

Parents' use of child care services and differences in use by mothers' employment status

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Parents' use of child care services and differences in use by mothers' employment status

by Shary Zhang, Rochelle Garner, Loanna Heidinger, and Leanne Findlay

Overview of the study

Use of non-parental formal and informal child care (hereafter, referred to as child care) has important implications for both parents and children as child care participation is associated with children's development and parents' labour force attachment. Furthermore, mothers participate in the labour force differently than fathers, and maternal employment characteristics may be particularly associated with child care use for children under the age of 12. Using the most recent General Social Survey (2017) on Families, the present study provides an estimate of the overall use of child care among parents in Canada, including the type and frequency of child care use, reasons for selecting a particular type of care, and reasons for not using child care. It also assesses the association between maternal employment characteristics and the use of child care.

- Child care use varied by parental and family characteristics and also differed based on the age of the child.
- Lone parents, younger parents, Canadian-born parents, and parents residing in Quebec or the Atlantic provinces were more likely to use child care.
- Child care use was associated with maternal employment characteristics for working mothers. For example, mothers with a regular work schedule (compared to irregular schedules such as shift work) were more likely to use child care.

Introduction

Canadian governments, at federal and provincial levels, have shown increasing attention to the importance of child care, for reasons that include parents' labour force participation and children's development. Most recently, the 2021 federal budget allocated \$30 billion over five years towards a new Canada-wide early learning and child care plan.¹ This plan has the stated goal of ensuring high quality, affordable and flexible care to secure women's participation in the labour force and to provide children with the range of benefits associated with quality child care.

A recent report using data from the Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements (SELCCA) revealed that approximately 52% of children aged

0 to 5 participated in some type of child care, formal or informal, in Canada in 2020. However, results further suggested that almost 4 in 10 (37%) parents reported experiencing difficulties in finding a child care arrangement.

Along with the challenges of finding and accessing quality child care, research has shown that women's employment characteristics also affect the use of child care. For example, one study found that mothers working non-standard hours were less likely than mothers who work standard hours to use child care on a regular basis for their young children.² Understanding the association between parents' employment characteristics and child care use is particularly important in light of research,

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notably studies on Quebec's universal child care program,³ that show investments in child care can have a positive impact on mother's labour force participation.

Using the 2017 General Social Survey on Families, the present study provides a profile of non-parental child care (hereafter, referred to as child care) among Canadian families (see the [Data sources, methods and definitions](#) section). The study examines parents⁴ use of child care, including the types of child care arrangements used by parents, the cost of care, the reasons for selecting a type of child care, as well as reasons for not using child care. Paid and unpaid child care arrangements can include home daycares; before or after school programs; preschool centres, nursery schools, daycares or centre de la petite enfance (Quebec only); and care in the child's home or elsewhere by a relative or non-relative.

Also, recognizing that the use of child care and mothers' employment are closely linked – with the gender gap in labour force participation being attributed, in part, to the availability of child care⁵ – this study looks at characteristics of mothers' employment. This includes an analysis of whether use of child care varies according to women's type of employment, usual work schedule, and sector of employment.

Use of child care differs by family characteristics

Overall, approximately two-thirds (64%) of parents reported using some type of child care in 2017 (Table 1).⁶ Reported use of child care was highest for parents with two children (71%), compared to approximately 60% of parents with one, three, or four or more children.

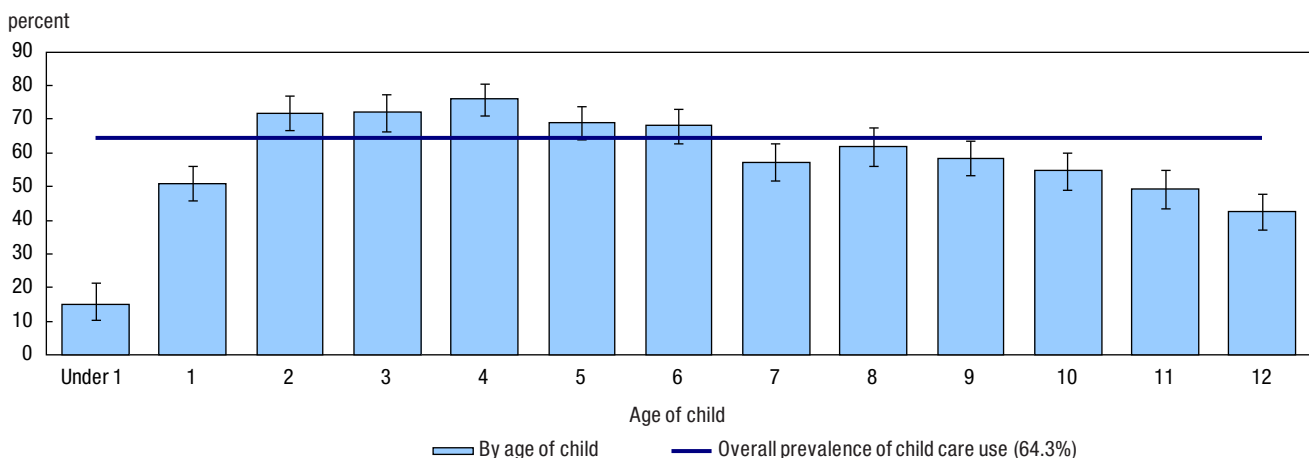
Reported use of child care was lowest among parents of infants (15%), potentially reflecting parents'

use of maternity and parental leave. Child care use increased thereafter for parents with children aged 1 to 12, peaking among parents of 4-year-olds (76%) (Chart 1). After children reached school-age, the reported use of child care decreased, dropping to 42% among parents of 12-year-olds.

