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Improving Our Understanding of Informal Childcare in the UK

An Interim Report of Daycare Trust Research into Informal Childcare

Jill Rutter and Ben Evans

Daycare Trust

73-81 Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 0NQ

0207 940 7510
www.daycaretrust.org.uk

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About our research project

Since the late 1990s formal childcare has become more both more available and more affordable across the UK as a consequence of initiatives such as free early education for three and four year olds, the roll out of children's centres and subsidies for childcare costs through the Tax Credit system. Despite these changes, the numbers of parents using informal childcare remains high. While many families use this type of childcare, little is known about this practice. To fill this knowledge gap Daycare Trust is undertaking a major research project on informal care, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. In 2011 we published a literature review on informal childcare and *Listening to Grandparents*, a report about the most important group of informal carers. *Improving Our Understanding of Informal Childcare in the UK* is the third published report from this project. The report outlines and discusses the findings from the main phase of our fieldwork. This report will be followed by two further research papers and a book in late 2012.

About the authors

Jill Rutter is the research manager at Daycare Trust. She has led this research on informal childcare and in 2012 will be leading a project on the early years built environment. Previously, Jill was a Senior Research Fellow in Migration at ippr, where she undertook work on migrant integration and public service responses to migration. Jill has been a lecturer in education at London Metropolitan University. From 1988-2001 she was a Policy Advisor on Children at the Refugee Council, London. She has also worked as a secondary school teacher and on development projects in India. Her publications include *Refugee Children in the UK* (Open University Press, 2006).

Ben Evans is a research officer at Daycare Trust, specialising in quantitative research methodologies. He holds a BA in sociology and MA with distinction in social research methodology both from the University of Liverpool. Since joining Daycare Trust in January 2010, Ben has worked on a number of research projects including the Childcare Costs and Sufficiency Survey series and the London Childcare Providers Network Survey.

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Introduction

Since the late 1990s formal childcare has become both more available and more affordable across the UK as a consequence of initiatives such as free entitlement to part-time early education for all three and four year olds, the development of children's centres and subsidies for childcare costs through Working Tax Credits. Despite this recent investment in formal childcare, the number of parents using informal childcare provided by friends and relations remains high, with surveys suggesting that between a third and a half of UK families use informal childcare.

While informal childcare is important in the lives of many families, we still know very little about this practice. To fill this knowledge gap Daycare Trust undertook a major research project on informal care, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The project examined the use of informal childcare in the UK, as well as its impacts on children, families and wider society. Specifically, the research was concerned with answering the following questions:

1. Who uses informal childcare, to what extent, and for what purpose?
2. What factors are most strongly associated with the use of informal childcare?
3. Who are the carers, how much time do they provide and are they happy doing it?
4. How do parents select which type of childcare, and which informal carer? Who do they consult? Who is influential? What issues impact on parents' choice of informal childcare?
5. Why is informal childcare used in preference to formal childcare in some families and not in others?
6. What is the impact of informal childcare on children, on carers and wider society?
7. If other high quality, affordable options were available, would parents still use informal childcare?

In order to answer these questions Daycare Trust undertook 10 focus groups with parents who used informal childcare, 40 semi-structured interviews with carers, a survey of 1,413 parents of children under 16 years and a survey of 857 adults and children over 16 who provided informal care. Both surveys were delivered at over 180 different sampling points in England, Scotland and Wales.

Defining informal childcare

Childcare can be characterised as formal, informal or parental. There is no single agreed definition of 'informal childcare' and research and policy literature often uses different definitions. For the purposes of this research we defined informal childcare as:

> **Childcare that is largely unregistered by the state for quality control, child protection and/or taxation purposes.**

Using our definition above, informal childcare comprises childcare offered by:

- Grandparents
- Other relations
- Older brothers and sisters of the child
- Neighbours and friends of the child's parents, including members of babysitting circles
- Babysitters who provide short term home-based childcare for financial reward, and
- Unregistered nannies and au pairs.

We also included unregistered childminding and unregistered private foster care in our definition of informal childcare, although the provision of both forms of childcare is illegal.

Some informal childcare is offered freely, but informal childcare can also involve financial transactions – babysitters, au pairs or unregistered nannies are usually paid for their services. Informal childcare can also be provided on a reciprocal or bartered basis. It is important to note, too, that informal carers are a diverse group of people in relation to their age, hours of care provided, the regularity of care arrangements and carers' relationships with the families for whom they provide childcare. The diversity of informal childcare care arrangements is a reason for disaggregating informal carers in any analysis of this group, including in local authority childcare sufficiency reviews[1].

Parents' use of informal childcare

Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey showed that nearly half (47 per cent) of parents in Britain used informal childcare for their oldest or youngest child. This was more than the 31 per cent of parents who use formal childcare for their youngest and oldest children.

Grandparents are most likely to provide informal childcare, with over a third of parents (35 per cent) who used childcare using grandparents as their main form of childcare. An estimated 6 per cent of parents used friends to provide informal childcare, but friends were usually used for shorter periods of time than for grandparent childcare.

The median number of hours of informal care provided by carers every week was estimated at four hours, but there is a considerable variation in the hours of care provided. Generally, grandparents offer the most hours of care.

Parents mostly use informal childcare to help them work, often at times outside normal office hours, when there is little formal childcare available. Some 56 per cent of parents in our survey used informal care to help them work and 13 per cent of parents stated that informal childcare helped them work outside normal office hours.

Our research showed that parents tended to use informal childcare in six different ways:

- It is often used as the main type of care for babies and toddlers.
- Parents also use informal childcare in combination with nursery care to ensure an affordable childcare package for child under five years old.
- Informal childcare is used as regular after-school and holiday childcare for school-age children
- Informal childcare may be used in an emergency or when a child is ill.
- Informal childcare is used as short term childcare for parents who are studying, looking or undertaking chores because short-term formal childcare can be difficult to find.
- Parents who work outside normal office hours – in the evenings, overnight or at the weekends – may use informal childcare as their main form of childcare.

Factors associated with the use of informal childcare

Almost all previous research on the use of informal childcare has highlighted significant differences in families' use of informal childcare. Our research enabled us to analyse the factors that were most strongly associated with the use of informal childcare. To enable us to disentangle many different and inter-related factors influencing informal childcare use, we undertook logistic regression analysis. This suggested that geographic proximity to the carers was the factor most strongly associated with the likelihood of using informal childcare. Families whose nearest adult relative lives within five miles were five times more likely to have used informal childcare than those whose nearest adult relative lived between 30 and 150 miles away. While proximity to carer usually determines the likelihood of using informal childcare, some families go against this trend and set up long distance childcare arrangements, within the UK or spanning international borders. Daycare Trust's Parents

1. The Childcare Act 2006 obliges local authorities to map childcare supply and demand for childcare, ensuring that is sufficient childcare for working parents and those studying with the intention of returning to work.

Survey suggested that in a typical week seven per cent of parents used relatives who normally live outside the UK to provide informal childcare for their youngest child and five per cent had used it as their main form of childcare over the last six months. There was no difference in the likelihood of using overseas-domiciled relatives to provide childcare between parents of white British ethnicity and those from minority ethnic groups.

