

Chapter 3

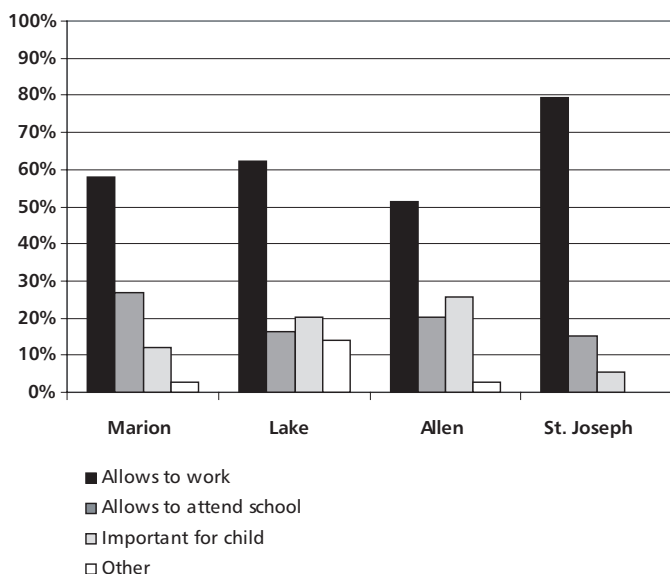
WHAT ARE THE CHILD CARE EXPERIENCES OF LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES?

The Community Child Care Research Project provides information about the child care experiences of low-income working families. Specifically, we asked parents to identify their reasons for using care, identify the types of care they used, report on their work and child care flexibility, and rate the child care quality of their current arrangement. These factors were examined within each of the four communities. The following information is based on the sample of 307 families described in Chapter 2. Descriptive statistics are summarized in Appendix D.

WHY ARE FAMILIES USING CHILD CARE?

Parents were presented a list of reasons for using child care (allows parent to work, allows parent to attend school, allows parent to take part in sports, cultural, political or leisure activities, and important for child's development) and were asked to select one main reason why their child was using child care. The dominant reasons selected were: allows parents to work (60%) and allows parent to attend school (19%). Figure 3.1 displays a comparison of the four community responses. In St. Joseph County, a greater percentage of families used child care to allow parents to work (74%) and lower percentage of families used child care because it was important for child's development

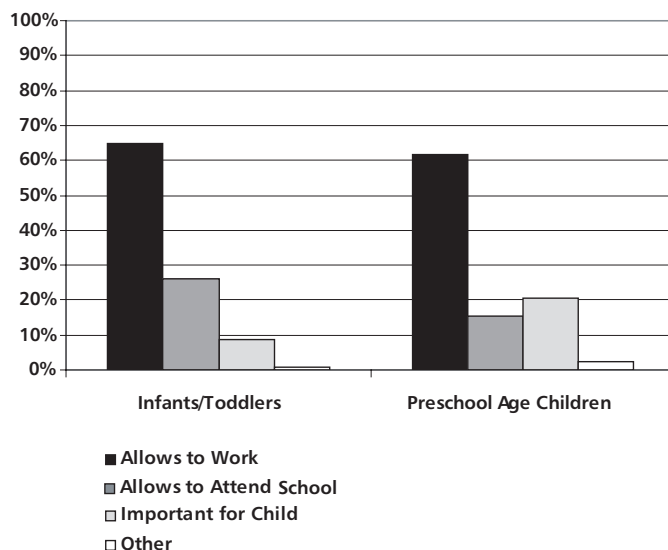
FIGURE 3.1 FAMILIES' MAIN REASON FOR USING CHILD CARE (N=295)



(5%) than the other three communities. A greater percentage of families in Allen and Lake Counties (25% and 20 %, respectively) reported their main reason for using child care was because it was important for child's development than other communities.

