

How the cost and scarcity of child care for school-aged kids is hurting women's careers ^[1]

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Source: The Globe and Mail

Format: Article

Publication Date: 11 Mar 2025

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

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New parents in Canada often struggle to find child care for their babies. But the school-aged care situation is just as fraught, or more so. After-care spots are difficult to secure, and before-care spaces are rarer still. It can be more expensive because federal funding – for the so-called \$10-a-day program – often subsidizes infant and toddler spots only. One parent reports they pay \$18 a day for their kids under four, and that jumps to \$35 for kindergarten after-care. Quality can be an issue, too.

“School-aged care has not been getting the attention that preschool child care has,” says Morna Ballantyne, executive director of advocacy group Child Care Now. “This definitely has an impact on labour force participation of women.”

A neglected problem

According to 2023 statistics from the non-profit Childcare Resource and Research Unit, there were 830,000 regulated before- and after-school care spaces for children aged 4-12 in Canada. With few spaces in regulated programs taught by early childhood educators, families can scramble.

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More is not enough

Policies and funding to increase the number of regulated, school-aged child-care spots would make a difference for working women. That's happening in places such as Manitoba, which earmarked funds in 2023 for more than 2,600 spaces for children under seven located in schools.

However, Ms. Ballantyne notes that not every province and territory has introduced full-day kindergarten for all children. “It shouldn't be mandatory, but it should be a right for children at age four and five to attend full-day kindergarten programs in the public education system,” she says.

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