Outside School Hours Care:

Social gradients and patterns of use

NATSEM
at the University of Canberra

UnitingCare
Children, Young People and Families

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Children, Young People and Families

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families (UnitingCare CYPF) is a service group of UnitingCare NSW.ACT. Our concerns for social justice and the needs of children, young people and families who are disadvantaged, inform the way we serve and represent people and communities. The Service Group is comprised of UnitingCare Burnside, UnitingCare Unifam Counselling and Mediation, UnitingCare Disability, UnitingCare Children's Services and the Institute of Family Practice, a registered training organisation. The Social Justice Unit drives UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families' commitment to social justice for vulnerable children, young people and families. It achieves this by building evidence through social research, policy review and analysis, systemic advocacy and influencing decision makers to bring about change in social policy settings.

Together these organisations form one of the largest providers of services to support children, young people and families in NSW.

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CONTENTS

Authors Note 4

Acknowledgements 4

Foreword 5

Key Findings 6

Introduction 7

Data and definitions 8

Findings 9

- Use of child care for school-age children in Australia 9
- Access to child care for school-age children in Australia 11
- Child care transitions for school-age children in Australia 15
- Problems with Child Care 18

Conclusion 21

Technical notes 22

References 23

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FOREWORD

UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families (UnitingCare CYPF) works together with children, young people and families to transform lives. Our long history in working with children and young people across NSW highlights the importance of educational and life opportunities to making a positive difference in the lives of our most vulnerable children.

The research literature provides substantial evidence for the benefits to children of participation in quality after-school programs (Bottrell and Russell, 2010). It is critical that opportunities for positive gains to health and wellbeing, improved safety and strengthened protective factors, and greater engagement in learning are better shared with vulnerable children. A significant public policy question in Australia is whether the benefits of after-school programs are reaching children in relatively disadvantaged communities?

As a large provider of early childhood education and care services in NSW (including Outside School Hours Care) and a significant provider of support services to children in the 'middle years' and their families, we know that the right supports at critical life stages can assist children's development and help to break the cycle of disadvantage.

Given the limited Australian research on formal Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services, UnitingCare CYPF commissioned the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) to explore social gradients in access to OSHC. A sophisticated understanding of patterns of use is necessary to inform discussion of initiatives to support access to high quality after school programs across key transition points in children's lives.

The findings are stark and the social gradient is pronounced. The research shows that children living in low-income working families and relatively disadvantaged communities have very limited participation in OSHC.

In working to address these gaps it is important to consolidate and extend the platforms from which high quality after school programs can be delivered to children in jobless families and families in low paid work.

We also know there is scope for OSHC services, and all after school programs, to better respond to the developmental needs of children in the 'missing' middle years (9-14 year olds). The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY, 2011) points out that the "enormity and intensity of changes" occurring in early adolescence "heighten the developmental vulnerability of young adolescents and the developmental risks to which they may be exposed".

I commend NATSEM on their original and important contribution to our knowledge base on Outside School Hours Care and commend this report to you. We hope you will join us in this much-needed conversation and a campaign that recognises the central role of services such as OSHC in making a positive difference in the lives of vulnerable children and young people.

Claerwen Little

Acting Director, UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families

KEY FINDINGS

- Almost 30 per cent of school-age children use some type of child care when their parents are working.
- Just over 10 per cent of school-age children use formal Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) when their parents are at work.
- There is a clear social gradient for child care usage, with those children from more affluent areas much more likely to be using child care than those children who are not - 40 per cent compared with 19 per cent.
- Children who live in the more affluent areas are more likely to access formal OSHC than those who do not – 17 per cent compared with 3 per cent.
- Children living in low income families are much less likely to be using formal OSHC than those in high income families – only 1 per cent in the bottom quintile, compared with over a fifth in the top income quintile.
- Around a quarter of school-age children in Sydney are using some type of care, compared with 40 per cent of children in Brisbane and 30 per cent in Melbourne.
- Children in single parent families are more likely to access formal OSHC than children in couple families.
- Evidence of possible transition points of child care exist, with usage reducing from ages 6 to 9, increasing at age 10 and dropping off at age 12.
- Many households with school age children are experiencing difficulties with accessing child care.
- Almost a third of households with children aged 5-8 and 9-12 have experienced difficulties in finding care for a sick child.
- Difficulties with the cost of care is more prevalent for those households with children aged 5-8 years (29 per cent of households), compared to 23 per cent of households with children aged 9-12 years.

INTRODUCTION

The use of child care, both informal and formal arrangements, has increased substantially over the past few decades, concurrent to maternal labour force participation. While Long Day Care (LDC) places increased by 39 per cent between 2004 and 2009; Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) places also increased substantially - 25 per cent in the same period (Productivity Commission 2011). Further, the number of children attending OSHC is predicted to rise by 40 per cent over the next 20 years – faster than growth in LDC (Productivity Commission 2011).

The 'middle years' of childhood is often overlooked in favour of early childhood, however these years are emerging as an important focus of policy within Australia and globally, including being recently flagged by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2011 report (UNICEF 2011) as years of childhood that should not be forgotten.

Outside school hours care is generally used by children aged between 5 and 12 years, and includes portions of two important developmental stages – early childhood (5-8 years) and the middle years (9-14 years). These developmental stages will often require a differentiated approach to the provision of care.

With an increasing proportion of school-age children attending formal and informal care settings and the value of these arrangements in terms of facilitating parental (and particularly mothers') labour force participation; as well as the potential for these care arrangements to influence child and family wellbeing, it is important that we gain an understanding of care patterns and transitions for school-age children in Australia.

DATA AND DEFINITIONS

This research report analyses care arrangements for children aged 5-12 years who are attending school, using the child care data available from the HILDA (Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia) wave 9 survey. More information about HILDA can be found in the technical notes at the end of this document. The 2009 data is analysed at a child level, allowing patterns of 'usual'[1] child care use and transition points of usage for children aged 5 to 12 years to be unpacked.

HILDA asks households about childcare 'while you (and your partner) are undertaking paid work', it also asks questions about childcare 'you use when you (or your partner) are not working'. The analysis in this report focuses on care arrangements when parents are working during the school term.

Throughout this report care provided to school age children has been divided into three main care types. The first care type is termed 'Any care' and includes all formal and informal care for school-age children, incorporating all care types, including formal OSHC, family day care, care by a brother/sister, grandparent relative, friend, nanny and self-care. Analysis of this care type allows knowledge of the prevalence and incidence of child care use.

'Any care' has then been separated into two categories – 'formal OSHC' and 'other care[2]'. These definitions have been used to distinguish formal OSHC form other care types and where possible this type of care arrangement has been analysed[3]. Formal OSHC is care provided by formal outside school hours care services.