Other factors associated with an increased likelihood of using informal childcare include household composition and work status. Couple households where both parents work and working single parent households were more likely to use informal childcare. Households where both parents work atypical hours are also more likely to use informal childcare provided by family members. Family size is also associated with informal childcare use: families with just one child are more likely to use informal childcare than larger families.

Daycare Trust's surveys and qualitative research shows that the likelihood of using grandparents and friends to provide informal childcare decreases down the social grades. This may be partly due to different patterns of atypical hours work across the social grades. (Parents in professional and managerial occupations are most likely to have atypical work patterns, involving work outside normal office hours when formal childcare is not usually available). The finding that there is a lesser use of informal childcare among families in the lower social grades challenges the findings of some previous research, as well as a number of local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, that suggests that less prosperous families depend more on informal childcare. It is important, therefore, that policy makers do not over-estimate less prosperous families' access to informal childcare support networks.

Interestingly, our research showed that income in itself is not a significant predictor of informal childcare use. Our research suggests that it is the type of job that parents do, rather than income in itself, that is associated with the likelihood of using informal childcare.

Our qualitative research also showed differences across the social grades in the way that families use informal childcare from friends. Working class families tended to use friends in emergency situations, but in middle class families childcare from friends was often planned in advance through 'playdates' and reciprocal childcare arrangements. That the most economically disadvantaged parents have less access to mutual support and emergency childcare is relevant to public policy. We believe that all children's centres should see it as a key mission to facilitate mutual support networks among parents.

Previous research about the use of informal childcare in families with disabled children has been inconclusive, with some studies suggesting that these families use more informal childcare and other research contradicting this. Daycare Trust's research suggests that the likelihood of using grandparents to provide childcare appeared to be similar in families with and without disabled children, but many parents of disabled children indicated that they very rarely used friends and were sometimes reluctant to use relatives other than grandparents.

Crucially, too, our research has shown that there are major regional differences in the use of grandparent childcare by across the UK, with parents in Scotland most likely to use grandparent childcare and those in London the least likely. The lesser use of grandparent care in London may be a consequence of international and internal migration to the capital, processes which often sever childcare support networks. Central and local government needs to acknowledge that London parents have less access to informal childcare and ensure that parents in the capital have sufficient access to affordable formal childcare, at the times of day that they need it.

The childcare decision-making process

There has been limited previous research about the childcare decision-making process in the UK and the relative importance of factors such as affordability, proximity, parents' trust in carers and preference for different types of childcare. Investigating the childcare decision-making process was a key aim of the research. Most parents rely on word-of-mouth information from friends and relatives to help them make decisions about childcare. Our research shows that childcare decision-making is a gendered process, with most initial decisions about childcare are taken by women.

We examined the factors that influence childcare decision-making. Our research shows that for mothers' decisions about work are taken alongside decisions about childcare. Structural constraints such as childcare affordability, the timing of formal childcare and the proximity of that care to the home or the workplace appear to be the pre-eminent factors in childcare decision-making. Subjective factors such as trust for the carer and views about childrearing tend to be invoked after a decision has been made about childcare, often as a means of self-justification for these arrangements. We believe that values and attitudes about bringing up children and childcare are determined, or at least significantly mediated, by the economic circumstances in which parents find themselves.

Our research also showed that parents looked to informal carers to provide different things from formal childcare. Parents expected informal carers to provide a nurturing, home-based type of childcare and to formal childcare to help develop a child's cognitive and social skills. We have concluded that there is little evidence to show that informal childcare displaces the free early education offer in nurseries, but there is some evidence to show that parents use informal childcare instead of after-school and holiday clubs.

The background and experiences of those who provide informal childcare

Although there has been a limited amount of qualitative and quantitative research on informal childcare in the UK, few studies have attempted to build a profile of those who provide it. We undertook a survey of those who provide informal childcare which has enabled us to understand the make up of this group and know more about their experiences.

Our survey data suggests that an estimated 14 per cent of the over-16 population of Britain was providing informal childcare – sized up this would be about 6,900,000 people across Britain. Nearly half of informal carers (49 per cent) were looking after their grandchildren, although about 4 per cent of our sample were looking after children in a professional capacity, as nannies, au pairs or babysitters. Informal carers provided a median of four hours of care every week, with grandparents providing the most hours of care.

Our research suggests that nearly 3.5 million adults in Britain provide childcare for their grandchildren. Grandfathers play an important role in caring for their grandchildren, with our survey showing that 40 per cent of grandparent carers were male. We calculated that the majority of grandparent carers are under retirement age and the average (mean) age of grandparent carers was 62.5 years. Some 35 per cent of grandparent carers in our survey were still working. Moreover, younger grandparents were providing more hours of care – those aged 45 - 54 years offered an average of 11.6 hours of care per typical week, compared with those aged 65 years and over undertook 8.3 hours of care per week.

Young carers who babysit or look after siblings, nieces and nephews are another significant group of informal carers. Nearly one in six (13 per cent) of 15-24 year olds in Daycare Trust's Survey provided informal childcare.

Most informal care arrangements arise after parents ask a carer to help them look after their child, but more than two in five carers (42 per cent) offer to care for a child. Both our Parents Survey and Carers' Survey suggested that reciprocal childcare arrangements were less frequent in social grades D and E[2]. Regular informal childcare offered by friends is more likely to involve parents and carers from higher social grades.

Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey indicated that almost everyone who provided informal care was satisfied with this arrangement, even though 25 per cent of carers had spent more time caring than they first anticipated. Three quarters of carers enjoyed spending time with the children for whom they cared. Very few carers felt that the duty to provide informal care had a negative impact on their lives and there is little evidence to show that large numbers of older women are being forced out of the labour market because of informal childcare obligations.

Previous research by Daycare Trust suggests there is little appetite among grandparents for registration as childminders and their payment for childcare services. We have concluded that grandparents who are willing to register as childminders and care for non-related children as well as their own grandchildren should not be barred from doing so. Our research with careers also suggests that relatives and friends who provide regular informal childcare want more support from children's centres and the opportunity for flexible working.

Impacts of informal childcare on children

Both the quantitative and qualitative parts of our research enabled some exploration of the impacts of informal childcare on children themselves. We asked questions about carers' contact with the children's school, nursery or playgroup, as well as the activities that they undertook with children for whom they care. Our research also probed unregistered childminding and other practices that have the potential to be unsafe.

Our research showed that most informal carers, particularly grandparents, do provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for the children for whom they care. Nearly half of the informal carers in the Daycare Trust Carers' Survey read with the children for whom they cared, or supervised homework. While reading and the supervision of homework are not associated with the social grade of the carer, the survey showed that the likelihood of undertaking painting, cooking and going on local walks and outings declines down the social grades.

Both our qualitative and quantitative research supported the view that there are significant numbers of unregistered childminders working in the UK. Our Parents' Survey suggested that three per cent of parents knew of unregistered childminders in their locality and our qualitative research suggested a higher incidence of unregistered childminding, with some parents using unregistered childminders to provide care, particularly outside normal office hours. In addressing this problem we believe it is important that local authorities understand the reasons that parents use unregistered childminders, which is that they provide a flexible and affordable form of childcare.