Lone-parent families were most likely to report using child care for their children aged 1 to 12. Specifically, seven in ten lone-parents – whether single, separated, divorced or widowed – reported using child care. This was somewhat higher than the proportion of partnered parents relying on child care (64%).

Younger parents are more likely to have young children, and young children are more likely to attend some type of child care. Therefore, it is reasonable to observe a higher proportion of young parents using child care services compared to

Chart 1
Use of child care, by age of child, 2017



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Families, 2017.

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older parents. In particular, 70% of parents aged 30 to 39 used child care in the preceding year, compared to 59% of parents aged 40 to 49, and 52% of parents aged 50 to 79.

Differences in the use of child care were also seen between immigrant and Canadian-born parents. Just over half of immigrant parents (53%) and non-permanent resident parents (54%) reported using child care in the 12 months preceding

the survey, compared to 69% of Canadian-born parents (Table 1). This may reflect the lower rate of employment among immigrants compared to those born in Canada,⁷ or that immigrant families may be less likely to pay for child care if they live in a multigenerational household.

Differences in child care use between Indigenous parents living off reserve and non-Indigenous parents were not statistically significant. Limitations

related to sample size precludes the further examination of child care use patterns among First Nations, Métis and Inuit. More research is needed to provide further insights into child care use among Indigenous parents.

Understanding variations in child care use by other racialized groups is not possible, due to small sample size and corresponding issues with data quality.

Table 1
Parental respondents and reported use of child care, by selected family and demographic characteristics, 2017

	All parents	Using child care	95% Confidence Interval	
			From	To
	percent			
Parents with at least one child age 12 or younger living in the household	100.0	64.3	62.3	66.2
Age of youngest child in the household				
Less than 1	6.3	15.0*	10.4	21.2
1 to 3 (ref.)	34.2	64.0	60.8	67.1
4 to 5 (in school)	7.1	66.7	59.2	73.4
4 to 5 (not in school)	8.6	80.3*	74.5	85.1
6 to 9	25.7	63.2	59.2	67.0
10 to 12	18.1	47.4*	42.6	52.3
Number of children (any age) per parent				
1 (ref.)	47.8	59.4	56.4	62.4
2	40.0	70.6*	67.7	73.3
3	10.5	63.3	57.5	68.8
4	1.6	57.4	41.6	71.8
Age of parent				
20 to 29	11.6	60.9*	54.7	66.8
30 to 39 (ref.)	49.2	70.1	67.5	72.5
40 to 49	34.2	58.8*	55.4	62.1
50 to 79	4.9	52.2*	43.4	60.8
Marital status of parent				
Partnered (ref.)	89.3	63.6	61.5	65.7
Lone	10.7	69.7*	64.4	74.5
Household income				
Less than \$40,000	10.3	54.7	48.8	60.5
\$40,000 to \$99,999 (ref.)	40.5	59.1	55.8	62.2
\$100,000 or more	49.2	70.5*	67.8	73.1
Population centre				
Larger urban population centres (CMA/CA) (ref.)	84.9	64.7	62.5	66.8
Rural areas, small population centres, and Prince Edward Island	15.1	62.0	57.2	66.7
Indigenous identity				
Indigenous (ref.)	5.7	68.2	59.4	75.9
Non-Indigenous	94.3	69.2	66.9	71.3
Immigrant status				
Immigrant	27.7	53.1*	49.1	57.1
Non-permanent resident	3.6	53.7*	42.2	64.7
Born in Canada (ref.)	68.7	69.1	66.9	71.2

* significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from reference category (ref.)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Families, 2017.

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Parents of young children more likely to use child care on a regular basis and to use it more frequently

The regularity and frequency of using child care mirrored patterns in the overall use, with regular use of child care being most common among parents of young children, many of whom had not yet entered school. Specifically, 50% of parents of children aged 1 to 3 used child care on a regular basis, as did 55% of parents of children aged 4 to 5. These proportions fell to 39% for parents of 6- to 9-year-olds and 25% for parents of 10- to 12-year-olds (Table 2).

Additional information about child care arrangements was only asked of parents using these on a regular basis. Among those using child care on a regular basis, the majority of parents reported having their children in care five or more days

per week, regardless of their child's age. Approximately one third of parents of young children reported regularly having their child in care 1 to 4 days a week, and fewer reported using child care services less frequently than weekly. For parents of the oldest children (10 to 12 years old), similar proportions reported having their child in care less than weekly (26%) as reported having them in care 1 to 4 days a week (20%).