Other care includes care provided by a brother or sister, grandparent, other relative, friend or neighbour, self-care, paid sitter or nanny, family day care, non-resident parent, boarding school, other care and care when a child coming to a parents workplace.

Child care arrangements have been examined by different characteristics of children, including their age, family situation and level of relative socio-economic disadvantage. Most of the analysis is conducted for care use when the primary caregivers (parents) are employed, however some analysis includes all care and care when primary caregivers are not at work.

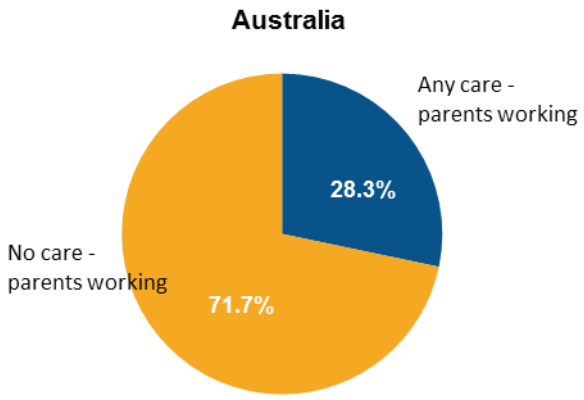
1. The HILDA survey asks questions about child care used in a usual week.
2. Other child care includes family day care. There are very small sample sizes for those children aged 5-12 years at school attending family day care.
3. Analysis of formal OSHC has been limited for some variable breakdowns, due to small sample sizes.

FINDINGS

USE OF CHILD CARE FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN AUSTRALIA

The proportion of school-age children using any care in Australia while their parents were working was almost 30 per cent in 2009 (Figure 1). The majority of Australian school-age children do not use any care arrangements when their parents are working, which suggests that work arrangements are such that non-parental care is not needed for these children. This corresponds with labour force patterns of women in Australia, where the majority of women (particularly mothers of young children) work on a part-time basis.

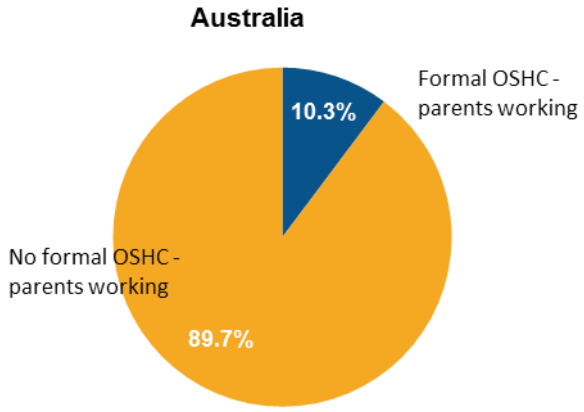
Figure 1 School-age children in any care when parent/s working, 2009



Note: Any care includes both formal and informal care for school-age children.
Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

Formal OSHC is used by just over 10 per cent of school-age children in Australia when their parents are working (Figure 2). These care arrangements include regulated care programs held in formal service facilities such as school premises, and are likely to attract child care benefit (CCB). Formal OSHC providers are required to be accredited through the National Childcare Accreditation Council. Children attending family day care have been included in the 'other care' group, even though family day care is a regulated care arrangement, as the key foci of this report are formal before and after school care programs.

Figure 2 School age children in formal OSHC when parent/s working, 2009



Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

Comparing the three most populous states in Australia – NSW, Victoria and Queensland (Table 1); similar care use for school-age children exist. NSW has slightly lower proportions of children using any care when their parents are engaged in paid work, when compared with Victoria and Queensland. NSW also has lower participation in formal OSHC – 8.5 per cent of children aged 5-12 attend formal OSHC services, compared with 9.5 per cent of Victorian children and 10.9 per cent of Queensland school children.

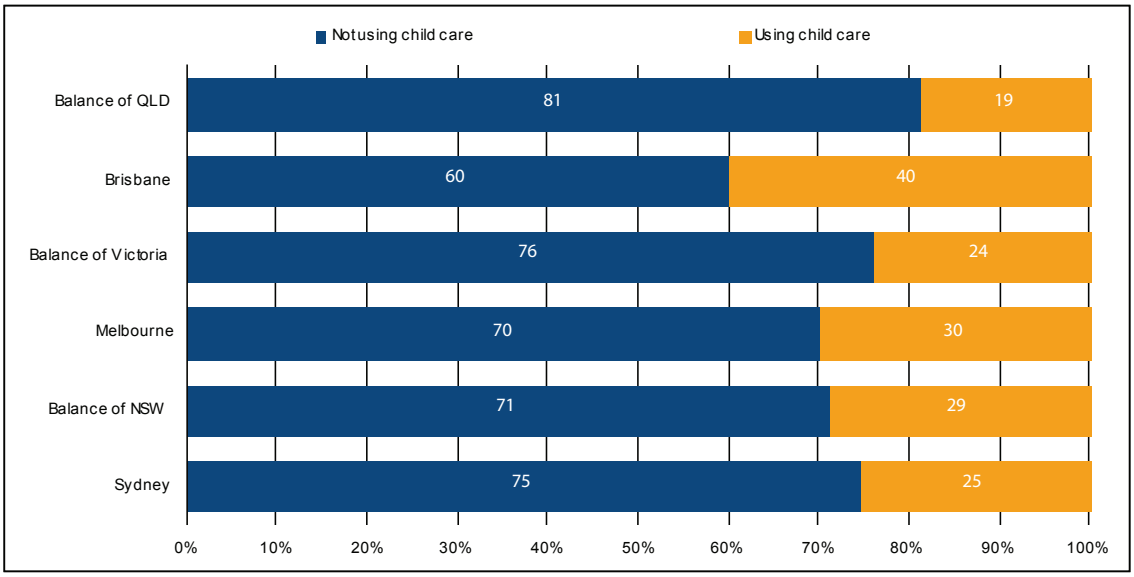
Table 1 School-age children using care by care type and State, 2009

Care Type	NSW	VIC	QLD	Australia
	%			
Any care - parents working	26.8	27.8	27.4	28.3
Formal OSHC - parents working	8.5	9.5	10.9	10.3
Other care - parents working	21.1	21.2	20.9	21.5

Note: Due to small sample sizes, information about provided care where parents are not working have not been included. See technical notes for definition of other care.
Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

Different patterns emerge when breaking down care use of school-age children by capital city and balance of state for NSW, Queensland and Victoria (Figure 3). Children living in Brisbane have the highest care usage when their parents are working, with 40 per cent using some type of informal or formal child care. Children in Melbourne have the second highest care usage, followed closely by the balance of NSW. Interestingly, only a quarter of Sydney school-age children are using any type of child care when their parents are working. These different spatial patterns may reflect varying underlying characteristics across states, capital cities and regional areas including costs of living, which may affect the affordability of child care, pattern of female labour participation, and available child care places.