In most families, the provision of informal childcare is a voluntary activity that benefits the carer, parents and children. For most parents being able to turn to relatives and friends to provide informal childcare is a positive condition, enabling them to work. For them, informal childcare has no detrimental effects as long as three and four year olds use some high quality early childhood education. We do not need interventions to substitute informal childcare with formal provision, as long as their informal childcare arrangements are safe, stable, reliable and meet parents' needs. However, our research showed that a small number of families use multiple, unstable and unreliable forms of informal childcare with children passed between friends, relatives and babysitters. This informal childcare was chaotic, disorientating for the child, as well as having the potential to be unsafe. Some parents used very young babysitters and unregistered childminders. We were also concerned that some parents on welfare-to-work programmes were forced to use multiple forms of childcare while undertaking training and job search.

2. The social grade variables that were used in the survey were derived from the Nation Readership Survey. This is a slightly different variable to the old Registrar General's social class variables, as it enables all members of a household to be classified according to the occupation of the chief income earner.

The broader impacts of informal childcare

Informal childcare offered by grandparents is a cross-generational exchange of services. Our research showed that the provision of informal childcare strengthens relationships within the family and helps with inter-generational understandings and communications. While it impacts on relationships between the young and old at a household level, the provision of informal childcare has had very little impact on dominant national debates about older people, focusing on the burden of financing and providing care for the frail elderly.

Our research also suggests broader impacts of informal childcare: on parents and other household members, on carers and on wider society. We believe that informal childcare may have positive impacts on families with disabled children, providing a respite for parents, enabling them to spend time as a couple, with their other children, or to undertake work, thus enabling better coping.

There was no significant evidence to show that the obligation to provide informal childcare forces large numbers of older women out of the labour market as many informal childcare arrangements are initiated by the carer offering to look after the child.

Although difficult to quantify, the provision of informal childcare has major economic impacts. Most importantly, our research shows that it enables parents to work and make a positive contribution to the exchequer through taxation.

Policy recommendations

Daycare Trust's research has led us to develop a series of policy recommendations, for central government, local government, third sector organisations and families themselves:

Changing the debate about informal childcare

All levels of government, as well as broader society, need to value and support informal childcare to a much greater extent than at present. The contribution of older carers needs to be recognised much more than it is today. The focus of public policy on informal childcare should be to maximise its benefits, while at the same time extending formal provision to those families without access to any good quality childcare, whether formal or informal. Informal childcare should not be viewed as an inadequate alternative to formal childcare; rather it should be seen as something that complements formal childcare.

Understanding childcare supply and demand

Both formal and informal care are part of the mixed economy of childcare. The use of informal has the capacity to affect demand for formal childcare and vice versa. However, many local authorities do not understand families' use of informal childcare and are often not aware of parents who do not have access to informal childcare. As a consequence of this omission significant numbers of parents are prevented from working, looking for work or studying. We recommend:

- Future guidance to local authorities on childcare sufficiency exercises must ensure that these reviews (and their equivalents in Scotland) give much more attention to informal childcare use, as well as the impact of raising the retirement age on the supply of informal childcare.
- Local authorities must ensure that families without access to informal childcare can find affordable formal provision at times of the day when they need it. Sufficient affordable childcare for student parents, those looking for work and parents who work irregular or a typical hours is essential.
- Local authorities should develop a strategy for sessional and emergency childcare in their areas, incorporated within their childcare sufficiency exercises. Such a strategy might include advice on financial sustainability. Vacant places in day nurseries should be offered to parents who need emergency and short-term forms of childcare.
- As parents of disabled children may find it difficult to find suitable formal or informal childcare, Statements of Special Educational Need, and the planned Health, Education and Social Care Plans should include reference to after-school childcare and enrichment activities.

Ensuring all parents have childcare support networks

Our research showed that the most economically disadvantaged parents used less informal childcare and appeared to have less access to the mutual support and emergency childcare that informal carers can offer. We recommend:

- All children's centres should see it as a key mission to facilitate mutual support networks among parents.

Meeting the childcare needs of parents with 'atypical' work patterns

Our research showed that parents who work outside standard office hours or whose work patterns are irregular are particularly reliant on informal childcare to be able to work. While informal childcare helps these parents stay in work, its absence often prevents parents from working. Local authorities need to fulfil their Childcare Act 2006 obligations that relate to ensuring sufficient childcare for working parents and make certain that there is appropriate formal provision for parents without informal childcare networks. These local authorities should consider a registered at-home childcare services for parents who work outside normal office hours. Under this model an agency or local authority brokers childcare that is provided in the family home by carers registered with Ofsted. (At home childcare services also usually provide emergency childcare). Improvements are also needed in the operation of Working Tax Credit support for childcare for parents in the peripheral labour market who move in and out of work regularly. We recommend:

- Local authorities should improve the ways that they research the demand for childcare outside normal office hours.
- Local authorities and groups of local authorities should set up at-home childcare services for parents who work outside normal office hours, and publicise these service alongside information about Working Tax Credit support to parents who may need such services.
- Local authorities should encourage nurseries and holiday childcare to open between 7am and 7pm where there is a demand from parents identified through the childcare sufficiency exercises.
- Central Government should ensure that the new Universal Credit system works better for families with fluctuating employment patterns. This could include longer run-ons when finishing work to avoid having to start a new claim when they find another job.

Managing poor quality forms of informal childcare

Some parents in our research – mostly those undertaking welfare-to-work programmes - were using multiple and short term forms of childcare which were often disorientating for their children. Our research also highlighted a small number of informal childcare arrangements that were chaotic, unreliable and sometimes unsafe and included unregistered childminders and very young babysitters. While there are arguments for the better regulation of nanny and babysitting agencies to ensure the best recruitment processes, as well as better enforcement action against unregistered childminders, parents who use unregistered childminders or very young babysitters are often from low income groups and unlikely to use childcare provided by an agency. Arguably, we need to understand better the demand for unregistered childminding and babysitting and ensure that there is enough flexible and affordable formal childcare available at times of the day when parents need it. Improved Personal, Health and Social Education courses in schools could also cover babysitting and first aid, to ensure that young babysitters are better equipped to deal with emergencies. We recommend:

- The Department for Work and Pensions should issue better guidance to welfare-to-work providers to ensure that childcare for parents on the Work Programme ensures better continuity for children.

- The Department for Education should commission a small-scale ethnographic research project to ensure a better understanding of families' use of unregistered childminding and how this could be prevented. This research needs to be disseminated within local authorities to ensure a better understanding of the drivers of unregistered childminding.

- Ofsted should investigate why so few complaints about unregistered childminding result in enforcement.

- Childminders should be required to place their registration number on any public advertisements for their services, including websites, and local authority Family Information Services should be resourced to check up on childminder advertisements to ensure compliance with registration.

- The review of the National Curriculum in England should be used as an opportunity to rethink Personal, Health and Social Education for young people. Parenting education in schools should also include babysitting, basing this input on the British Red Cross babysitting courses.

Supporting informal carers

Our research suggests that there is much room for improvement in the way that we support informal carers. We recommend:

- Building on the commitments of the Modern Workplaces consultation, central government should extend the right to request flexible working to grandparents and other relatives who provide regular informal childcare as soon as possible.

- There should be greater flexibility about the use of parental leave, enabling grandparents to use parental leave entitlements.

- Local authorities and third sector providers of children's centres should support the greater involvement of informal carers in the activities of Sure Start children's centres and ensure that informal carers are always made to feel welcome.