Daycare or preschool care most common for young children

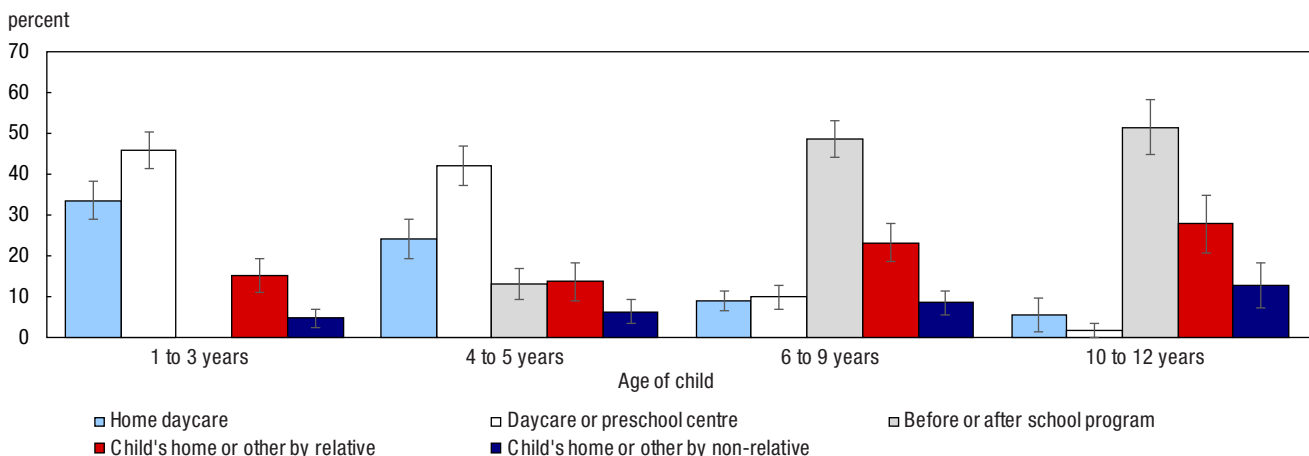
Among parents of young children (1 to 5 year olds), a daycare or preschool centre care was the most common type of child care used, with home daycares being the second most common child care arrangement (Chart 2). A small proportion (13%) of parents with

children aged 4 and 5 reported using before or after school care, whereas a majority of parents of school-aged children (6 through 12) reported using before or after school care, followed by care provided in the child's home, whether by a relative or a non-relative. It should be noted that kindergarten enrollment for 4- and 5-year-olds varies across the provinces; however, almost all children attend school by age 6.

Convenience is leading reason for choosing a child care arrangement

Parents reported the main reason for which they chose a specific type of child care. Regardless of the child's age, reasons of convenience, including the location and hours of operation, and the trustworthiness of the child care provider topped the list for selecting a particular child care arrangement (Table 2).

Chart 2
Type of child care arrangement, by age of child, 2017



Note: Due to the low use of child care for infants under the age of 1, data are not presented.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Families, 2017.

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Table 2
Characteristics of regular child care use, by age of child, 2017

	Child 1 to 3 years			Child 4 to 5 years			Child 6 to 9 years			Child 10 to 12 years		
	Distribution	95% Confidence Interval		Distribution	95% Confidence Interval		Distribution	95% Confidence Interval		Distribution	95% Confidence Interval	
		From	To		From	To		From	To		From	To
	percent											
Use of non-parental child care												
Use regularly	50.3	47.3	53.4	54.8	51.0	58.6	39.3	36.4	42.3	24.7	22.1	27.5
Use occasionally	15.2	13.0	17.8	17.0	14.1	20.2	22.7	20.4	25.2	25.5	22.8	28.4
Does not use care	34.4	31.4	37.5	28.2	24.8	31.9	38.0	35.0	41.1	49.8	46.5	53.2
Frequency of child care use[†]												
5 or more days per week	63.6	59.0	68.0	58.0	53.0	62.9	61.6	57.0	66.1	53.6	46.2	60.8
1 to 4 days per week	31.6	27.5	36.1	33.4	28.8	38.5	25.0	21.2	29.1	20.2	15.2	26.4
Less than weekly	4.7	3.1	7.2	8.5	5.6	12.7	13.4	10.6	16.8	26.2	20.1	33.4
Main reason for using care[†]												
Convenient	27.3	23.8	31.1	33.6	29.0	38.6	47.8	43.3	52.4	44.8	38.2	51.6
Trustworthy/safe	30.2	26.2	34.5	28.6	24.0	33.8	24.6	20.6	29.1	30.1	23.7	37.4
Affordable cost	11.8	9.0	15.3	8.0	5.5	11.5	10.3	7.7	13.8	9.2	6.1	13.7
For child's development	14.2	11.5	17.4	13.4	10.2	17.5	8.4	6.2	11.1	8.1	5.1	12.7
Other reason	16.6	13.7	20.0	16.3	13.1	20.1	8.9	6.7	11.6	7.7	4.9	11.9
Number of hours spent in child care per week[‡]												
Full-time	72.0	67.6	76.0	53.2	47.9	58.5	14.0	10.8	18.1	10.7	6.7	16.8
Part-time	28.0	24.0	32.4	46.8	41.5	52.1	86.0	81.9	89.2	89.3	83.2	93.3
Cost of care per month[†]												
No cost	16.4	13.0	20.3	14.9	11.3	19.5	25.2	20.7	30.3	32.8	25.5	41.0
Cost greater than 0	83.6	79.7	87.0	85.1	80.5	88.7	74.8	69.7	79.3	67.2	59.0	74.5
Main reason for not using care or not using it regularly												
One of the parents stay at home	63.5	58.6	68.2	46.7	40.7	52.8	37.2	33.7	40.9	27.9	24.7	31.4
Doesn't need or doesn't want	14.3	11.1	18.2	27.2	22.2	33.0	41.9	38.2	45.8	56.9	53.1	60.5
Child care is too costly	8.5	6.1	11.9	8.6	5.6	13.1	4.7	3.4	6.6	3.7	2.6	5.3
Unemployed or unpredictable schedule	10.5	7.8	14.0	14.4	10.6	19.2	12.8	10.5	15.5	8.2	6.3	10.6
Other	3.2	1.8	5.6	3.1	1.6	5.7	3.3	2.2	4.9	3.3	2.3	4.8