The pattern of responses changed slightly when age of child was considered. Allowing parents to work remained the main reason for child care (62% of parents of infants and toddlers compared to 59% of parents of preschool-age children). Differences existed in the percentage of parents who selected allowing parent to attend school and important for child's development as the main reason for using child care. While 21% of parents of preschool-age children (children 3 to 6 years of age) selected important for child's development as the main reason for using child care, only 8% of parents of infants and toddlers (children 6 to 35 months of age) did. This is not surprising as parents of preschool-age children are more likely to be thinking about their child entering school and may be concerned about how child care is promoting their child's skills. Twenty-five percent (25%) of parents of infants and toddlers selected allow parents to go to school while 15% of parents of preschool-age children did. Figure 3.2 displays these differences.

FIGURE 3.2 FAMILIES' MAIN REASON FOR USING CHILD CARE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS AND PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN (N=295)



TYPES OF CHILD CARE

Licensed Child Care Center

Non-residential group child care by paid providers, governed by Indiana child care center licensing requirements that include requirements for staff training, health, safety, nutrition, appropriate discipline, and child development curriculum.

Registered Child Care Ministry

License exempt center-based program, an extension of a church or ministry that is a tax-exempt religious organization. No regulations for staff, group sizes, ratios, or program apply to registered ministries. They have only to meet general sanitation and fire safety rules.

Head Start

A national comprehensive preschool program for low income children prenatal to 6 years and their families. Programs must follow the Head Start Performance Standards which meet or exceed the standards for licensed child care centers in Indiana.

Licensed Family Child Care

Home-based child care provider caring for six or more non-relative children. Licensing sets minimum standards for health, safety, and caregiver training that must be maintained. Licensed family child care homes are inspected by the state once per year.

Unlicensed Family Child Care

Family care providers that are not licensed, legally caring for fewer than six children non-relative children in Indiana. Licensing is not required if the home-based provider is not paid; cares for only relative children; cares for less than 6 children, not including own children; or serves migrant children.

Relative Care

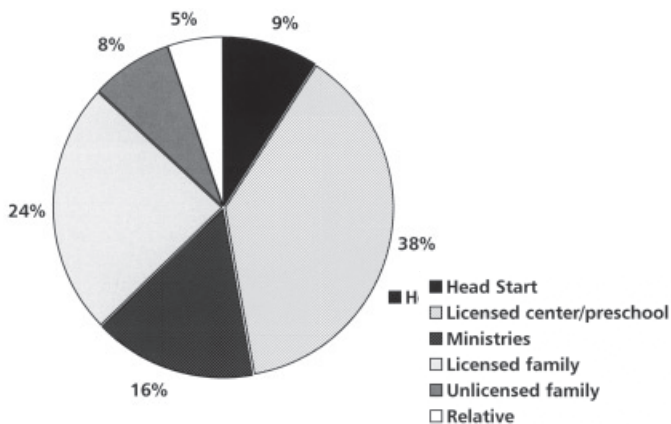
Relatives caring for children in the relative's home. Indiana does not regulate care provided by relatives.

(See Glossary page for additional definitions.)

WHAT TYPES OF CHILD CARE DO LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES USE?

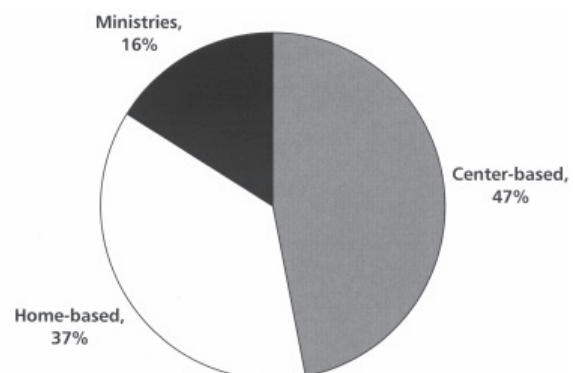
Families used a variety of child care: licensed center care/preschool, child care ministries (license-exempt centers operated by churches), relative care, Head Start, and licensed and unlicensed family child care. Figure 3.3 displays the proportion of families using each type of care. The most frequently used care for this sample of families was licensed center care/preschool (38%), followed by licensed family child care (24%) and child care ministry (16%).