- Training material that accompanies the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory guidance needs to promote good practice in communicating with informal carers who collect children from formal childcare provision. Central government guidance on home-school partnership should also encourage good practice in communicating with informal carers.

"I was working part-time and then I decided to go back full-time but instead of paying a childminder the full fees my grandmother used to travel from Pimlico to King's Cross to bring her home and look after her until I got home from work. She did that for about two, three years. As soon as the holidays came, I couldn't pay a childminder, so she [daughter] used to go to my grandmother's – rather than my mum because my mum was at work too."

(Mother, London).

1. Introduction

Until the late 1990s childcare was seen as a private matter in the UK, with limited government investment or intervention and with patchy access to formal nursery provision or after-school clubs. In many parts of the UK, the absence of formal childcare meant that working parents relied on their family and friends to provide informal childcare. Since 1998 formal childcare has become both more affordable and more available across the UK as a consequence of initiatives such as the free entitlement to part-time early childhood education for all three and four year olds, the development of Sure Start children's centres and subsidies for childcare costs through Working Tax Credit system. Despite this recent investment, the number of parents using informal childcare provided by friends and relations remains high. Research by the Office for National Statistics suggested that families use nearly 90 billion hours of informal childcare every year (Holloway and Tamplin, 2001).

National surveys highlight the importance of informal childcare in the lives of families in the UK. The 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents found that 41 per cent of parents in England had used informal childcare in the reference week of the survey, compared to 45 per cent who had used formal childcare (Department for Education, 2010). The same survey indicated that 34 per cent of the parents of three and four year olds used a mixture of formal and informal childcare.

From a position of neglect, informal childcare is now rising up the political agenda. Grandparents Plus and the Grandparents Association have led campaigns for greater rights for grandparents who provide childcare. The Centre for Social Justice has been one of a number of organisations that has argued for childcare Tax Credits to be used to fund informal childcare, albeit it at a 20 per cent lower rate than funding for formal care (Centre for Social Justice, 2008). *Next Steps for Early Learning and Childcare*, the Government's 2009 update on the childcare strategy made substantial reference to the role of informal childcare in the lives of families. In 2011 the Department for Work and Pensions changed policy in relation to National Insurance credits so that grandparents or other relatives providing childcare do not face state pension penalties caused by fewer National Insurance contributions. More controversially, ministers at the Department for Work and Pensions have highlighted the role of informal childcare in helping parents enter the labour market and taking up 'mini-jobs' of less than 16 hours a week[3]. Internationally, September 2010 saw a strike by some Spanish grandparents who wanted to draw attention to their role in providing free childcare. Indeed, half of all Spanish grandparents look after their grandchildren every day and one in eight provides unpaid childcare for more than nine hours a day[4].

While informal childcare is receiving much greater consideration by the Government and in the media, we still know very little about this practice. We do not know whether families choose informal childcare because they prefer the care offered by grandparents and other family members over that of nurseries or childminders, or whether informal childcare is a necessity because formal childcare does not cover the needed hours or is unaffordable. We know little about the role that informal childcare plays in helping parents re-enter or remain in the labour market, in particular, for those parents who work atypical hours. We also have little understanding about parents' childcare decision-making processes. We know very little about the characteristics of those who provide informal childcare and their views and experiences. And we have very little analysis of the impact of informal childcare on children themselves, their families and on wider society. Overall, we have little evidence on which to base policy-making.

To fill this knowledge gap Daycare Trust undertook a major research project on informal care, funded by the Big Lottery Fund. The project examined the use of informal childcare in Britain, as well as its impacts, on children, families and wider society. It has also profiled those providing informal childcare.

3. See Chris Grayling answer to the Welfare Reform Bill Committee, 5 April 2011. For a discussion of mini-jobs see Bell et al, 2007

4. Eurostat data cited in the Daily Telegraph, 26.09.10 http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/spain/8025992/Spains-babysitter-grandparents-to-join-the-strike.html

Defining informal childcare

Childcare can be characterised as formal, informal or parental. There is no single agreed definition of informal childcare and research and policy literature often uses different definitions. For example, some literature includes non-resident parents as informal carers, while other studies do not. Au pairs and nannies providing childcare in a child's home are defined as informal carers in some writing and formal carers elsewhere (Rutter and Evans, 2011a).

While some parts of central government includes non-resident parents as informal carers, we have decided not define them as informal carers, as we feel that there is a difference between parental and informal childcare. Literature that looks at definitions of informal childcare suggests that the absence of enforced regulation appears to be the defining characteristic of informal childcare (Holloway and Tamplin, 2001). Drawing from this literature, our working definition of informal childcare is:

Childcare that is largely unregulated by the state for quality control, child protection and/or taxation purposes.

Using our definition above, informal childcare comprises childcare offered by:

- Grandparents
- Other relations
- Siblings
- Neighbours of parents
- Friends of the child's parents, including members of babysitting circles
- Babysitters who provide short term home-based childcare for financial reward
- Unregistered nannies – some nannies choose to register with Ofsted's Voluntary Childcare Register and its equivalents in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but legally nannies are not required to register, undergo Criminal Record Bureau checks or have insurance. Neither are they obliged to possess qualifications or experience
- Mothers' helps – there is a degree of overlap between a nanny and mother's help, although the latter is less likely to work unsupervised for long periods and is less likely to hold childcare qualifications than a nanny
- Au pairs and other migrant domestic workers providing childcare
- Unregistered breakfast, after-school, school holiday and activity-based clubs that are unattached to formal educational or childcare provision such as schools and children's centres. In England, registration with Ofsted is voluntary for those providing childcare for children over eight years old, hence the existence of unregistered clubs
- Kinship care, which we define as residential care offered by close relatives who substitute for parents. We do not include three generation families – where grandparents, parents and children live in the same household - as kinship care.

We are also including two illegal forms of childcare in our definition of informal care:

- Unregistered childminding
- Unregistered private foster care

In England, the Children Act 2004 and the Childcare Act 2006 obliges those providing early childhood education and care for children under five in their own homes to register with Ofsted for inclusion on the Early Years Register. Those providing childcare for children aged between five and eight are also obliged to register with Ofsted. There are similar requirements in Northern Irealnd, Scotland and Wales (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). Some previous research as well as data from the Millennium Cohort Study and local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments indicates a prevalence of unregistered – thus illegal – childminding in parts of the UK (Gray and Bruegel, 2003).

The Children Act 1989 defines private foster care as the continuous care of a child below the school leaving age (under 18 if disabled) by someone who is not a close relative for a period of more than 28 days, with Scottish law adopting a similar definition. Those providing private foster care are obliged to inform their local authority children's services department, who in turn have to undertake checks to ensure the child's safety and welfare. There is growing literature on unregistered foster care in the UK, some of which links this form of childcare with parental work patterns, in particular, atypical hours working (Olusanya and Hodes, 2000).

Some informal childcare is offered freely, but informal childcare can also involve financial transactions – babysitters, au pairs or unregistered nannies and maternity nurses are usually paid for their services. Informal childcare can also be provided on a reciprocal or bartered basis. For some people, informal childcare is their employment. Our report makes the distinction between professional informal childcare and non-professional informal childcare; in other words, informal childcare given as part of one's job and informal childcare that is not related to one's job.