[†] examined only among those who reported using child care regularly

[‡] examined only among those who reported using child care regularly and using care at least one day a week

Note: Due to the low use of child care for infants under the age of 1, data are not presented.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Families, 2017.

For young children (aged 1 to 5), similar proportions of parents said that they chose a particular child care arrangement because of its convenience and because they felt the child care provider was trustworthy and safe. Convenience was more important for parents of older children. In 2017, nearly half of parents of children aged 6 to 12 said the location and hours of operation were key reasons for selecting the

child care arrangement. Other reasons for choosing a particular type of child care, such as affordable cost and for the child's development, were reported less often.

Parents' employment and cost of care cited as reasons for not using child care

Among parents who reported not using child care, the predominant reasons were that a parent is at

home, whether on parental leave or otherwise, or that the parent did not need or want child care.

The majority of parents of young children (aged 1 through 5) reported a parent at home as the main reason for not using child care. However, the reason for a parent being at home is unknown. A parent may be at home by choice (i.e., parental leave) or not by choice (i.e., parent cannot find appropriate care for child),

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which can have varying implications for child care use. Between 10% and 15% of parents of 1- to 5-year-olds reported that unemployment or unpredictable work schedules contributed to them not using child care services. An additional 8% reported that they did not use child care due to its high cost. For parents of school-aged children (6 to 12 years of age), the majority reported not needing or wanting child care as the main reason for not using child care.

Cost of child care varies by age of child

The majority of parents reported paying for child care. However, the proportion of parents reporting no

cost increased with the age of the child (Table 2). The vast majority (84%) of parents who reported not paying for child care indicated that their child was cared for by a relative, either in the respondents' home or elsewhere.

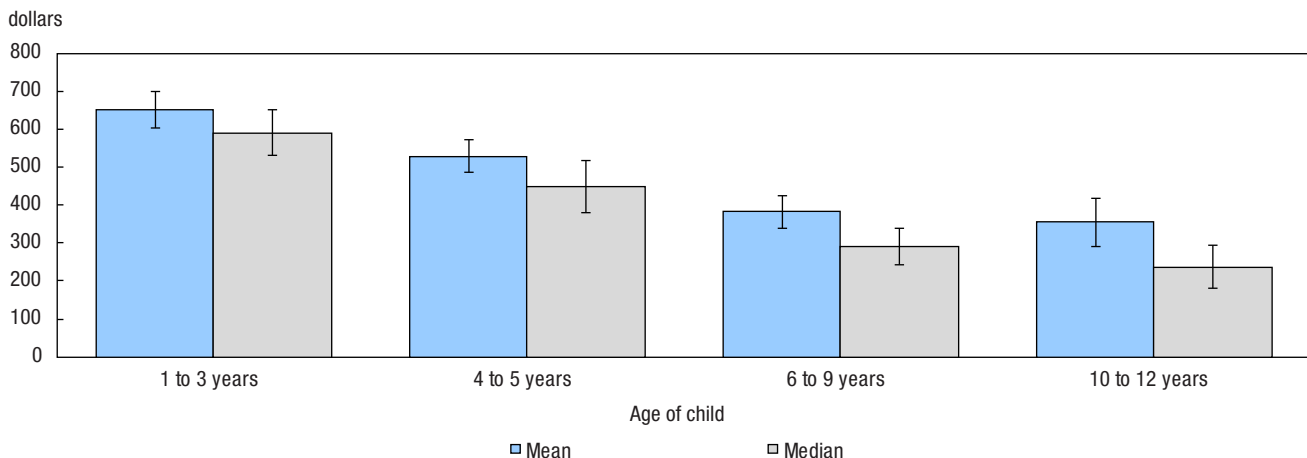
Among parents paying for child care, the average cost of care per child was highest for young children, and decreased in older age groups (Chart 3). This downward pattern is consistent with the number of hours a child attends child care per week. Younger children tend to require more hours of care, whereas school-aged children are usually only in care outside of school hours.⁸

A majority of parents (72%) of children aged 1 to 3 years reported

full-time (i.e., 30 or more hours per week) attendance in child care, while parents of children 4 to 5 years old were equally likely to report full-time use of child care as they were to report part-time attendance. For school-aged children, between 86% and 90% of parents reported that their child attended child care part-time.