Figure 3 School-age children using any care when parent/s are working, by capital city and balance of state, 2009



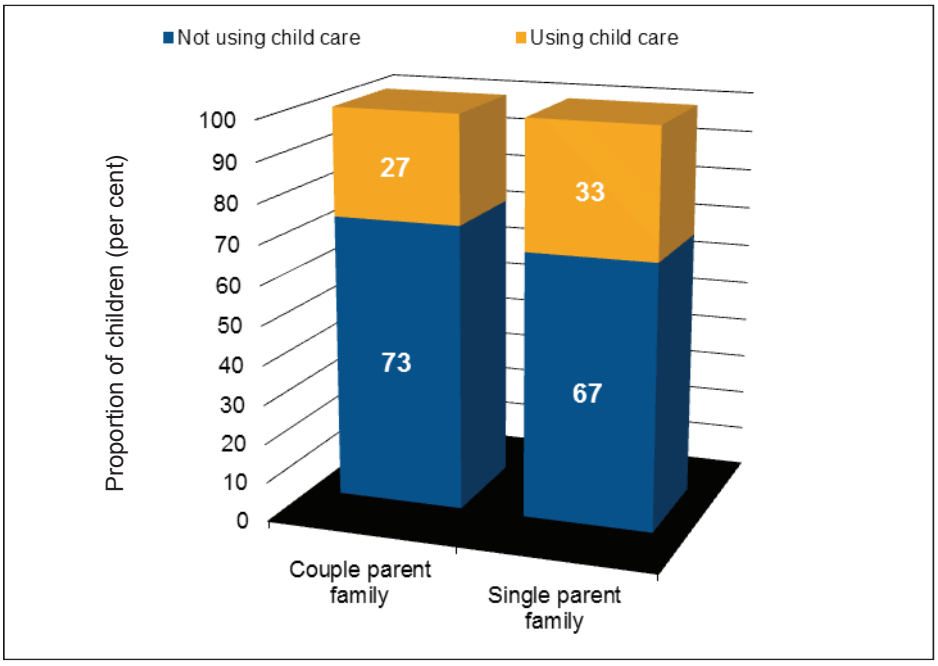
Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

ACCESS TO CHILD CARE FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN AUSTRALIA

Access to services (including child care), is not always equitable, even in developed nations such as Australia. Barriers to care can include availability issues, such as finding care within a geographic area; and cost issues which may act as a disincentive to accessing care services. The Australian Government has invested a great deal of resources into the child care sector over the past two decades, increasing funding for child care services and places and increasing, refining and introducing welfare transfers such as the Child Care Benefit (2001) and Child Care Rebate (2004). The Child Care Benefit in particular is targeted towards low income and single parent families (recipients of Family Tax Benefit B), especially if care is used for paid work or study. Other initiatives include the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care fee assistance scheme, which provides extra child care support to eligible parents.

When looking at children who do use any type of care, those who are living in single parent families are more likely to access child care than those living in couple families – 33 compared with 27 per cent (Figure 4). This pattern is intuitive, as single parent families are less likely to have an extra adult that can help with child care.

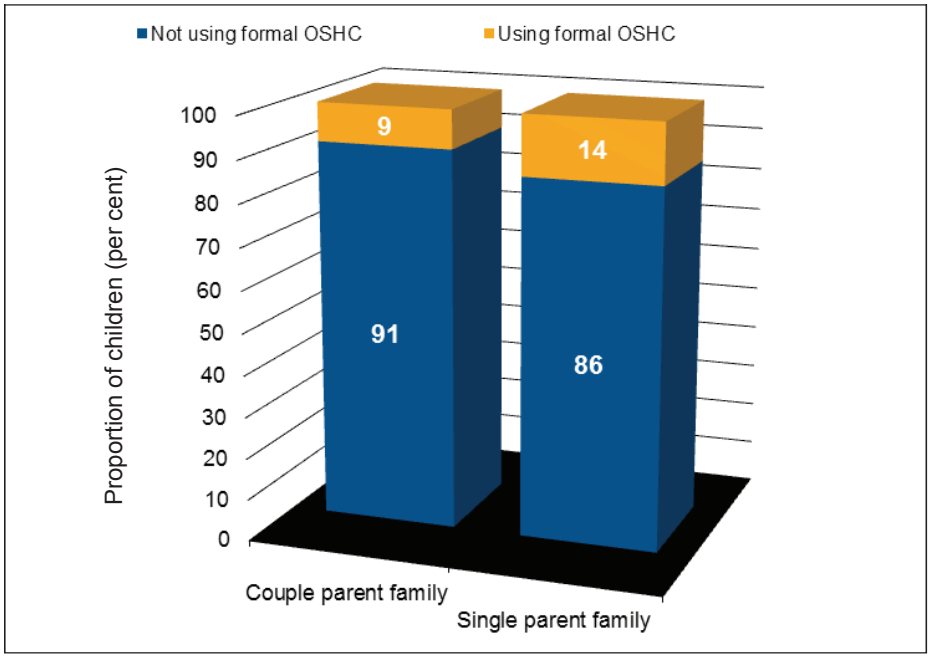
Figure 4 School-age children in any care by family type, parent/s working, 2009



Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

Children in single parent families are also more likely to be using formal OSHC care, compared with those in couple families. In 2009, 14 per cent of school-age children with the parent working were attending a formal OSHC service, compared to only 9 per cent of children in couple families (Figure 5).