Clearly, informal childcare is a very diverse practice in terms of the nature and extent of the childcare and its monetary reward. Parents' motivations for using this type of childcare also vary considerably. The carers are also a very diverse group of people. (We discuss the diversity of the practice in the literature review for this project (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). The research aims to understand better the diversity of informal childcare.

Structure of the report

Improving our Understanding of Informal Childcare in the UK is the interim report of the Daycare Trust research project. It provides an analysis of the main phase of our fieldwork: focus groups interviews with parents, a survey of parents who use informal childcare and a second survey of people who provide informal childcare.

The report is divided into 12 chapters. ***Chapter Two*** summarises existing research on informal childcare and outlines gaps in knowledge about this issue. *Chapter Three* describes the research methodology that we used.

The next part of this report presents and analyses our research findings. *Chapter Four* examines patterns of informal childcare use, mostly drawing from Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey. It looks at how many parents use this type of childcare and why they use it.

The use of informal childcare varies between different families. Our research shows that a number of factors have the potential to influence the use of informal childcare, for example, parental work patterns and the proximity to carers. ***Chapters Five*** and *Six* analyse factors associated with the use of informal childcare.

Chapter Seven looks at how parents make decisions about childcare, examining the impact of practical considerations such as childcare affordability, as well as subjective factors such as parents' attitudes to childrearing.

The next two chapters examine those who provide informal childcare. *Chapter Eight* profiles this group of people and *Chapter Nine* examines their experiences of providing childcare.

The research also looks at some of the impacts of providing childcare – on children themselves, as well as their families and wider society. *Chapter Ten* looks at some of the educational, social and welfare impacts of informal childcare on children. *Chapter Eleven* examines the impacts of informal childcare on families and wider society. Our final chapter draws our research together and discusses policy responses to informal childcare.

We hope that by generating a greater range of evidence about informal childcare, for example, about its role in helping parents to work, we will support more informed public policy interventions and a more enlightened debate about this type of childcare.

2. Existing research on informal childcare

There is quite a limited British research literature on informal childcare, although there are many more North American studies on this subject, mostly focusing on grandparent care (Brown-Lyons et al, 2001; Rutter and Evans, 2011a). For a UK researcher there are, however, a number of publicly available datasets that include variables that relate to informal childcare use, the most relevant of which are the Labour Force Survey, the Millennium Cohort Survey and, in England, the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents from the Department for Education. In England and Wales, many local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments are also a source of useful data on the use of informal childcare. This section summarises existing research about informal childcare, drawing from the literature review undertaken for this project (Rutter and Evans, 2011a).

Patterns of use of informal childcare

Overall, existing research on informal childcare suggests that about half of families in the UK use informal childcare (Gray, 2005a). For example, the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents showed that 41 per cent of parents of children under 16 had used informal childcare in the reference week of the survey, compared with 55 per cent of parents who had used formal childcare, with some parents using both formal and informal provision (Department for Education, 2010). In 65 out of England's 158 local authorities, the 2008 Childcare Sufficiency Assessment suggested that informal childcare was the main form of provision in terms of the type of childcare parents used.

Parents' use of informal childcare varies considerably, with some families using it irregularly, and others using it on a more regular basis or for a greater number of hours per week. While some families use informal childcare as their main type of childcare, many families use it in combination with formal childcare: nurseries, registered childminders or out-of-school clubs. Other parents use informal childcare when formal childcare arrangements break down or are unavailable (Skinner, 2003; Smith et al, 2009). The 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents suggested that 32 per cent of parents of three and four year olds combine formal and informal childcare, with nursery and informal provision being the most popular option.
Data from the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents suggested that families used an average (mean) of 13.1 hours of informal childcare per week, compared with an average of 12.7 hours of formal childcare (Department for Education, 2010).

Both the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents and some of the qualitative studies about informal childcare explore the reasons that parents use informal childcare (Brown and Dench, 2004; Brown-Lyons et al, 2001; Gray, 2005a, Rutter and Evans, 2011a) The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents categorises the reasons that families use informal childcare into three groups:

- Economic reasons (working, looking for work or studying)
- Child-related reasons (helping with the child's learning development or because child liked going there)
- Parental time-related reasons (respite, or enabling parent to undertake leisure activities or chores).

This survey found that 43 per cent of families solely using informal childcare are using it for economic reasons; for school-age children this figure rises to 60 per cent of families. This, and other research, suggests that most informal childcare enables parents to work (Rutter and Evans, 2011a).

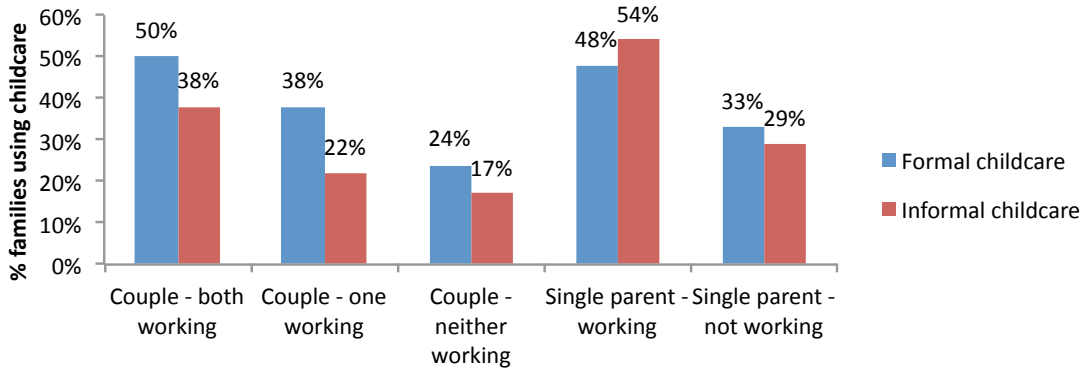
Who relies most on informal childcare?

Many qualitative research studies show that work status and household composition affect the use of informal childcare. Full-time workers and single parents tend to use more informal childcare (Brown and Dench, 2004; Gray, 2005a). Figure 1 presents data from the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents on childcare use by household structure. It shows that single parents in work are the biggest users of all childcare and informal childcare, an observation also noted in most, but not all, qualitative studies.