FIGURE 3.3 TYPE OF CHILD CARE USED BY LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES (N=307)



A majority of the children (71%) were cared for in licensed child care settings (i.e., licensed centers/preschools, Head Start, and licensed family child care) while the remaining 29% were cared for in unlicensed child care settings (i.e., child care ministries, unlicensed family child care, and relative care). About 47% of the children attended licensed center-based child care settings, including community child care programs and Head Start programs. More than one-third of the children (37%) attended home-based child care settings such as relative care and licensed/unlicensed family day care. Another 16% attended child care ministry programs, which are exempt from Indiana government regulation. Figure 3.4 displays this distribution.

FIGURE 3.4 USE OF CENTER-BASED, HOME-BASED, AND MINISTRY CARE (N=307)

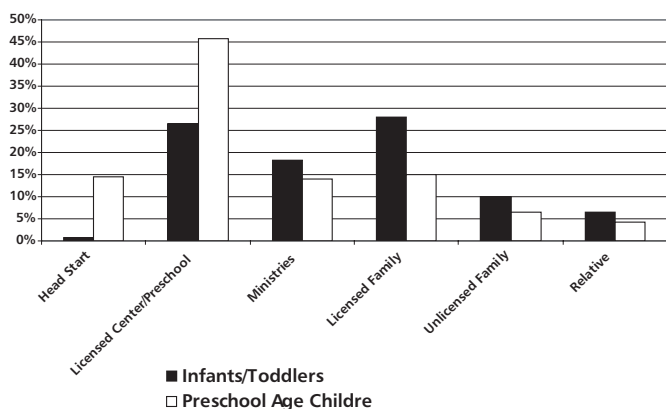


Twenty percent of these children started attending child care shortly after birth, and over half were in care by 3 months of age. Seventy-five percent were in care by 8 months of age and all children were in care by 48 months of age. On average children attended a different child care setting about every 15 months.

DO PARENTS OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS CHOOSE DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHILD CARE THAN PARENTS OF PRESCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN?

There was a greater percentage of preschool-age children receiving care in centers than infants and toddlers (74% compared to 46%) and a greater percentage of infants and toddlers were cared for in family child care than preschool-age children (55% compared to 26%). A greater percentage of preschool-age children were cared for in licensed settings (75% compared to 65%) than infants and toddlers. Figure 3.5 displays the type of child care used for infants and toddler and preschool-age children.

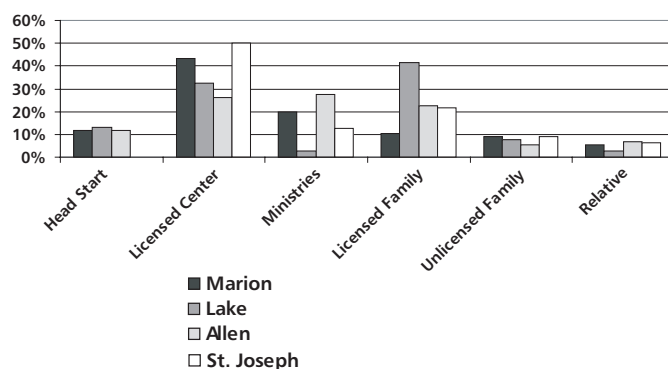
FIGURE 3.5 USE OF CARE FOR YOUNGER AND OLDER CHILDREN



DO TYPES OF CHILD CARE USED DIFFER FOR THE COMMUNITIES?

Statistical tests revealed there were differences in the distribution of child care types across the four community samples. Families in Allen County were evenly distributed in their use of licensed center care/preschool, licensed family child care, and child care ministry (22% to 27% each). Very few families in the Lake County sample (less than 3%) used child care ministries, while 42% used licensed family child care. Finally, over half of the families in St. Joseph and Marion counties (55%) selected licensed child care centers, including Head Start. Figure 3.6 shows the differences in child care placements among the four communities.

FIGURE 3.6 TYPE OF CHILD CARE USED IN THE FOUR COMMUNITIES



HOW DO LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES BALANCE CHILD CARE AND WORK?