Child care costs also tend to be higher for young children in general, specifically infants and toddlers.⁹ In addition, younger children tend to require more hours of care, whereas school-aged children are usually only in care outside of school hours. Greater time spent in child care was generally related to higher cost of care.

Chart 3
Average and median cost of child care per month, by age of child, 2017



Note: Due to the low use of child care for infants under the age of 1, data are not presented.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Families, 2017.

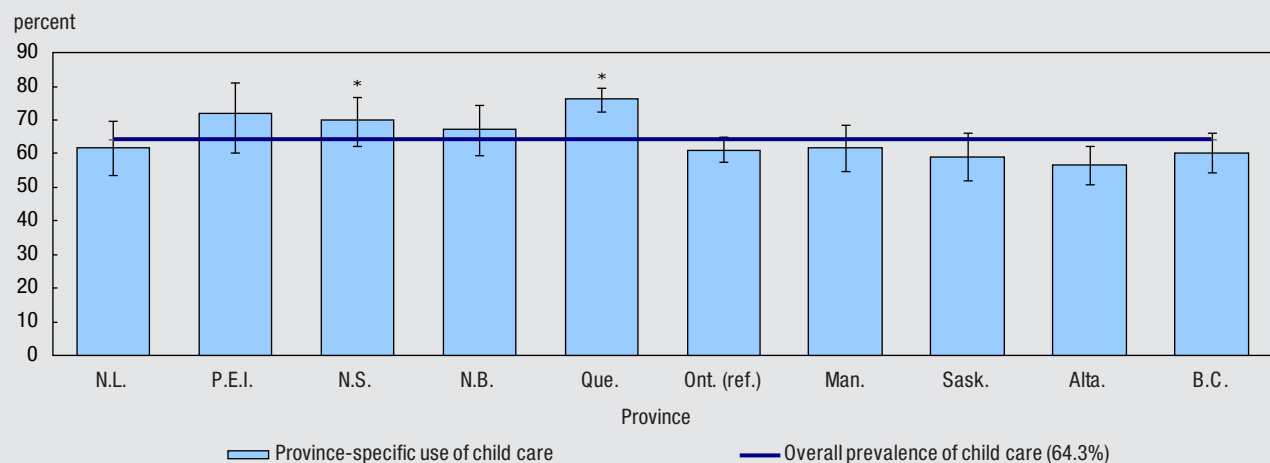
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Child care use highest in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces

Child care policies and programs vary across Canada, which in turn, may impact the overall use. The highest rate of child care use was found for parents in Quebec (76%), a province with a universal child care system (Chart 4). The next highest rates were reported by those living in Atlantic Canada, ranging from 62% in Newfoundland and Labrador to 72% in Prince Edward Island.

There was no significant difference in reported child care use by population centre size. Parents living in rural areas and small population centres (including the province of Prince Edward Island) were as likely to report using child care as parents living in large urban population centres (62% vs. 65%, respectively).

Chart 4
Percentage of parents reporting use of child care, by province, 2017



* significantly different from Ontario ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Families, 2017.

Mothers who worked regular schedules were more likely to use child care

As low-fee child care is often linked to increased maternal employment, examining child care use by mothers' employment patterns may provide insight into the possible growth in maternal employment. For instance, with the introduction of the Quebec universal child care system, it was estimated that there were approximately 4% more mothers in the labour force compared to

the period before the reforms.¹⁰ This suggests that some mothers that are currently unemployed or on leave may switch to working at a paid job if affordable, quality child care became available.

Based on data from the 2017 GSS, 1 in 5 mothers of children aged 1 to 12 reported that did not work at a job or business last week or last year.¹¹ This was most often the case when the child was between the ages of 1 and 5. The majority of mothers (71%) reported working at

a paid job or business, with another 11% being on some type of leave (Table 3).

In this study, child care use was lowest among mothers who were unemployed (30%) or on leave (48%) compared to employed mothers (74%; Table 3). The lower use of child care by mothers on leave can be explained by the lower likelihood of mothers on leave with 1- to 3-year-olds to use child care (52%) as compared to employed mothers (84%).

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Not all employed mothers reported using child care. In 2017, 26% of employed mothers did not use child care, with the proportion being highest for older school-aged children – 10 to 12 years (39%; Table 3). For this age group, it is possible that child care was not needed.

Among employed mothers, those working regular schedules were more likely than those working irregular schedules to report using child care (76% versus 68%, respectively; Table 3). However, this difference was only statistically significant for mothers of school-aged children. This follows a similar pattern to differences in the use of child care services between mothers employed full-time versus part-time.

Overall, reported use of child care was consistently higher for mothers who were employed full-time (78%) than those who were employed part-time (65%) (Chart 5). Again, this difference was only statistically significant for mothers of school-aged children (6 to 12 years). For mothers of children aged 1 to 5 years old, there was no significant difference in the percent using child care between full-time and part-time working mothers.

