

60 hours a week in child care [AU] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Nearly 500 Queensland children are spending 60 hours or more in childcare centres each week, raising concerns about their welfare.

The figure - more than double any other state or territory - is being blamed on financial hardship and poor work-life balance.

Childcare experts warn long hours could be harmful to young children, their parents and even society, especially if high-quality care isn't provided.

A Federal Government census of childcare services found 757 children were attending long day care services for at least 60 hours a week in 2006 - 485 of those in Queensland.

A further 9426 children were in care for between 50 and 59 hours a week - Queensland recording the highest number with 2565 children.

Queensland also had more children spending 60 hours or longer in family day care.

Childcare Queensland president Gwynn Bridge said the situation was a tragedy and the numbers were likely to increase under the tightening economy.

But she denied children were being adversely affected.

"This is where our training kicks in to deal with all issues," Ms Bridge said. "Unfortunately, it is a sign of the times that parents use that amount of child care to get by every week."

University of Queensland child and family psychologist Professor Matt Sanders said economic pressures meant some parents had no choice. "On the other hand, sometimes the pressure parents place on themselves to earn a living and to have a kind of reasonable lifestyle can be at the expense of children if it leads to less time with them," he said.

...

"Having said that, things are getting more and more expensive and there is mortgage pressure and all those kinds of things. At the end of the day society is going to pay the price if this is not fixed."

The census, in May 2006, showed most children were in care less than 30 hours a week.

And while those who spent 60 hours or more a week accounted for less than 1 per cent of all children in care, the figures were considered significant enough to be included in the census for the first time.

- reprinted from The Courier Mail

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