As presented in Chapter 1, data from preliminary focus group interviews and parent surveys indicated that parents encountered problems balancing work and child care. An expressed need for extended and sick care, as well as lack of financial resources were among the problems mentioned in the focus groups and preliminary surveys. Parents mentioned reliance on friends and families for supplemental care and reliance on child care vouchers for financial support as key factors allowing them to balance their work and child care. Flexibility in both work and child care appeared to be key components of a successful child care and work arrangement. The issues of child care and work flexibility were examined more closely with the large sample.

■ *Parents mentioned reliance on friends and families for supplemental care and reliance on child care vouchers for financial support as key factors allowing them to balance their work and child care.*

WHAT WERE THE EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS OF LOW-INCOME WORKING PARENTS?

Although the employment criteria for our sample was that the head of the household must be “working” at least 20 hours per week, most parents worked more than 20 hours. Of families who identified a male head of household (n = 116), 90 percent were employed and most (86%) worked full time (35 or more hours per week). Most men (72%) reported a daytime work shift. Five percent reported working a second shift during the evening.

Eighty-five percent of female heads of household were employed and a majority (72%) worked full time. Most women (79%) reported a daytime work shift. Five percent reported working a second shift during the day, evening or night. Seventy-two percent of two parent families reported both parents were working, with a majority of families having both parents working full time.

HOW FLEXIBLE DO PARENTS PERCEIVE THEIR WORK IN RELATION TO CHILD CARE ISSUES?

Both male ($n = 89$) and female ($n = 236$) heads of household were asked about the assistance and support they receive from their employer on child care, work stress, flexibility in dealing with child care problems, and child sickness.

The following percentages of male heads of household agreed with the following statements:

- 17% My shift and work schedule cause extra stress for me and my child.
- 38% Where I work, it is difficult to deal with child care problems during work.
- 6% My employer has a program or service to help employees find child care.
- 2% My employer provides direct financial assistance for child care.
- 16% I can pay for child care with pre-tax dollars.
- 36% My employer allows me to stay home when my child is ill and I have no child care.

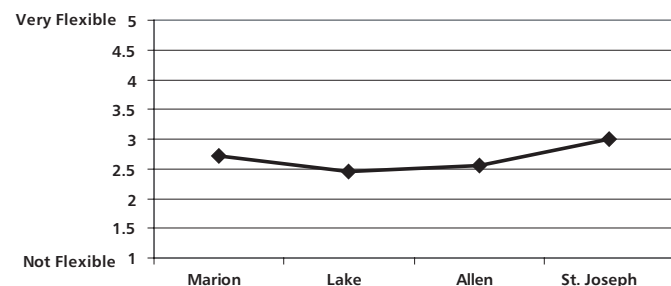
The following percentage of female heads of household agreed with the following statements:

- 19% My shift and work schedule cause extra stress for me and my child.
- 24% Where I work, it is difficult to deal with child care problems during work.
- 13% My employer has a program or service to help employees find child care.
- 8% My employer provides direct financial assistance for child care.
- 17% I can pay for child care with pre-tax dollars.
- 53% My employer allows me to stay home when my child is ill and I have no child care.

For both male and female heads of household, work offered moderate flexibility. While parents did not overwhelmingly report extra stress from their job or difficulty dealing with child care problems at work, few reported any direct child care assistance from their employer. The most striking gender difference in work flexibility was whether employers allowed parents to stay home when their child was ill and they had no child care. Females were significantly more likely to report their employer would allow them to stay home when their child was ill. It is unclear if this is due to differences in the types of jobs low-income men and women might hold, or if employers are more understanding when a mother rather than a father needs to miss work to care for a sick child. It should also be noted that there were fewer males than females included in these samples. There were data on 307 females, while there were data for only 124 males due to the high percentage of single-mother households in the sample.

Perceptions of work flexibility did not differ by age of child, but there were some differences across communities. In the area of male work flexibility, Lake County males reported the least amount of total flexibility, while St. Joseph County males reported the greatest. Figure 3.7 illustrates these differences. There were no differences among communities in female work flexibility.

FIGURE 3.7 MALE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD WORK FLEXIBILITY IN THE FOUR COMMUNITIES



HOW DO PARENTS PERCEIVE THE FLEXIBILITY OF THEIR CHILD CARE ARRANGEMENT?