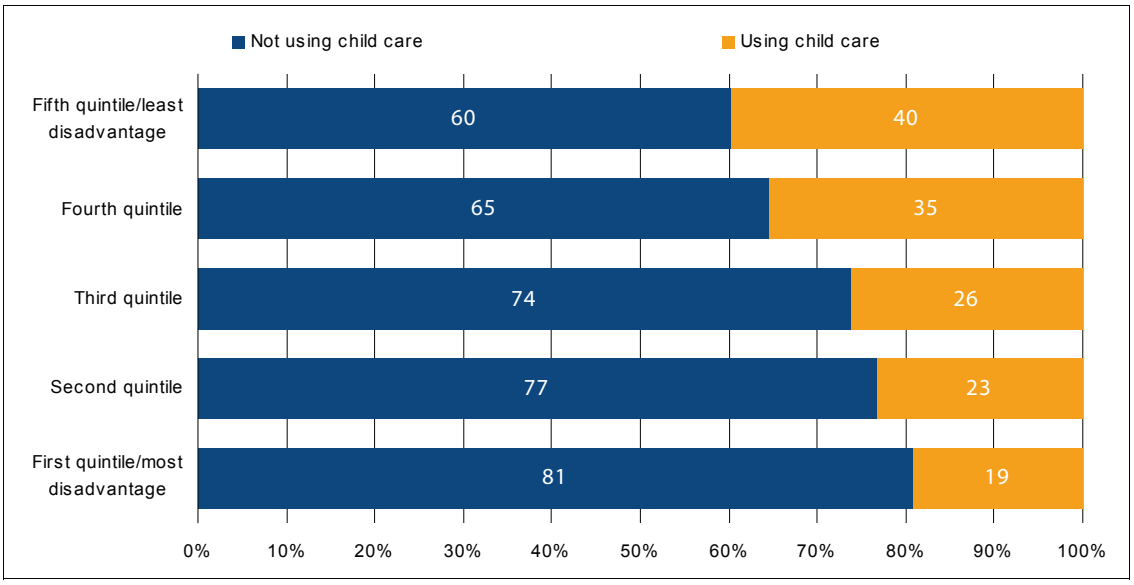
Figure 5 School-age children in formal OSHC by family type, parent/s working, 2009



Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

A clear social gradient that extends from one end of the socio-economic spectrum to the other in terms of use of any child care when parents are working is evident from Figure 6. School-age children with a parent or parents working and living in the least disadvantaged areas are more likely to be accessing child care than those children living in the most disadvantaged areas – 40 per cent compared with 19 per cent. This pattern continues when analysing formal OSHC (Figure 7), with those children in the more affluent areas, more likely to be accessing these services than those who do not.

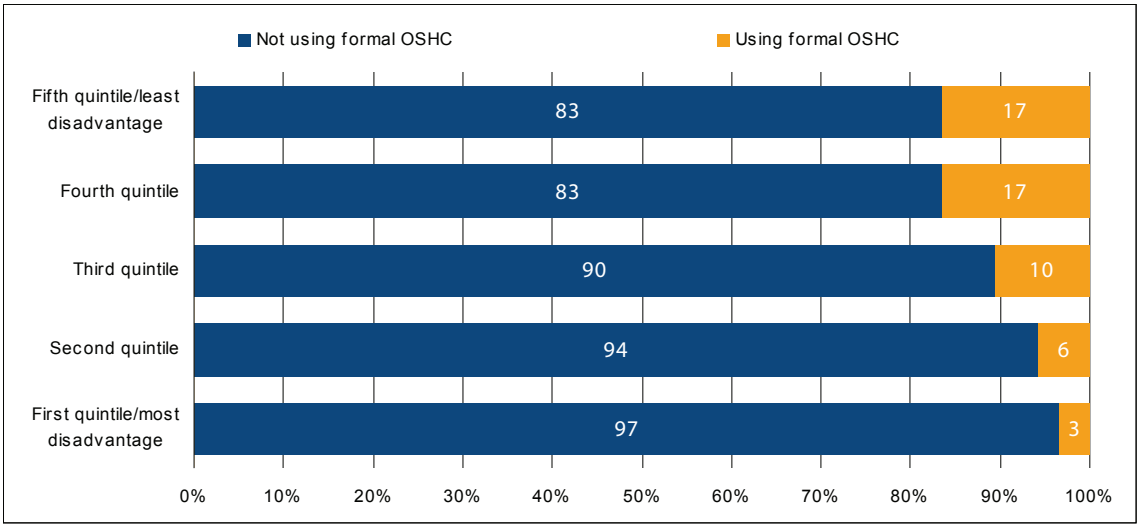
Figure 6 School-age children in any care by SEIFA index of disadvantage, parent/s working, 2009



Note: Sample sizes for school children using care in the most disadvantaged areas are small and should be used with caution. The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) were derived by the ABS from the characteristics of the residential area of respondents in the Census. See technical notes for further details.

Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

Figure 7 School-age children in formal OSHC care by SEIFA index of disadvantage, parent/s working, 2009

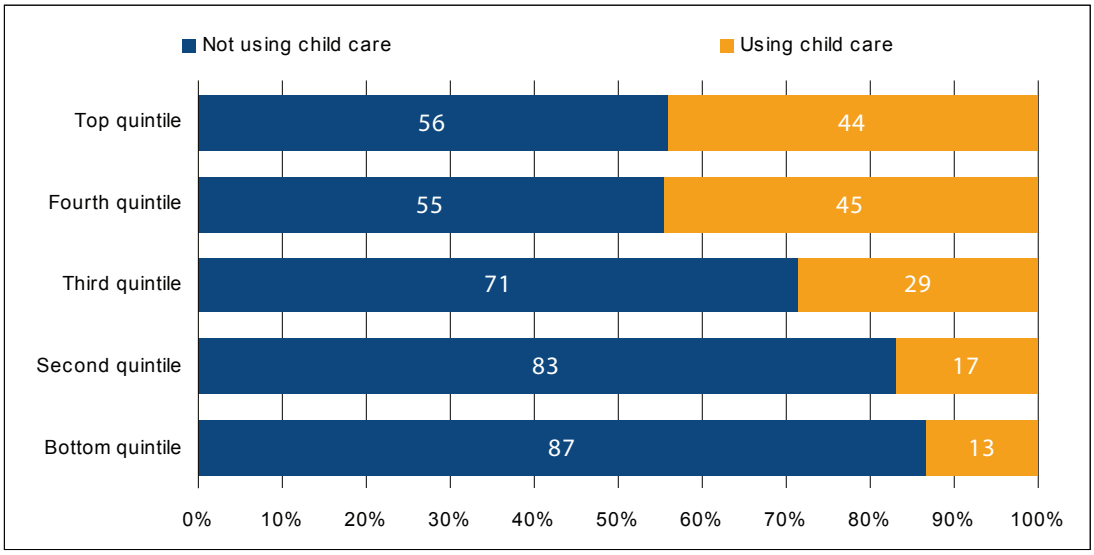


Note: Sample sizes for school children using care in the most disadvantaged areas are small and should be used with caution. The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) were derived by the ABS from the characteristics of the residential area of respondents in the Census. See technical notes for further details.

Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

A similar pattern exists when examining family disposable income, with school-age children living in households with the highest incomes (around $80,000 per year) much more likely to be using any child care when compared with those children living in households with the lowest incomes - around $21,000 per year (Figure 8).