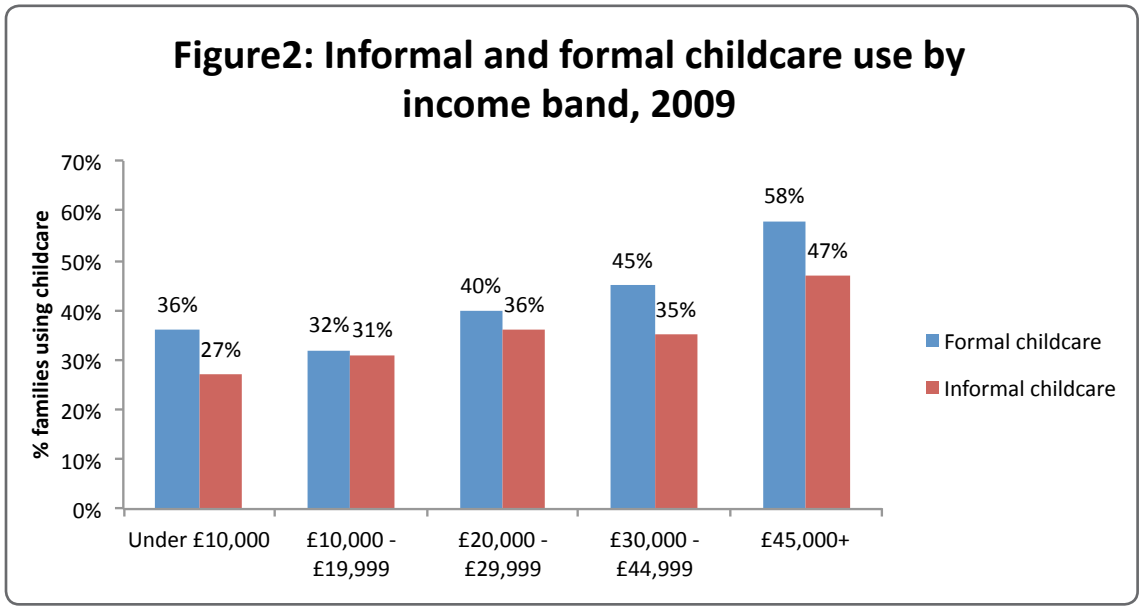
Household income is another factor that appears to be associated with informal childcare use, although evidence about this is sometimes contradictory (Gray, 2005a; Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004; Vandell et al, 2003). Some studies have suggested that low income parents use more informal childcare, while other research shows the opposite. Figure 2 present data from the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents on childcare use by gross household income band. In the two income bands of £10,000 - £30,000 informal childcare use is very similar to formal childcare use, whereas for higher income groups more formal childcare is used.

Households where parents work atypical hours, usually defined as outside 8am to 6pm, are another group that, proportionately speaking, make greater use of informal childcare (Bryson et al, 2006; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004; Singler, 2011; Statham and Mooney, 2003). There is also some literature that suggests that parents in the peripheral labour market, that is in unstable and short term forms of employment that are usually low paid, also rely on informal childcare (Knox et

Figure 1: Childcare use by household structure and work status, 2009



Source: Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, 2009



Source: Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, 2009

al, 2003; Lowe et al, 2003; McQuaid et al, 2010). Finding formal childcare at the same time that work becomes available can be difficult:

"You have to get the childcare and the job available at the same time and they always seem to miss."

(Parent cited in Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004)

Formal childcare may also be unaffordable and the childcare element of Working Tax Credit – which subsidises a proportion of childcare costs for low paid workers – may not be responsive to childcare costs that frequently change. Formal childcare providers may also be unwilling to offer irregular, sessional care. If this group of parents is to secure work they will usually rely on the free and flexible informal childcare offered by relatives and friends.

Who uses least informal childcare?

As shown in Figure 1, above, working status is associated with informal childcare use, with workless families using the least informal childcare. In Britain, informal childcare tends to be lower in most minority ethnic groups (Department for Education, 2010). This may be partly explained by lower levels of female employment among groups such as Pakistanis and Bangladeshis, as well as their lesser likelihood of living near grandparents who can provide childcare.

Recent internal and international migration appears to another factor associated with low levels of informal childcare use, as migration can sever support networks. The capacity of migration to disrupt informal childcare arrangements is likely to be a major causal factor for the large regional differences in the use of informal childcare across Britain. Data from the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents suggested that 20 per cent of London families with children use informal childcare from friends and relatives, compared with 33 per cent of families across the whole of England (Department for Education, 2010).

Who provides informal childcare?

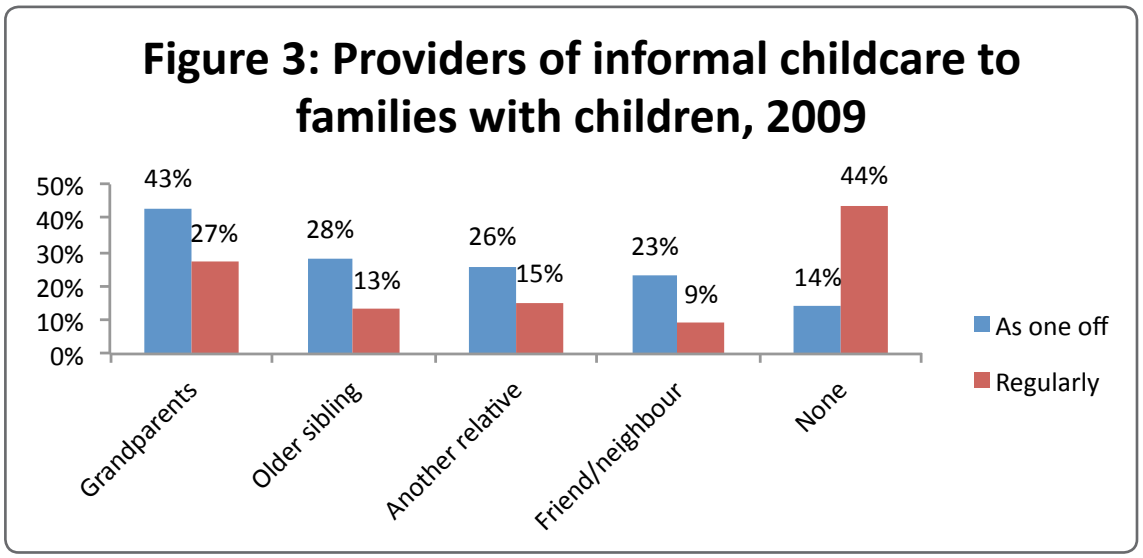
In Britain **grandparents** emerge as the main providers of informal childcare in all studies. Figure 3 gives data on the providers of informal childcare taken from the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, highlighting the importance of grandparents.

There is little evidence to suggest that grandparents' caring role has been displaced by the expansion of formal childcare in Britain (Gray, 2005a; Wellard, 2011). Indeed, a 2010 survey suggests that the use of grandparents care grew in 2009, as a consequence of the recession and parents wanting to save money (RIAS, 2010). Literature suggests that grandparents tend to provide day-time care for children under two, much after-school, evening and weekend childcare for parents who work atypical hours, as well as school holiday childcare (Gray, 2005a; Skinner, 2003). In this respect grandparent care complements formal provision.

Despite their importance as carers, there has been little research that profiles grandparent carers or looks at their experience of providing informal childcare. Some studies suggest that grandparents who provide the most childcare are in their late 50s and early 60 (Gray, 2005a; Hawkes and Joshi, 2007). The poorer health of older grandparents may be one reason that older grandparents provide less childcare, but also the age of grandchildren may also play a role. (An older grandparent may have older grandchildren who need less childcare.)

Siblings also offer considerable amounts of childcare, with the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents suggesting that siblings provide more childcare in Britain than do babysitters, friends or neighbours. Again there is limited research on this group of carers, apart from a small number of studies that examines sibling childcare from the perspective of children's household duties or the division of labour within the family (Blair, 1992; Bonke, 2010; Peters and Haldeman, 1987; Weisner and Gallimore, 1977). This literature shows that, in economically developed countries, girls, children from poorer families and children from large families undertake the most housework, including sibling childcare.