Low-income families are more likely to stay employed once they find a job, to work more hours, lose less time at work, and experience less job stress if the flexibility of their child care arrangement is congruent with their employment needs. As we have already noted, low-income workers are more likely to need flexible child care due to the nature of low wage work (e.g., shift work, changing shifts). Parents were asked about their child care as a source of needed flexibility in managing work and family.

A majority agreed with the following statements:

- 60% My caregiver understands my job and what goes on for me at work.
- 75% My caregiver is willing to work with me about my work schedule.
- 60% I rely on my caregiver to be flexible about hours and/or days.

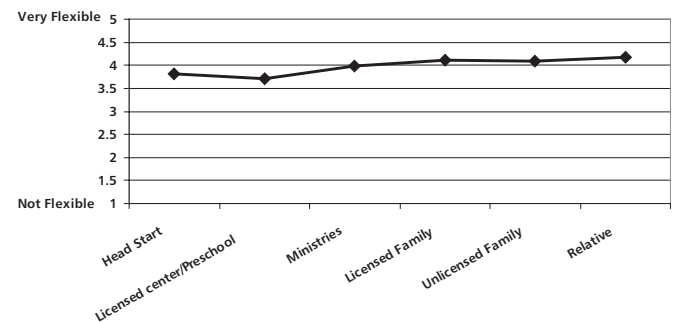
A majority disagreed with the following statements:

- 77% My child care setting makes it difficult for me to meet my work responsibilities because of rigid hours and/or no weekend care.
- 60% When my caregiver is ill, I have to make other arrangements for care.

For the most part, parents were positive about the flexibility they perceived in terms of their caregiver understanding their job, working with them and their employment schedule, offering flexible hours or days of care, and helping them meet work responsibilities. There was greater variability in how parents perceived the sick care flexibility their current caregiver provided. Forty-three percent reported that when their child is mildly ill, they are not allowed to bring him/her to child care. Also 28 percent did not have an arrangement at all if their child was mildly ill. This lack of flexibility in sick care results in a need for back-up care that parents must arrange with friends, family, or sick child care programs. Qualitative interviews with key informants and parent focus groups in each of the four communities supported a need for back-up care when a child is ill.

There were no differences in perceptions of child care flexibility based on the age of the child. However, there were some community differences on individual aspects of child care flexibility. Differences existed in parents' perceptions of caregiver understanding of their job and if they could rely on their caregiver to be flexible about hours and days. Although parents from all communities were generally positive about these aspects, Lake County parents agreed more strongly that their caregivers were understanding about their jobs, while St. Joseph parents agreed more strongly with caregiver's flexibility about hours and days. There were differences depending on the type of child care that families used. In general, licensed center care provided the least amount of flexibility, while relative care provided the most flexibility. Figure 3.8 presents these differences.

FIGURE 3.8. CHILD CARE FLEXIBILITY OF THE SIX CHILD CARE SETTINGS



HOW DOES THE CHILD CARE CONTEXT OF EACH COMMUNITY DIFFER FOR LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES?

As reported in the Chapter 1 analysis of existing community child care data, parent focus groups, and key informant interviews, there are some unique aspects to each community. The variation counties have less availability of licensed care for their children (22 and 23 licensed slots per 100 children). Marion and St. Joseph counties had a more adequate supply (35 and 30 licensed among the number of licensed child care slots (center and family care) available per 100 children suggests differences in the availability and selection of licensed care for children. Allen and Lake slots per 100, respectively). These community differences were not however reflected in our samples' perceptions about the availability of child care.

The median number of days parents spent looking for their current child care arrangement was 14 days, but there was a great deal of variability, ranging from 0 to 210 days! Most parents (90%) spent 90 days or less looking for their current child care arrangement. When asked how difficult it was to find satisfactory child care arrangements in their area, 18 percent reported it was very easy, 19 percent reported it was easy, 34 percent reported it was neither easy nor difficult, 18 percent reported it was difficult, and 10 percent reported it was very difficult. Days spent looking for care did not differ by community, nor by age of child. While perceived difficulty in finding satisfactory child care arrangements did not differ by community, it did differ by age of child. Parents of infants and toddlers perceived it was easier to find satisfactory child care arrangements in their area than did parents of preschool age children. This may be because parents were more willing to consider more informal child care arrangements (e.g., relative care, unlicensed family child care) for infants and toddlers than for preschool-age children.