Figure 8 School-age children using any care by income quintile, parent/s working, 2009

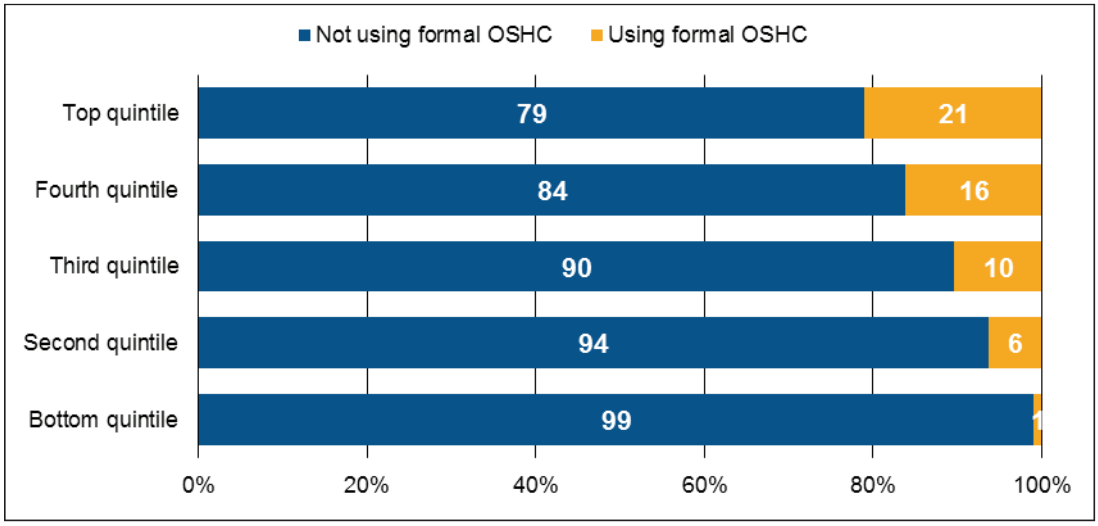


Note: Income is disposable equivalised income. See technical notes for details of equivalisation process. Sample sizes for school children using care in the bottom income quintile are small and should be used with caution.

Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

These patterns are also evident when analysing formal OSHC use (Figure 9). Only very small proportions of children living in households that fell into the bottom and second lowest income quintile used formal OSHC services. This compares with over a fifth of school-age children living in the most affluent families.

Figure 9 School-age children using formal OSHC care by income quintile, parent/s working, 2009



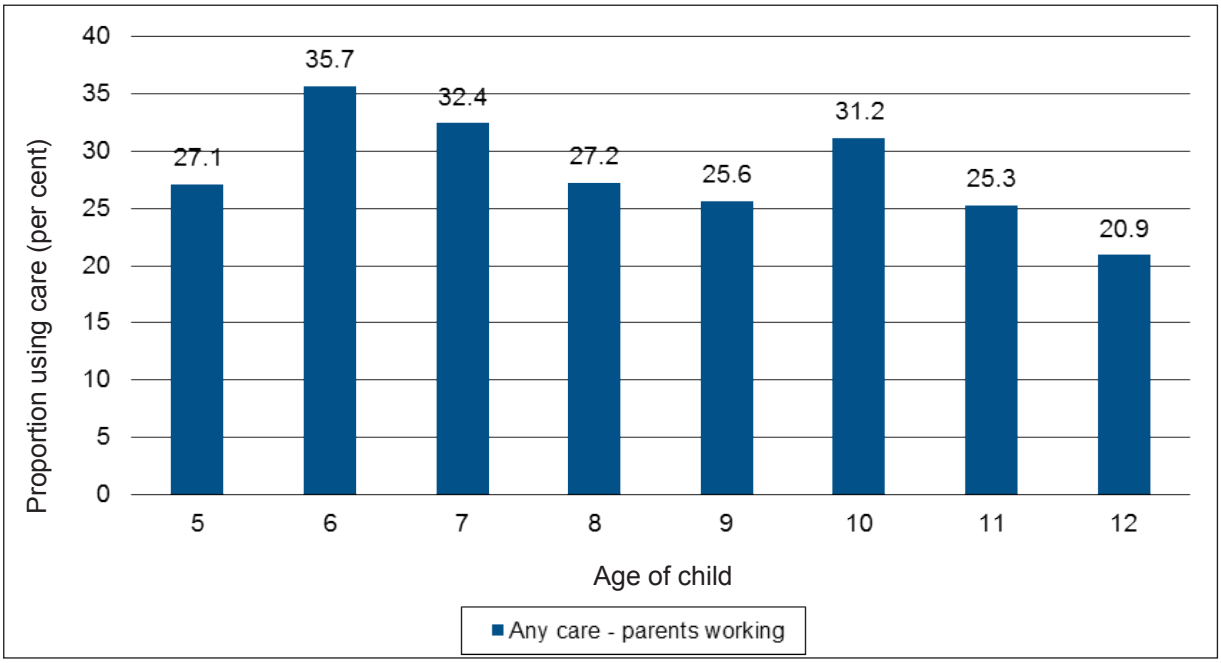
Note: Income is disposable equivalised income. See technical notes for details of equivalisation process. Sample sizes for school children using care in the bottom income quintile are small and should be used with caution.

Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

CHILD CARE TRANSITIONS FOR SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN IN AUSTRALIA

This section examines child care transitions for primary school-age children. The analysis undertaken attempts to gain further understanding about the age at which children tend to be engaged in more or less child care and whether key transitions points exist.

Figure 10 Proportion of children using any care by age of child, parent/s working, 2009