Other adult relatives, often maternal aunts, are another group who provide informal childcare in Britain. Again there is little research on this group of carers. Data from the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents suggests that the care offered by siblings and other adult relatives differs from grandparent provision in that it tends to be for fewer hours per week than grandparent childcare (Department for Education, 2010).



Source: Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, 2009

Friends, neighbours and **babysitters** also provide informal childcare, but there is very little specific research on this group of informal carers, either in Britain or other developed countries. Brown and Dench (2004) suggest that maternal contacts are prioritised over paternal contacts, and generally provide one-off or emergency childcare. Friends may also be involved in reciprocal childcare arrangements, such as 'play dates' and babysitting circles where hours are traded between families on a reciprocal basis or through a more formalised token system.

Friends and neighbours are more likely than grandparents and other relative to receive monetary or in kind payments for the childcare that they provide. The 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents shows that 66 per cent of friends and neighbours received payment in kind, most usually reciprocal childcare (49 per cent), gifts (16 per cent) or other favours (11 per cent[5]).[6]

Unregistered nannies are a further category of informal childcare. The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents 2009 suggested that one per cent of English families were using au pairs or nannies although there is a significant regional variation in the use of nannies across England. Estimates about the size of the nanny population range between 30,000 and 100,000 (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). In many households **au pairs** often perform similar duties to live-in nannies. A key difference between a nanny and an au pair is that the latter is always a migrant, while a nanny may not be. Additionally nannies are often expected to work full-time and on a contractual basis, whereas an au pair is not.

Two recent British studies have attempted to profile the nanny workforce, suggesting that nannies can be categorised into three groups:

- UK-born nannies with childcare qualifications who are doing the job as a vocation
- Younger UK-born nannies without childcare qualifications who are undertaking childcare work on a temporary basis at the start of their working careers, and
- Migrant nannies and au pairs (ESRU, 2000; SIRC, 2009).

This project also defines unregistered childminding as a type of informal childcare, although this practice is illegal. Some 1.8 per cent of parent respondents in the first sweep of the Millennium Cohort Study stated that they were using **unregistered childminders** – an amount of childcare use that equalled that of nannies. Based on this data, and if unregistered childminders and nannies supervised equal numbers of children, the numbers of unregistered childminders could number as many as 60,000 across the UK.

Impacts of informal childcare on children

In addition to examining families' use of informal childcare and analysing the experiences of carers, some research literature has looked at the impact of informal childcare on children, their families and on wider society. There is a large research literature on the impacts of different childcare regimes on children's later cognitive and social outcomes. Data from the Millennium Cohort Study and previous longitudinal surveys of child development in this country tend to show that compared with formal group childcare, all other types of childcare, including informal childcare, are associated with less school readiness among children. The Millennium Cohort Study shows that children who were least school ready were those receiving informal childcare from friends and neighbours, although this is a very small group of children in Britain (Hawkes and Joshi, 2007; Hansen and Hawkes, 2009). Conversely some studies in the United States have linked informal childcare to better social and behavioural outcomes than children

5. These are not mutually exclusive categories.

6. In 2010 Government in England clarified the law so that parents providing reciprocal childcare for under eights did not need to register with Ofsted after two police officers were threatened with prosecution for providing reciprocal childcare for each other.

who experienced long hours of formal provision in nurseries (NICHD, 2004; Belsky et al, 2007).

Much of the reporting of the research on the later impact on children of different childcare regimes has focused on the type of childcare, for example, parents or nurseries. The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD) Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development also enabled researchers to examine how the quality and quantity of different types of childcare impact on children's later outcomes, although it aggregates childcare into relative care and non-relative care, with the latter group comprising nannies, babysitters, friends and other non-relatives, as well as formal nursery provision (Belsky et al, 2007). Importantly, however, it shows that the quality of relative care is positively correlated with better cognitive outcomes at children at 4.5 years, although this is a smaller effect than the quality of parental childcare. This, alongside the finding from the Millennium Cohort Study suggests that the positive impacts of grandparent care do not manifest themselves in low income families. Arguably, researchers and policy makers need to give greater consideration to quality of informal childcare: better quality grandparenting and relative care leads to better cognitive outcomes in children.

In addition to the later cognitive, social and behavioural outcomes, informal childcare can have more immediate impact on a child's welfare and safety. While parents trust informal carers who are close friends or relatives to ensure their child's safety and welfare, not all informal childcare arrangements are safe. There is fairly frequent media coverage of children whose welfare has been compromised by unregistered nannies, au pairs, babysitters, unregistered childminders and relatives. Despite this media coverage, there is limited research about the negative welfare impacts of informal childcare. Knox et al (2003) highlights the unsafe nature of some informal childcare in a study that looked at childcare usage in a number of deprived areas in the United States. There is no similar UK study, although this may be a consequence of the typical research methodologies used in childcare research here, with very little in-depth ethnography being undertaken in the homes of children or their carers.

Wider impacts of informal childcare

In addition to impacts on children themselves, informal care has wider impacts – on parents, on carers, as well as more broadly through its social and economic impacts.

Informal childcare may impact on the psycho-social well-being of families as access to supportive family and friends who provide informal care may be a protective factor in families experiencing stress or caring for a disabled child (Dunst et al, 1994; Mitchell, 2007; Trute, 2003).

Very few studies look at the impact of informal care on the carers themselves. There is no British research that looks at the labour market effects of providing informal childcare on older women – a group who might potentially be prevented from working by their caring obligations. Some studies on grandparent care highlight the health and the psycho-social benefits of greater family contact (Grandparents Plus, 2010). Conversely there is also considerable North American research that highlights the increased risk of poverty as well as negative physical and mental health outcomes among grandparents who provide childcare, although most of this research focuses on grandparents who provide full-time kinship care in the absence of the child's own parents (Bachman and Chase-Lansdale, 2005; Hughes et al, 2007). Overall, however, the impact on carers of informal care provision is an under-researched area.

Informal childcare has considerable economic impacts as it can enable parents to work, thus increasing household income and enabling some families to move off benefits and out of poverty. There will be broader economic benefits of this parental employment, as well as fiscal impacts through their payment of taxes and non-uptake of benefits. However, no studies have analysed the economic impacts of informal childcare, partly because it is difficult to quantify and attach a value to informal childcare provision (Holloway and Tamplin, 2001).

Gaps in knowledge

Daycare Trust's literature review undertaken for this research project has highlighted many gaps in knowledge about informal childcare. Some of these gaps in knowledge are highlighted in the summary of existing literature above, but a fuller discussion of these research gaps is given in Rutter and Evans (2011b). Table 1 summarises the main gaps in knowledge about informal childcare in Britain.

Our interim report will address some of these gaps in knowledge. It provides new research about factors associated with the use of informal childcare. It also profiles informal carers for the first time in Britain. Other areas, for example, the economic impacts of informal childcare, are outside the scope for this research, but offer future researchers a fertile ground for enquiry.

