 paragraph 6.25

¹⁴ SNA 2008, paragraph 4.4

¹⁵ Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, rev. 3, para. 2.35

¹⁶ This section is not exhaustive.

members taking medication would be considered passive. Passive care is typically done while doing something else, but it could be done as a primary activity.

Active care is considered when the person provides care directly and interacts with the person being cared, monitored or supervised. Thus, activities such as listening to someone, getting kids dressed, and giving a family member medication would be considered active care.

DRAFT