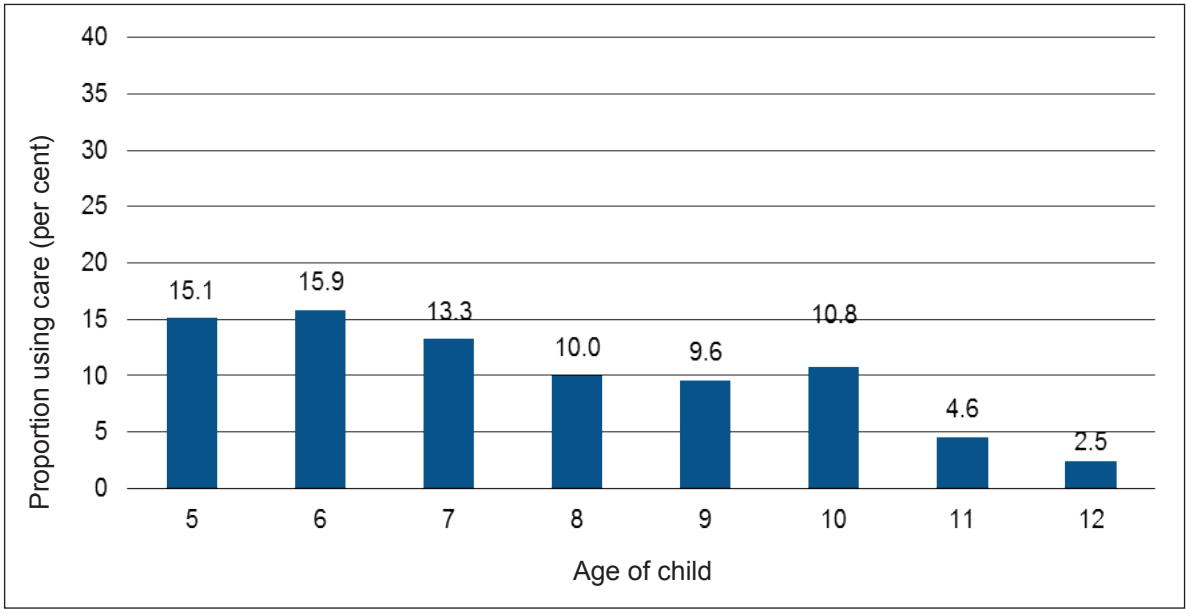


Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

Figure 10 shows the proportion of children using any child care for children at individual ages from 5 to 12 years when their parents are working. Child care use increases markedly between ages 5 and 6, which possibly captures the influx of children into school at these ages and the increased likelihood and rate of parents (particularly mothers) participating in the paid work force. From ages six to nine, the proportion of children using any child care decreases steadily, from 35.7 per cent of six year olds, to just over a quarter of nine year olds. This is possibly an adjustment period, as families begin to establish work-life rhythms, combining parental care schedules which may limit the need for external child care arrangements. The reduction may also be due to other children being born into the family and parents reducing their labour force participation and need for child care.

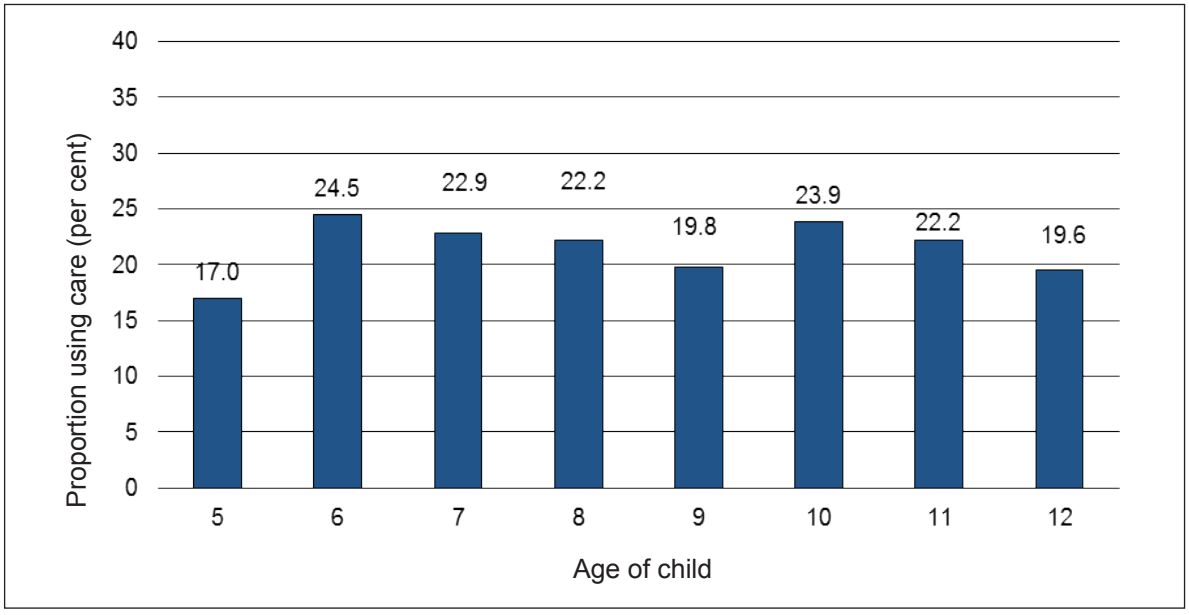
The increase in child care use at age ten with almost a third of children using some type of formal OSHC or informal child care is noteworthy. These patterns correspond with those seen for children using both formal OSHC (Figure 11), and those children using other types of care which includes self-care (Figure 12). A possible explanation of the increase in child care use for children at this age is that it is a demand driven response, with parents increasing their working hours as their children become more independent, possibly impacting upon how comfortable and assured parents may feel leaving their child in care while they go to work.

Figure 11 Proportion of children using formal OSHC care by age of child, parent/s working, 2009



Note: Formal OSHC sample sizes are small and data should be used with caution.
Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

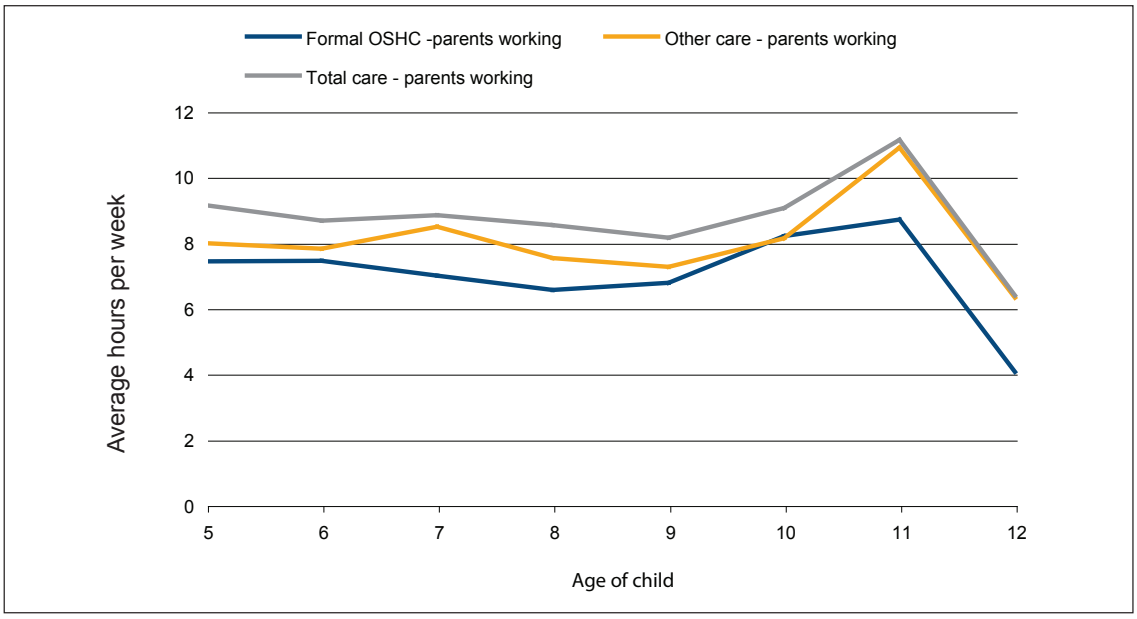
Figure 12 Proportion of children using other care by age of child, parent/s working, 2009



