

Fewer children of low-income families in childcare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Almost 70 per cent of children cared for by non-related childminders are from higher income backgrounds, a new study shows.

The findings, which were published yesterday, also showed there was “strong relationship” between a parent’s level of education and the use of regular childcare.

The latest research is part of the national longitudinal study of children, Growing Up in Ireland, which has followed the progress of 20,000 children since 2007. The Government-funded report is led by the Economic and Social Research Institute and Trinity College Dublin.

The figures, based on a survey of 9,000 children and their families, showed the top two tiers of the five income levels used childminders and centre-based services, such as creches, the most.

Households with the lowest incomes had the highest number of parents as full- time carers at 30 per cent.

Dr Helen Russell of the ESRI, one of the authors, said the numbers showed parents with a low income or a low social class background were more likely to look after the child themselves.

“They’re less likely to be employed, so they don’t need childcare,” she said. “The group that used centre-based care and non-relative care are coming from more advantaged backgrounds. What did surprise me a bit was the people using non-relative care, childminders, were quite an advantaged group.

“I would have thought they would have more centre-based care, although that’s a high number too.”

The findings also showed 66 per cent of mothers with a degree-level education or higher used childcare, compared to 30 per cent who had not completed the Leaving Certificate.

“In the more advantaged groups, mothers are more likely to be employed, women with degrees, and they use a much higher portion of childcare,” Dr Russell said.

Just over one in five said they could not have afforded to send their child to preschool without the free year. Almost all of the children in the group took part in the free preschool year after it was introduced in 2010.

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