

Provision and use of preschool childcare in Britain, research study summary for National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)

Antonia Simon, Charlie Owen, and Katie Hollingworth (UCL Institute of Education), with Claire Schofield, Director of Membership, Policy and Communications at NDNA



Introduction

Quality provision has been shown to be closely associated with staff qualifications: key to achieving 'good quality', therefore, is an upskilling of the childcare workforce. Consequently, improving the qualifications profile of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce has been a recurrent government priority. In 2012 Cathy Nutbrown in her review of the workforce called for at least 50 per cent of childcare workers to be qualified to at least NVQ level 3 by 2013.

This paper summarises the 'Provision and use of preschool childcare in Britain' study by UCL Institute of Education. The National Day Nurseries Association was a collaborator, along with the Family and Childcare Trust, in this study and here we share the study's aims, methods and key findings.

Aims

The overall aim of the study was to inform understanding of the future shape of childcare provision and usage in Britain. The three main objectives were to:

- Examine the **formal childcare workforce**, including their demographic characteristics, their qualifications and their work patterns;
- Examine **childcare usage**, including combinations of formal and informal care, and how the use of care is related to the demographic characteristics of families;
- Examine who provides **informal childcare** for preschool children, their demographic characteristics and the extent to which they have other caring responsibilities.

Background

As a collaborator, National Day Nurseries Association's role was to help raise awareness and share findings with children's nurseries and the childcare workforce, as well as wider non-academic audiences, including government and other childcare organisations.

Method

The study did not collect any new data, but instead conducted analyses of large-scale national quantitative data, including the Labour Force Survey, the Family Resources Survey, the Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey, and the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents. The focus of the study and findings discussed below was on provision in Britain.

Findings

1 Childcare provision

- **Differing definitions of the workforce in different datasets** - The classification of job roles in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is not a good fit with the nature of childcare and early education provision. It is widely accepted that ECEC is and should be an integrated offer, and this is set out by the legislative and statutory framework of the Childcare Act 2006 and Early Years Foundation Stage. Patterns of provision in childcare and early education services, particularly in the private and voluntary sector reflect this integrated nature. However, the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) System used in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) (which is used to code people's main and second jobs) does not match provision, for example, nursery workers in educational settings are currently excluded from the 'Childcare' workforce. Additionally, managers working in childcare are also currently excluded (there is no specific category in the SOC for childcare manager). In comparison, the Department for Education's Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey (CEYPS) divides nursery workers into three levels of seniority with an income differential. The way the workforce can be classified using the LFS, which currently excludes those workers in educational settings and childcare managers, means levels of pay and qualifications reported in the LFS may not be representative of whole of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).
- **Workforce size** - Data, backed up by Ofsted registration statistics, show a decline in the childminder workforce in recent years. Significantly more people describe themselves as working as childminders in the LFS than are registered with Ofsted as childminders.
- **Qualifications** - The proportion of staff qualified to NVQ level 3 or above has increased steadily since 2008.
- **Pay** - Again, different surveys show different results on levels of pay, however, overall data shows the sector as low paid compared to other occupations and with low levels of wage inflation during the recent economic downturn.

2 Childcare usage

- **High rates of use of childcare** – group childcare in nurseries, playgroups and preschools is the most popular form of formal childcare.
- **Importance of informal childcare** – around a third of all childcare arrangements, the most commonly used childcare is informal by grandparents.
- **Childcare choices are related to employment** – mothers employed full time are more likely to use day nurseries, whilst mothers who are unemployed are more likely to use ‘education or other’ childcare i.e. free early education hours
- **Childcare choices are related to the mother’s level of education** – mothers educated to degree level are more likely to use formal childcare, whilst over a third of mothers whose highest level of education is to GCSE do not use formal childcare.

3 Informal childcare

- The project identified a dearth of data providing information from the perspective of providers of informal childcare for pre-school children. This is an important gap in current knowledge about childcare for this age group of children and hinders understandings of the future shape of childcare provision and usage in Britain that can be obtained from national data sources.
- More data and research are needed that captures the characteristics of those providing informal childcare for preschool children, including their work patterns and the extent to which these carers are providing work to others (such as elderly parents).

Discussion

In March 2015 findings of the study were presented to the NDNA National Policy Committee – a voluntary committee of nursery sector leaders and expert advisers including academics, nursery business advisers and former senior civil servants.

Key points raised in that discussion were:

- **Standard Occupation Categories poor fit for the childcare workforce** – the categories used in the Labour Force Survey do not fit with the present early years workforce which has seen considerable professionalization in recent years. The committee was keen to see the Office for National Statistics review categorisation better to reflect the current workforce. These concerns have subsequently been raised by the research team with ONS who have promised to consider them carefully in their next review of the SOC due in 2016.
- **Unregistered childminding** – It was noted that informal arrangements between friends and neighbours involving reward had always been a feature of childcare provision and members reported anecdotal evidence of this.
- **Salary trends** – members noted that funding for free entitlement hours had decreased in real terms during the period covered and this had limited the capacity of private and voluntary sector providers to offer pay increases.
- **Costs of provision** - concerns were raised about the use of LFS data for modelling childcare delivery costs and for informing funding rates for early years providers given the considerable gaps in capturing the real levels of salary in the sector. LFS data makes costs look much lower than may be the case if managers working in the childcare sector are included.

- **Future surveys** - The committee felt the Department for Education should be urged to continue to invest in the Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey this is a rich source of sector specific data to support and inform good early years policymaking.

Further information

For further information about the study go to: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/childcareinbritain>. At this site, you can download the study's recent policy briefing paper with key results.

Acknowledgements

The 'Provision and Use of Preschool Childcare in Britain' study was funded by the Economic Social Research Council under its 'Secondary Data Analysis Initiative' phase I, grant number ES/K003690/1. The study was conducted between 2012 and 2015.