Note: Other care includes care by a brother/sister, grandparent, other relative, friend, self-care and family day care etc. See technical notes for a full definition of other types of care.
Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

Figure 13 shows the average weekly hours of care for children of different ages using different types of care when their parents are working. Similar patterns emerge from the hours data, when compared to the overall usage data above, with average weekly hours of child care increasing at age ten and eleven. These patterns exist for both formal OSHC and other types of care. Other types of care, which include care by a relative and self-care; attract the highest average hours of use per week regardless of the age of the child, symbolic of the preference for care by a relative or friend that is perhaps less costly and possibly more convenient than care available in a formal service setting. Average hours of care per week for formal OSHC and other care types is highest at age 11 – averaging around 8.7 hours for those in formal OSHC and 10.9 hours for those in other care types. Lowest average hours of care are shown at ages 8 and 9, which is where we also see a reduction in overall use.

Figure 13 Average hours of care per week by care type, parent/s working, 2009



Note: Formal OSHC sample sizes are small and data should be used with caution. Due to small sample sizes, children who are using formal OSHC care where parents are not working have not been included. Other care includes care by a brother/sister, grandparent, other relative, friend, self-care and family day care etc. See technical notes for a full definition of other types of care.

Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

PROBLEMS WITH CHILD CARE

The HILDA survey questions all households with children aged under 15 years old that had used or thought about using child care to undertake paid work, about various problems and difficulties with child care in the last 12 months. There are 10 problems and difficulties covered by this set of questions. These include:

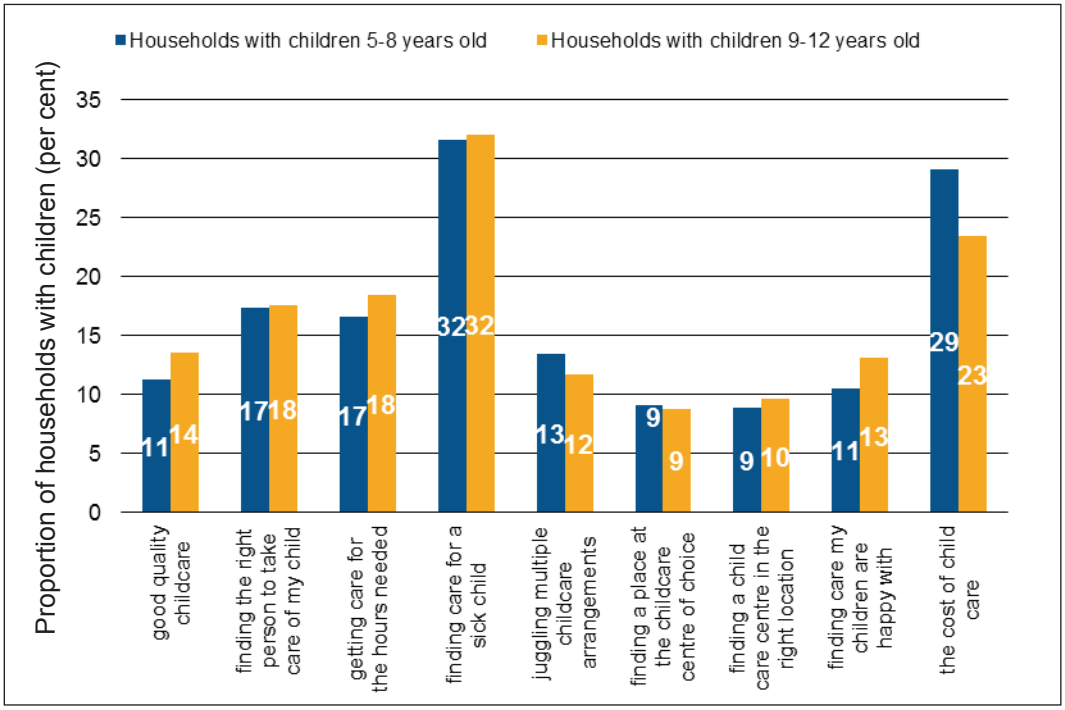
1. finding good quality childcare
2. finding the right person to take care of my child
3. getting care for the hours needed
4. finding care for a sick child
5. juggling multiple childcare arrangements
6. finding care for a difficult or special needs child
7. finding a place at the childcare centre of choice
8. finding a child care centre in the right location
9. finding care my children are happy with
10. the cost of child care

The first eight of the problems refer to 'availability problems', while problem number nine takes into account a child's happiness in using child care. In the HILDA survey, the household member answering the questions about these problems is asked to rate the severity of each problem on a scale of 0 (not a problem at all) to 10 (a severe problem). In this report, we have defined a household as having a difficulty with child care access as those who have answered 7 or more.

As these variables are only available at a household level, we have focused our sample on selected household types – those households with children aged 5-8 years (the early years) and those with children aged 9-12 years (the middle years). Due to the way the data is collected, it is not possible to determine if the problem relates directly to a particular child within the household, however inferences can still be made with this limitation in mind.

Households have also been limited to those where there are no other adult household members, as these households have been identified as being more likely to require and thus experience difficulties with care.

Figure 14 Households with school aged children and type of difficulty, 2009



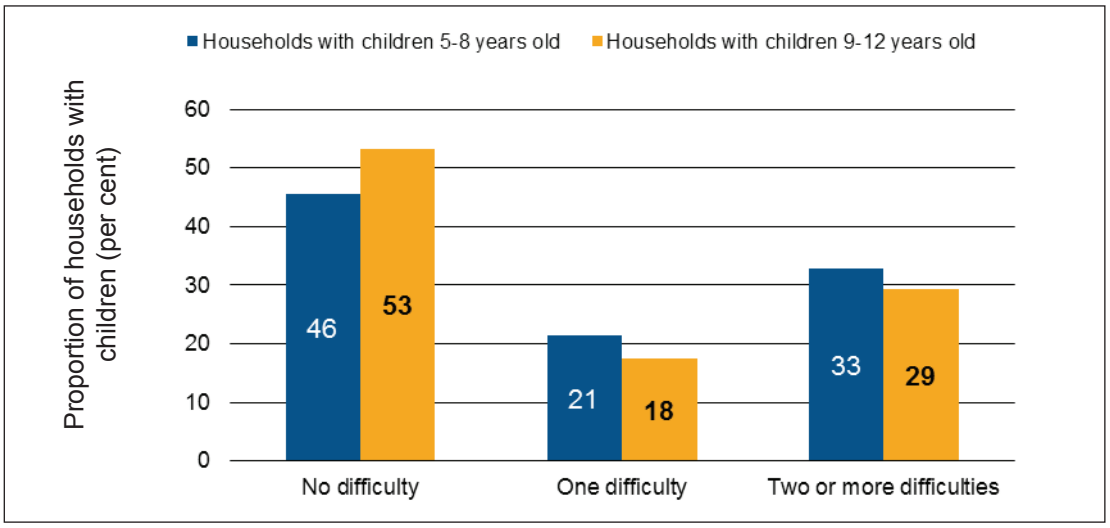
Note: Households with children aged 5-8 years can also have households with children of other ages and these difficulties may not necessarily relate to children in this age group but other children in the household. This also applies for households with children aged 9-12 years.

Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

Figure 14 shows the proportion of households with school aged children by the type of difficulty with child care. Overall, patterns of difficulties with child care are very similar for both household types. Two types of problems stand out - finding care for a sick child and the cost of child care. Households with children both in the early and middle years experience these types of difficulties more than any other. Almost a third of households with children aged 5-8 and 9-12 have experienced difficulties in finding care for a sick child. Difficulties with the cost of care is more prevalent for those households with children aged 5-8 years (29 per cent of households), compared to 23 per cent of households with children aged 9-12 years.

Other availability problems can also be found with just under one-fifth of households with both early and middle years children experiencing difficulties in getting care for the hours needed and finding the right person to take care of their child. Difficulties with finding care that children are happy with is more common for households with children older children – 13 per cent, compared with households with children in the early years (11 per cent).

Figure 15 Households with school aged children and number of problems/difficulties, 2009



Note: Households with children aged 5-8 years can also have households with children of other ages and these difficulties may not necessarily relate to children in this age group but other children in the household. This also applies for households with children aged 9-12 years.

Source: Authors' calculations from HILDA Wave 9

It is shown above that patterns of child care difficulties look very similar across these two groups of households, however the patterns look slightly different when measuring multiple difficulties (Figure 15). Households with younger children aged 5-8 years old are more likely to experience multiple child care problems, with 33 per cent of them experiencing two or more difficulties – this compares with 29 per cent of households with children in the middle years.

It is also interesting to see from this chart, that a lower proportion of households with younger children do not have child care difficulties – 46 per cent, compared with 53 per cent of households with children in the middle years, which indicates that child care problems are still a major issue for households with young school aged children.

CONCLUSION

This research report analyses child care patterns and transitions for school-age children in Australia whose parent/s are working. The findings show that almost 30 per cent of school-age children aged 5-12 years in Australia are using some type of non-parental care and around a tenth are using formal OSHC when their parents are working. It is clear from the results, that child care is not accessed by all families. This is especially the case for those families accessing formal OSHC, with only 1 per cent of children in low income families using formal OSHC, compared with over 20 per cent in relatively high income families. Children living in low socio-economic areas are also much less likely to access all types of child care. Lack of use of child care services raises important issues, including the potential lost benefit to these children and families that formal child care services may afford, through facilitating and building on cognitive, social and physical development, providing a safe and secure environment and role models that these children may look to for guidance and support.

Further understanding about what age children tend to engage in child care more is gained, with results showing that child care use increases substantially between the ages of 5 and 6 years, from 27 per cent of five-year-old children using care compared with almost 36 per cent of six-year-olds. Child care use decreases steadily from age six to nine, increasing for ten year olds, and then drops off at the later years of primary school. School attendance, maternal labour force and fertility patterns, along with children's increased independence and reluctance to attend child care settings are all likely to contribute to the usage patterns shown in the data. This information is useful for child care providers in that it identifies age groups that are likely to become uninterested in attending formal care settings, which can help structure programs that may keep children this age engaged in care services.

TECHNICAL NOTES

DATA SOURCE

Data used in this report is sourced from the 2009 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey. The HILDA survey is a longitudinal dataset that follows the same people and households over time. HILDA is a statistically representative of the Australian population. There are around 13,000 persons in the HILDA dataset.

The HILDA project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and views reported in this paper, however, are those of the authors and should not be attributed to either FaHCSIA or the Melbourne Institute.

Wooden and Watson (2007) provides details of the design of HILDA and Watson (2010) is the latest version of the HILDA user guide.

CARE DEFINITIONS USED IN THE REPORT

Any care - includes all formal and informal care for school-age children. It incorporates all care types, including formal OSHC, family day care, care by a brother/sister, grandparent relative, friend, nanny and self-care.

Any care has then been separated into two categories – formal OSHC and other care. This definition has been used to distinguish formal OSHC form other care types.

Formal OSHC – Care provided by formal outside school hours care services.

Other care - includes care provided by a brother or sister, grandparent, other relative, friend or neighbour, self-care, paid sitter or nanny, family day care, non-resident parent, boarding school, other care and care when a child coming to a parents workplace. While it is suspected that self-care may be important in the later years of primary school, due to small sample sizes, this type of care cannot be assessed separately and is included in other care.

Please note that a child can use multiple types of child care.

INCOME QUINTILES

Income quintiles have been defined using household financial year disposable income and equivalising these income amounts as per standard OECD equivalence scales. Equivalising income is a way of taking into account the size and composition of a household, given that the same amount of household income translates into different standards of living for smaller and larger households. Incomes are transformed by a factor relevant to the household size, in order to gain a truer comparison of household income across different household types.

Income includes income from all sources (wages and salaries, business and government benefits). Income quintiles have been derived from Australian households with dependent children aged less than 15 years, by excluding negative incomes. Thus each quintile covers 20 per cent of households with this particular characteristic.

The income quintile bands have been calculated from the 2009 HILDA data. These data have been uprated using changes in the CPI to reflect 2011 dollar amounts (shown below).

Income Quintile	Average household equivalised disposable income ($ pa)
Bottom quintile	21,195
Second quintile	32,363
Third quintile	40,328
Fourth quintile	48,939
Top quintile	80,733

SEIFA

The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) index were derived by the ABS from the characteristics of the residential area of respondents in the Census. There are four types of SEIFA index. The one we used for this paper is the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage/Disadvantage (IRSAD) derived from the 2006 Census. IRSAD mainly focuses on low or high income, internet connection, occupation and education, but it does not include Indigenous status. Lower IRSAD scores indicate more disadvantaged areas and higher scores indicate more advantaged areas (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008).

SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

School-age children have been defined as those children aged 5-12 years who are attending school.

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