

Child care use during and after the COVID-19 pandemic ^[1]

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Source: Statistics Canada

Format: Fact sheet

Publication Date: 29 Jul 2020

AVAILABILITY

Access online [EN] ^[2]

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EXCERPTS

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered the way of life for Canadian families, parents, and children. Physical distancing and the impact on employment has meant that parents have altered their usual routines and supports, and many children and families have been isolated in their homes for months. Child care is one service that has been dramatically altered – prior to COVID-19, many parents were using child care services for work, study, or other reasons. For example, approximately 60% of children aged 0 to 5 were participating in a formal or informal child care arrangement in 2019 (Findlay & Kohen, 2019).

The purpose of this report is to provide a snapshot of the child care experiences of parents and families with children less than 15 years of age both during and after child care closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crowdsourcing data collection was completed by just over 32,000 people. Readers should note that crowdsourcing data are not collected under a design using probability-based sampling. As a result, the findings reflect only the responses of those who participated in the questionnaire and thus cannot be generalized to the entire Canadian population. In fact, a greater proportion of crowdsourcing participants were women, born in Canada, and had a Bachelor's degree or above compared to the Canadian population.

Approximately one in ten parents of children younger than 15 years of age reported that their child or children were attending child care during the COVID-19 pandemic

According to the crowdsourcing results, 9% of participants said that their child or children were attending child care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Child care use varied across the country, with 30% of participants in Northwest Territories using child care and only 5% in Quebec and Ontario. Each province and territory regulates its own child care sector, with some regions almost entirely shut down and others open either for essential workers or the population at large (see Friendly, Forer, Vickerson, & Mohamed, 2020).

Child care use varied slightly by the work status of family members living in the household. Participants were asked if anyone in their household was working outside the home and if anyone was working at home (not mutually exclusive). When at least one person was working outside the home, 14% of participants responded that they were using child care. When at least one person was working at home, 8% of participants were using child care.

Among participants who reported using child care, approximately one third (35%) were using the same child care arrangement and paying the same fees as prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. One in ten were using the same arrangement with different fees (including no fees; 9%), about half were using a different arrangement with different fees (46%), and 11% were using different arrangements with the same fees. Of the participants who were not using child care, 6% were still paying fees.

Child care use varied by the age of children in the household. Table 1 demonstrates the use of child care for families with children in four age groupings: children were less than 6 and not in school (pre-school aged children), children were ages 4-11 and in school, children were ages 12 to 14, and children were in multiple age groups. Among participants with only pre-school aged children, 14% were using child care during the pandemic, whereas among participants with young school-aged children (aged 4 to 11 and in typically in school), 6% were using child care. Almost half of participants with pre-school aged children who were using care were still using the same arrangement with the same fees (42%), whereas in the older age groups, it was more common to be using a different arrangement with different fees.

Almost a quarter of participants said that their children will not return to child care once services reopen, but about one third of children will return

About one quarter of participants said that their children would not return to child care upon re-opening. Of those participants, almost half (49%) said that they would not attend because they were concerned about the health of their child or other members of their household, 32% would no longer need child care services (many of whom may be getting too old to need child care), 13% would have family or friends

take care of their children, and 6% said that they could no longer afford child care services. However, about one in three participants said that once formal child care services re-opened, their children would resume attending – 88% of these participants said that they required child care in order to work and 12% required child care for other reasons.

Participants who had at least one child in their home with a disability were less likely to report a return to child care once services re-opened (23% compared to 37% of participants who did not have a child with a disability in the home). Participants with children with disabilities were also more likely to report that they had not used child care services prior to COVID-19 compared with those without disabilities (49% vs. 34%). Further investigation of child care use as well as the impact of COVID-19 for children with disabilities and their families is warranted.

Methodology

The study is based on data from the *Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Parenting during the Pandemic: Data Collection Series*. This crowdsourcing online questionnaire was designed to collect information about family concerns and activities during COVID-19 from parents of children aged 0 to 14 living in Canada. From June 9 to June 22, approximately 32,000 participants completed the voluntary online questionnaire. Readers should note that crowdsourcing data are not collected under a sample design using probability-based sampling. As a result, the findings cannot be applied to the overall Canadian population. However, a benchmarking factor based on demographic projections of the number of families with children aged exclusively 0 to 5 or 6 to 14 years or a mixture of both age groups by province as of January 2020 was used for every participant to compensate for the over- or under-representation of the participants.

Related link:

Region: Canada ^[6]

Tags: family ^[7]

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