Parents were asked about availability of child care. Overall, parents had a neutral to positive view of the availability of child care arrangements in their area.

- Forty-five percent of parents felt there were good choices for child care where they live, while 28 percent did not and 27 percent were neutral.
- Fifty-eight percent of parents felt they had more than one choice when they made their current child care arrangement, while 33 percent did not and 9 percent were neutral.
- Fifty-eight percent of parents did not have difficulty finding the child care they wanted, while 29 percent did and 13 percent were neutral.
- Seventy-five percent of parents felt they did not have to take whatever child care they could get, while 14 percent did and 11 percent were neutral.
- When asked to reply yes or no to: “If I could, I would find a new child care arrangement for my child,” only 7 percent of parents replied yes, while 83 percent replied no and 9 percent were neutral.
- Eighty-eight percent of parents felt their current child care arrangements met their child’s need quite well, while only 6 percent did not, and 7 percent were neutral.

There were no differences in parent’s responses based on the child’s age. There was one community difference. Allen County parents did not feel they had as much difficulty finding the child care they wanted as parents from the other communities.

WHAT ARE THE PARENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD CARE QUALITY?

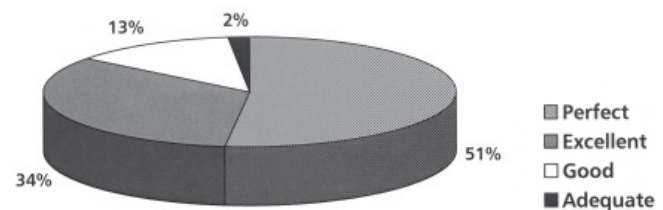
In general parents perceived their child care arrangements to be flexible and felt they had access to satisfactory child care arrangements that were good for their families. But how do parents view the quality of the child care arrangements they are using?

In general parents perceived their child care arrangements to be flexible and felt they had access to satisfactory child care arrangements that were good for their families.

Parents were asked to rate six aspects of child care quality. These included: caregiver warmth toward child, caregiver interest in child, child’s safety, cleanliness of setting, number and variety of activities child engages in everyday, and the

amount and desirability of the equipment available to the children. A majority (70% to 80%) of parents rated these aspects as excellent or perfect. Very few parents rated any of these aspects as fair or poor (1% to 2%). A total score of perception of quality was created by combining the averages of each aspect of quality rated. Figure 3.9 displays parents’ overall rating of child care quality. Responses to these six aspects were combined to form an overall score of quality, ranging from poor to perfect. These perceptions did not differ by community, age of child, or type of child care.

FIGURE 3.9 PARENTS’ PERCEPTION OF CHILD CARE QUALITY (N=304).



CONCLUSIONS

The most common types of primary child care used by this sample of 307 low-income working families were licensed center care/preschool (38%) and licensed family child care (24%). Other types used were child care ministry (16%), Head Start (9%), unlicensed family child care (8%), and relative care (5%). Twenty percent of the children started in child care soon after birth, and more than 75% were enrolled in some type of child care by age 8 months. Infants and toddlers were slightly more likely to be in family child care, and preschool-age children were slightly more likely to be in center care. Licensed family child care was used at a high rate in Lake County (42%), while center-based care was often used in Marion and St. Joseph counties (55%). Families in Allen County used a more balanced distribution of types of child care.

More than one-third of these low-income parents reported missing at least some work or school because of child care problems. A small proportion of mothers reported receiving child care assistance from their employers: finding child care (13%), financial assistance (8%), pre-tax accounts (17%), or allowing employees to take sick time to care for an ill child (53%). Fathers reported lower levels of child care support from employers. Fathers in St. Joseph County reported the highest levels of employer flexibility, and fathers in Lake County reported the lowest levels.