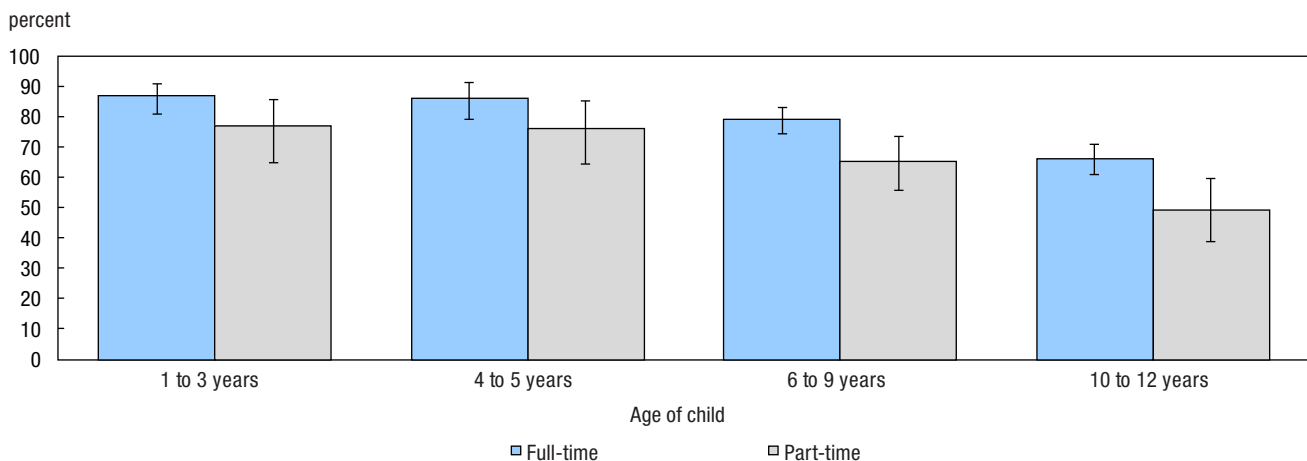
It is possible that part-time employment is a choice or a necessity to accommodate child care, particularly for mothers of school-aged children who may not require full-day child care. Other studies have examined parents'

decision-making process regarding the use of child care, and how parents' employment affects this process.¹² For example, parents who work nonstandard hours may be more likely to use non-formal types of child care arrangements that can provide greater accommodation for flexible work schedules.¹³

Use of child care varies by women's sector of employment

Across all five occupational categories, mothers of young children were more likely to use child care than mothers of school-aged children (Chart 6). A larger proportion of mothers working in Business, Finance and

Chart 5
Use of child care, by mother's employment type and age of child, 2017



Note: Due to the low use of child care for infants under the age of 1, data are not presented.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Families, 2017.

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Table 3
Use of child care, by mothers' employment characteristics, by age of child, 2017

	All parents	Child 1 to 3 years			Child 4 to 5 years			Child 6 to 9 years			Child 10 to 12 years			Child 0 to 12 years
		Using child care	95% CI		Using child care	95% CI		Using child care	95% CI		Using child care	95% CI		Using child care
			From	To		From	To		From	To		From	To	
percent														
Employment status of mothers														
Worked at a job or a business last week or last year (ref.)	70.5	83.5	78.5	87.5	82.7	76.7	87.4	75.9	71.7	79.6	61.5	56.7	66.1	74.2
Did not work at a job or a business last week or last year	18.6	38.7*	29.0	49.4	37.3*	27.4	48.5	25.0*	18.4	33.1	21.8*	13.7	32.9	30.2
On leave	10.9	51.7*	41.7	61.6	91.6	79.1	96.9	70.3	51.6	84.1	F	F	F	48.1
Type of employment[‡]														
Full-time (ref.)	77.7	86.7	80.9	90.9	86.1	78.9	91.1	79.0	74.2	83.1	66.0	60.8	70.8	77.7
Part-time	22.3	76.8	64.8	85.6	76.2	64.3	85.1	65.2*	55.9	73.5	49.2*	38.9	59.6	65.3
Usual work schedule[‡]														
Regular (ref.)	77.4	84.8	78.9	89.3	85.0	78.0	90.0	78.2	73.5	82.2	64.6	59.2	69.6	76.3
Irregular, rotating or on call	22.6	79.8	68.4	87.9	79.6	67.4	88.0	68.4*	59.1	76.5	50.3*	40.6	60.0	67.9
Term of employment[‡]														
Permanent (ref.)	87.5	86.8	81.5	90.7	88.2	81.8	92.6	82.1	77.6	85.8	65.1	59.6	70.3	79.2
Seasonal, temporary, term or casual	12.5	69.9	48.6	85.0	77.1	53.5	90.8	57.1*	43.6	69.6	55.7	39.7	70.6	61.2

