

Preferences of first-time expectant mothers for care of their child: 'I wouldn't leave them somewhere that made me feel insecure'^[1]

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Introduction

Australia, like other developed economies, has witnessed a continual increase in maternal employment over the past two decades--from 40 per cent in 1983 to 53 per cent in 2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007a). The Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that 44 per cent of mothers engage in paid work within the first three years of their child's birth (2007a). Thirty per cent of infants aged one year or younger are in care; and of those, 77 per cent are in care that is considered 'informal'--that is, care provided by a relative, friend or known other (ABS, 2008). The engagement of women in the paid workforce contributes to national economic development and is recognised in government policy incentives such as cash subsidies and tax relief for childcare fees--incentives which are targeted towards mothers, to encourage them to engage in paid work. Yet these incentives are not currently matched by a focus on early childhood education and care provision. Even though a recent review of paid maternity leave (2) was undertaken by the Productivity Commission (2008), Australia has no statutory provision for paid parental leave. Early childhood education and care services for the very young are in high demand, but are often unaffordable. In addition, there is a low availability of family-friendly employment (Organisation for Economic Cooperative Development, 2006).

Accessing high-quality formal childcare in Australia can be difficult for women attempting to return to paid work (Bourke, 2006). The care available is often unaffordable, provides unsuitable hours and is in a location unsuitable for families (Bourke, 2006). Frequently, children have multiple care settings and parents report a high level of satisfaction with these multiple care arrangements (Bowes et al., 2003). Also, the quality of care has been reported as being an emotional barrier to women's engagement in the workforce in Australia. For example, Harris (2008) reports that women feel emotionally torn by the decision to support their family financially, which may come at the cost of placing a child in a non-parental care setting that they deem as unacceptable. Against a background of increasing public and private demand for women's participation in the workforce, and the related need for non-maternal care, this study asks: What is important for women regarding their decisions to engage in paid work and choose care for their child?

Region: Australia and New Zealand^[3]

Tags: mother's labour force participation^[4]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/16/01/preferences-first-time-expectant-mothers-care-their-child-i>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/16/01/preferences-first-time-expectant-mothers-care-their-child-i>^[2]

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