

Who cares? The child care choices of working mothers ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Complete brief in html ^[3]

The "typical" American family with young children is one in which the mom is at work and the children are in child care. For most mothers, this means added expenses as well as the daily hassles of transporting children to their child care locations. Most mothers use some type of "familial" care (parental care or relative care) as the primary source of care for their children. These arrangements are almost as reliable as formal daycare and are less expensive to use. However, there are indications that this kind of care, in particular relative care, is done out of necessity rather than choice because it is most often used by low-income mothers and by single mothers who live with other family members.

The movement to formal care occurs as mothers' hours and commitment to staying employed increases, and as income increases. As women become more entrenched in the labor market, they often move from informal to center-based care. Some of this is because their incomes rise, but some of it is because formal settings are more reliable in the long-run. The use of formal child care is associated with increased employment durations for mothers, as is receiving assistance in paying for child care. Therefore it is likely that there will be a continuing shift from informal and familial care settings to formal care in the future.

Little is being done in Washington at present to help mothers find and pay for quality child care. The federal tax cuts currently being discussed provide little, if any, assistance for low-income families. The proposed child tax credit is not refundable and therefore would do little to help the vast majority of working families. Most of the programs the federal government has established are not funded at sufficient levels and this problem has been further exacerbated by the states' fiscal crisis, which has led to cutbacks in child care assistance in many states. As a result, working mothers are likely to continue to face serious obstacles to obtaining high quality, reliable, and affordable child care.

Region: United States ^[4]

Tags: affordability ^[5]

availability ^[6]

mother's labour force participation ^[7]

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