

Child Care & Early Education

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RESEARCH-TO-POLICY
CONNECTIONS
No. 1

INFANT AND TODDLER CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENTS

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August 2005

The Research-to-Policy Connections series summarizes current research on key topics in child care and early education and discusses implications for policymakers. The first three briefs in this series focus on early care and education for children under age 3—infants and toddlers—in the United States:

- ▶ *Infant and Toddler Child Care Arrangements*
- ▶ *Infant and Toddler Child Care Quality*
- ▶ *Impact of Training and Education for Caregivers of Infants and Toddlers*

Overview

What care arrangements do American parents make for their infants and toddlers while they are at work, school, or otherwise unavailable to provide care themselves? Research findings that respond to this question come from two recent nationally representative surveys: the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort, and the National Survey of America's Families (NSAF), 2002. Additional research helps answer a second, related question: What factors influence the types of care arrangements made for this country's children under age 3?

Key Findings

The following facts are from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort, which collected information on over 10,000 children born in the United States in 2001.¹

What is the national picture of primary child care arrangements for infant and toddlers?

- ▶ Half of the children born in 2001 were in some kind of regular nonparental child care arrangement at 9 months of age.
- ▶ Of children born in 2001, 26 percent were in relative care (often with grandmothers) at 9 months, 15 percent in nonrelative care (either in their own or another family's home—i.e., family child care), and 9 percent in center-based care.

The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), overseen by the U.S. Child Care Bureau, serves a higher proportion of infants and toddlers in center care than the national average. Of infants served by CCDF, 49 percent are in center care, as are 55 percent of toddlers. Published CCDF data do not distinguish between relatives and nonrelatives caring for infants and toddlers in their own homes or in family child care homes. Some 42 percent of CCDF infants and 37 percent of toddlers are in family child care; nearly 10 percent of infants and 8 percent of toddlers are cared for in their homes.²

How many hours do infants and toddlers spend in different types of arrangements?

- ▶ Children in relative care at 9 months were more likely to be in care for 10 or fewer hours a week than children in nonrelative (in-home or family child care) or center care. Conversely, children in center care were more likely to be in care for 31 to 40 hours more a week than children in relative or nonrelative care.

How do child care arrangements differ by race/ethnicity?

- ▶ Black children born in 2001 were more likely to be in a nonparental child care arrangement at 9 months (63 percent) than white (49 percent), Hispanic (46 percent), or Asian (47 percent) children.
- ▶ Additionally, black children were more likely to be in center-based care at 9 months (14 percent) than white (9 percent), Hispanic (5 percent), or Asian (4 percent) children.

- ▶ White children were less likely to be cared for by a relative at 9 months (21 percent) than black (33 percent), Hispanic (30 percent), or Asian (33 percent) children.

How does use of nonparental care differ by income level?

- ▶ Children born in 2001 in families with incomes below the federal poverty level* were less likely to be in a nonparental child care arrangement at 9 months (43 percent) than higher-income families (52 percent).

Findings below are from the National Survey of America's Families, 2002, which collected information on over 12,000 children under age 5.³

How do income level and mothers' employment status affect use of care and primary care type?

- ▶ In 2002, children under age 3 in low-income families** with employed mothers were less likely to be in some kind of regular nonparental child care arrangement (62 percent) than higher-income children (68 percent).
- ▶ Infants and toddlers in low-income families with employed mothers were more likely than higher-income children with employed mothers to be in relative care (32 vs. 26 percent) and less likely to be in center-based (16 vs. 21 percent) or family child care (11 vs. 15 percent).

How many hours do infants and toddlers spend in nonparental care?

- ▶ In 2002, of children under age 3 with working mothers: 38 percent spent 35 hours or more in care; 17 percent spent 15 to 34 hours; 17 percent spent 1 to 14 hours; and 28 percent spent no hours in nonparental care.

Influences on Demand and Supply of Care Arrangements

Multiple factors affect the child care decisions parents' make for their infants and toddlers: (1) availability and cost of various types of care; (2) preferences for particular types of care; (3) quality of care; (4) parent characteristics, such as income, race/ethnicity, and education; and (5) child characteristics, such as age and temperament.⁴

Caregivers also make decisions about what care arrangements to offer to parents of infants and toddlers. Among factors weighed by regulated providers are the low number of children per caregiver required for infant and toddler care and the corresponding costs.⁵ Among factors influencing relatives—particularly grandparents—to offer care, are their desire to be active in the children's development and helpful to the children's parents.⁶

* In 2002, the federal poverty level was \$14,848 for a family of three.

** Low income is defined as income below twice the poverty line (200 percent).

Considerations for Policymakers

- ▶ It is important to know the full range of child care arrangements parents make for their infants and toddlers—particularly factoring in relative care, nationally the most frequently used form of care for babies.
- ▶ Parents use different types of care arrangements for different numbers of hours.
- ▶ In order to increase the supply of any type of child care arrangement, it is critical to understand the multiple factors underlying the current arrangements in communities.
- ▶ Lastly, to be effective, quality enhancement efforts should be tailored to each type of child care arrangement that parents use.

Resources

National Data Sets

National Survey of America's Families, 2002
www.childcareresearch.org/location/ccrca6456

Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey, Birth Cohort
www.childcareresearch.org/location/ccrca5115

National Household Education Survey, 2001
www.childcareresearch.org/location/ccrca3637

National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, 1997
www.childcareresearch.org/location/ccrca6457

State-Specific Research

For state-specific resources on the child care arrangements of infants and toddlers, please see the Browse by State function on the Research Connections web site:
www.childcareresearch.org

Endnotes

1. Flanagan, K., & West, J. (2004). *Children born in 2001: First results from the base year of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B)* (NCES 2005-036). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. <www.childcareresearch.org/location/ccrca4623>
2. U.S. Child Care Bureau. (2003). *Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF): Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <www.childcareresearch.org/location/ccrca3562>
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6. Anderson, S. G., Ramburg, D. M., & Rothbaum, B. (2003). *Illinois study of license-exempt child care: Interim report*. Springfield: Illinois Department of Human Services. <www.childcareresearch.org/location/ccrca2968>
- Porter, T., Rice, R., & Mabon, S. (2003). *Doting on kids: Understanding quality in kith and kin child care*. New York: Bank Street College of Education. <www.childcareresearch.org/location/ccrca3650>

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