F suppressed due to small sample size

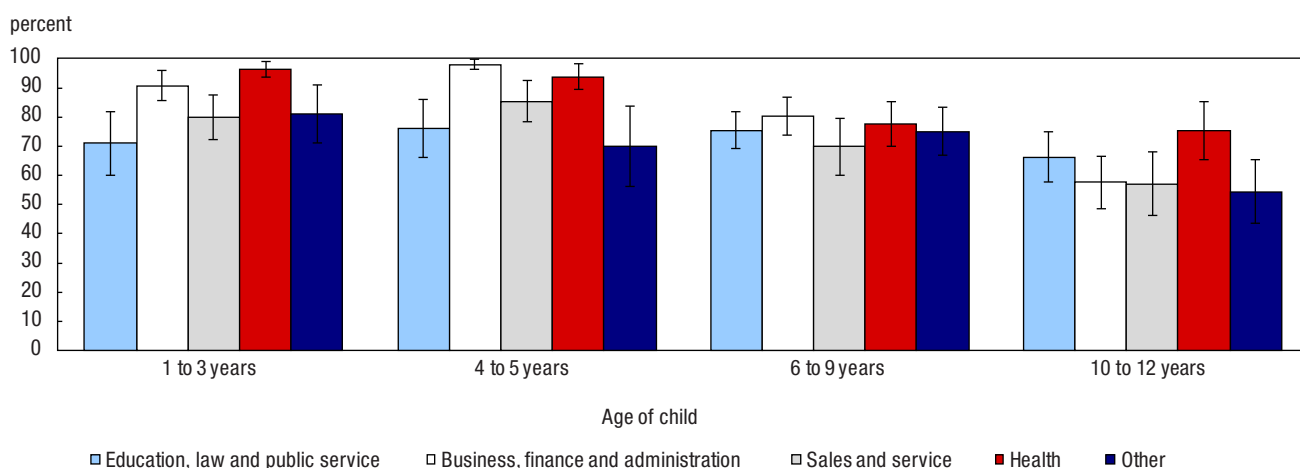
* significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from reference category (ref.)

‡ examined only among those who were employed

Note: Due to the low use of child care for infants under the age of 1, data are not presented.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Families, 2017.

Chart 6
Use of child care, by occupation of mother and age of child, 2017



Notes: Due to the low use of child care for infants under the age of 1, data are not presented. Occupational groupings are based on the National Occupational Classification, 2016.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey on Families, 2017.

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Administration, or in Health sectors reported using child care compared to mothers in other occupational categories. This is a unique finding from the present study, and should be corroborated in future work.

Conclusion

The majority (64%) of parents with children under the age of 12 years in the household reported using child care in 2017. Child care use varied by the age of the child, with the proportion of parents reporting using child care peaking for children age 4 and decreasing thereafter.

The present study indicates that the use of child care varied by several geographic, demographic, and socioeconomic factors, highlighting factors associated with parents' use of child care services. The present study also illustrated differences in child care use by maternal employment characteristics. Employed mothers were more likely to report using child care services for their children. A larger proportion of mothers who worked full-time and had regular schedules used child care compared to mothers who worked part-time and had irregular schedules.

Future research may further consider how additional factors related to the affordability, accessibility and need for care influence parents reported use of child care services.

Shary Zhang is an analyst with the Centre for Population Health Data at Statistics Canada. Rochelle Garner is a chief with the Health Analysis Division at Statistics Canada. Loanna Heidinger is an analyst with the Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics at Statistics Canada. Leanne Findlay is a chief with the Health Analysis Division at Statistics Canada.

Data sources, methods and definitions

Data source

The current study is based on Cycle 31 of the General Social Survey – Family (GSS2017), which was conducted between February 1 and November 30, 2017. The target population of the GSS2017 was non-institutionalized persons 15 years of age and older living in the 10 Canadian provinces. The overall response rate was 52.4%, with a final sample size of 20,602 respondents representing 30,302,287 Canadians. For more information on the GSS, see the General Social Survey 2017 Families (Cycle 31) User Guide.¹⁴

The analytic sample is comprised of respondents, hereafter referred to as parents, who were either birth parents or adoptive parents of at least one child age 12 or younger living in their household full-time or part-time. Each parent was asked to provide information regarding their children, up to a maximum of 20 children, starting with the eldest. For each birth or adopted child aged 12 or younger, parents completed the child care module which included questions on each child's care arrangement. For ease of analysis and due to low frequencies of more than four children in a household, responses for a maximum of four children were considered in the final analytic sample. This yielded a sample of 3,746 birth or adoptive parents reporting on their children's use of child care. The GSS2017 was collected at the individual level and for the present study, the parent is the unit of analysis.

Subsequent analyses were completed with a subsample of female parents, hereafter referred to as mothers. Since working mothers are more likely than working fathers to experience disruptions in employment following childbirth, the present study further examines the use of child care according to mothers' employment status. This analytic subsample included 3,053 mothers with children aged 12 or under living in the household.

Methods

Descriptive characteristics, including use of child care, were reported overall and based on the age of each reported child: 1 to 3 years old, 4 and 5 years old, 6 to 9 years old, and 10 to 12 years old. For parents with multiple children in the same age group, one child was randomly selected from within the age group for analysis.

Parents reported on the child care characteristics for each child. However, statistical comparisons across children's age groups were not conducted since estimates across age groups are not mutually exclusive if a parent had children in different age groups. Comparisons of overall child care use by mothers' employment status were also examined.

All analyses were conducted with SAS 9.3 and SUDAAN 11.0 using sample and bootstrap weights.

Strengths and Limitations

The GSS2017 and this study both possess several strengths and limitations. First, a strength of the GSS2017 is that it covers all provinces, which allows for a broader examination of the use of child care services across the Canadian provinces.

Having the parent as the unit of analysis is both a strength and a limitation of this study. Due to the survey weighting methodology, the results of this study pertain to parents and mothers rather than children themselves. Therefore, this study cannot report on the proportion of children that are in child care, only the proportion of parents that report using child care for their child(ren). However, in anchoring responses at the parent-level, there is an inherent understanding of an inter-dependence between multiple children in a family in terms of child care use. Since parents could be reporting child care use for multiple children in their family, different age groups

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of children could not be assumed to be independent and the randomly selected child within an age group might not be representative. Statistical comparisons across different age groups could not be conducted.

Another limitation is the timeframe when the GSS2017 was conducted. Data collection included the summer months during which school-aged children are on school break. Child care questions often referred to the previous month; however, responses could have been influenced by different child care schedules for (older) school-aged children in the summer months.

Lastly, although information about use of child care has been associated with short- and long-term impacts for children, a greater predictor of outcomes is the quality of that care.¹⁵ The GSS2017 did not assess this aspect of child care.

Definitions

Child care variables

Child care arrangement: The main measure of interest for this study was the use of child care. Parents were asked to report whether they had made child care arrangements in the past 12 months, either paid or unpaid, for each child aged 12 years and younger in their household because of work or any other reason. Since the use of child care for children under age 1 was low (15%), most of the analyses focused on children aged 1 to 12 years.

Additional details on child care arrangements were asked of parents for each child who used child care on a regular basis, including:

Type of child care: Parents were asked to report the main type of child care arrangement used at the time of the survey for each child and whether the person providing care was a relative. Responses were combined into five categories: home daycare; before or after school program; preschool centre, nursery school, daycare or centre de la petite enfance (Quebec only); care provided in the child's home or elsewhere by a relative; and care provided in the child's home or elsewhere by a non-relative.

Reasons for choosing main child care arrangement: Parents were asked to report the reason for choosing the main type of child care arrangement for each child in care. Reasons were categorized as: affordable cost; convenience (location close to work, home or school; hours of operation; my other children go/have gone there); trustworthy/safe (care by someone trustworthy; was recommended by someone; it is safe); child development (learning program; for child's socialization); and other (only option available; low child-adult ratio/more employees/one-on-one time; other).

Frequency of child care: Parents reported how many days in the past month they used the main child care arrangement for each child. Responses were: 5 or more days per week; 1 to 4 days per week; and less than weekly.

Cost of child care: Parents reported the average amount spent on child care arrangements, and the frequency of child care use. Cost was reported per child on a daily, weekly, biweekly, or monthly basis. For consistency and ease of analysis, the mean and median amount spent on child care was calculated per month using a conversion factor for parents who reported any cost for child care.

Reasons for not using child care: Parents who did not use child care for their children, or who used child care on an irregular basis, were asked to report the main reason. Reasons were grouped into: doesn't need/doesn't want; cost of child care is too high; parent at home (maternity, paternity, or parental leave; one of the parents wishes to stay at home with the child); unemployed or unpredictable schedule (unemployed; work or school schedules are unpredictable and variable); and other (shortage of places/waiting list; services not adapted to child's needs; other).

Other characteristics

Use of child care was examined by various demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Parents' marital status was grouped as partnered (married or living common-law) or lone (single, separated, divorced, or widowed). Based on self-report, parents' Indigenous identity was dichotomized as Indigenous or non-Indigenous. Based on country of birth and landed immigrant status, parents were classified as either immigrants, non-permanent residents, or Canadian born. Consistent with previous literature, household income was grouped into three income categories: less than \$40,000, \$40,000 to \$99,999, and \$100,000 or more.

Mother's employment status

Employment status: Mothers were employed if they worked at a job or business in the 12 months prior to interview and unemployed if they did not have a job in the 12 months prior to interview. Mothers who reported being on parental leave were categorized separately.

Type of employment: Mothers who worked 30 or more hours per week were considered employed full-time and those who worked less than 30 hours were considered employed part-time.

Work schedule: Mothers' usual work schedule was classified as regular (regular daytime schedule or shift; regular evening shift; or regular night shift) or irregular (rotating shift; split shift; irregular schedule; or on call).

Occupational category: Mothers' occupation was reported based on the National Occupational Classification 2016. Three quarters (75%) of employed mothers worked in one of four broad occupational categories: Education, Law and Public Service; Business, Finance and Administration; Sales and Service; or Health. The remaining six occupational categories (management; natural and applied sciences and related; art, culture, recreation and sport; trades, transport and equipment operators and related; natural resources, agriculture and related production; manufacturing and utilities) were grouped as "Other".

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Notes

1. See Budget (2021).
2. Daily, April 7, 2021. Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements, 2020.
3. Fortin (2017).
4. In this study, parents refer to respondents who were either birth parents or adoptive parents of at least one child aged 12 or younger living in their household full-time or part-time.
5. See Moyser (2017).
6. Overall, about half (48%) of all parents had one birth or adopted child, 40% had two children, and the remainder had three or more children aged 12 years and under living at home.
7. Yssaad and Fields (2018).
8. See MacDonald and Friendly (2019).
9. See MacDonald and Friendly (2016) and Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2020).
10. Fortin (2017).
11. These data may vary from the Labour Force Survey data, since the two surveys have differing survey methodologies.
12. See Meyers and Jordan (2006).
13. See Kimmel and Powell (2006).
14. See General Social Survey (Cycle 31), Microdata User Guide (2019).
15. See Melhuish et al. (2015).

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