Table 1: Research gaps on informal childcare in Britain

Broad Area	Specific gap in knowledge
Factors associated with use of informal childcare	▶ Factors determining the use of sibling care ▶ Factors determining the use of non-grandparent relative care ▶ Factors determining the use of friend and neighbour care ▶ Informal childcare use in families with disabled children ▶ Impacts of residential mobility on informal childcare and family support networks ▶ Informal childcare use in wealthy families ▶ Au pair use in Britain ▶ Childcare availability in Britain as a factor associated with transnational kinship care and private foster care
Parents' childcare decision-making	▶ The importance of trust in determining childcare use and how it is balanced with other factors such as affordability and proximity ▶ The balance of different factors in childcare decision-making ▶ Childcare decision-making in parents moving into the labour market
Children's and parents' opinions of informal childcare	▶ Children's opinions of informal childcare arrangements ▶ Parents opinions about au pairs and unregistered nannies
Carers' profiles	▶ The socio-economic profiles of different informal carers: grandparents, relative carers, sibling carers, friend and neighbourhood carers
Carers' experiences	▶ The experiences of sibling carers in providing informal childcare ▶ The experiences of teenage babysitters in providing informal childcare ▶ Employment impacts on grandparents of providing childcare ▶ The experiences of au pairs in providing informal childcare
Supporting a learning environment	▶ Home learning activities undertaken by informal carers ▶ Communication between school, formal childcare provider, parents and informal carer ▶ School and nursery interactions with informal carers
Economic impacts of informal childcare	▶ Role of informal childcare in enabling unemployed parents to re-enter the labour market ▶ Stability and safety of informal care arrangements in disadvantaged families

3. Research methodology

Clearly, informal childcare is an issue of importance to policymakers, in both local and central government. But policymaking in this country has been impeded by a lack of knowledge about informal childcare, about parents' decision-making processes, about carers and the impacts of informal childcare on parents and their children. The aims and objectives of Daycare Trust's research on informal childcare are to map its use and achieve a greater understanding this form of childcare in Britain, and its interplay, where applicable, with formal childcare usage. Specifically, the research was concerned with answering the following research questions:

1. Who uses informal childcare, to what extent, and for what purpose?

2. Who are the carers, how much time do they provide, are they happy doing this and are they paid for it?

3. How do parents select which type of childcare, and which informal carer? Who do they consult? Who is influential? What issues impact on parents' choice of informal childcare?

4. Why is informal childcare used in preference to formal childcare in some families and not in others?

5. What is the impact of informal childcare on children, on carers and wider society?

6. If other high quality, affordable options were available, would parents still use informal childcare?

In order to answer these questions Daycare Trust utilised a number of research tools, namely:

- A literature review and analysis of existing datasets published in 2011 (Rutter and Evans, 2011a)

- Ten focus groups with parents who used informal childcare

- A survey of 1,413 parents of children under 16 years, and

- A survey of 857 adults and children over 16 who provide informal care.

This report analyses data collected in the ten focus groups and Daycare Trust's Parents' and Carers' surveys. Further interviews will be carried out later in 2011 and 2012.

Focus groups

We undertook ten focus groups (with an average of five participants) with parents at different locations in Britain. The focus groups explored the research questions that are central to the project: childcare usage, parents' decision-making processes and their perceptions about the advantages and disadvantages of informal childcare.

The focus groups were recruited to get a social mix of parents. We did not want to recruit families who solely used informal childcare. Rather, we wanted to interview parents with different social characteristics, some of whom would use informal childcare, while others would not. Using our literature review we compiled a list of family characteristics to guide the recruitment of focus groups (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). These characteristics included parental work status, income, household composition and so on, and were used to recruit parents. We also wanted to include some fathers in our focus groups, although research suggests that is usually mothers who make most of the decisions about childcare (Vincent and Ball, 2006).

We also wanted to undertake qualitative research in at least one rural location, as well as ensuring that our focus groups included parents from long-established minority ethnic groups, newer international migrants and internal migrants in Britain. (Data from the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents suggests that migrant and minority ethnic groups are less likely to use relatives to provide informal childcare because migration has severed these support networks.

Previous research on informal childcare use in families with disabled children is inconclusive. Some North American research suggests that parents of disabled children use more informal childcare while other research suggests they use less (Susman-Stillman and Banghart, 2008).

Similarly, analysis of the 2008 and 2011 local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments[7] provides little clarity on childcare usage in this group of families. In order to explore childcare usage among families of disabled children, we planned two focus groups with this group of parents.

The eventual categories that were used to select interview participants were:

- Economic activity of parent (in full-time and part-time employment, studying and not working)
- Job characteristics (atypical hours working patterns and short-term or insecure forms of employment)
- Household income (low income, middle income and higher income households)
- Household structure (single parents and two parent households)
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Internal and international migration history (established minority groups and new arrivals to Britain)
- Age of child
- Whether the child had a disability, and
- Rural and urban locations.

Recruitment for each of the focus groups was carried out by an independent research organisation. The eventual location and characteristics of the ten focus groups is given in Tables 2 and 3.

7. Local authorities are obliged to map childcare supply and demand for it through the process of carrying out Childcare Sufficiency Assessments. These documents provide a useful source of data about childcare usage.

Table 2: Location and characteristics of each focus group

Group Number	Location of group	Characteristics of area	Characteristics of participants	Number and gender of participants
1	Inner London	Urban, economically mixed, multi-ethnic	Disadvantaged young mothers, all single parents	4 female
2	Inner London	Urban, economically mixed, multi-ethnic	Mixed group of working and non-working parents with recent labour market participation	3 female
3	South east England	Rural with market towns in vicinity. Ethnically homogeneous	Professionals, all employed by government agency. Staff have all moved to area to work for this employer who had a family friendly working policy	5 female 1 male
4	Rural eastern England	Rural with small market towns in vicinity. Ethnically homogenous, but recent arrival of migrant workers	Low income working parents	3 female 1 male
5	Outer London	Urban, deprived, multi-ethnic	Parents attending a welfare-to-work programme	5 female
6	Doncaster	Urban, deprived	Students and low income parents with higher level qualifications	4 female
7	Non-urban west Midlands	Market town in rural area	Working and non-working parents of disabled children	6 female
8	London	Urban, economically mixed, multi-ethnic	Working and non-working parents of disabled children	8 female
9	Inner Manchester	Urban, deprived inner city	Parents who are migrants or from minority ethnic communities	7 female
10	Manchester	Urban	Lower and middle income local authority staff	4 female 1 male

Total = 50 parents

To ensure that the interviews probed all relevant issues and that data collection was consistent in all the interviews, we compiled an interview guide. Daycare Trust staff ran all the focus groups, each one of which lasted about 90 minutes. Daycare Trust staff also made contextual notes at each focus group.

All interview participants were guaranteed anonymity. Participants received an incentive in the form of a voucher redeemable in a wide range of stores. Voucher incentives were used, rather than a cash payment, so as not to place additional demands on parents receiving welfare benefits.

Table 3: Number of individuals with specific characteristics in the focus groups

Parent or child characteristic	Number of parents with characteristic
Parents in full-time work	11
Parents in part-time work	14
Unemployed parents	5
Student parents	6
Economically inactive parents	16
Atypical hours employment	5
Unstable and changeable employment	11
Low income households (benefits or Working Tax Credits)	27
Middle income households (c£35,000-£70,000 gross household income)	17
High income households (over £70,000)	6
Single parents	8
Men	3
Member of established minority ethnic group	10
Recent international migrant	7
Internal migrant	6
Parents of infants aged under 2 years	11
Parent of children aged 2 – 4	23
Parent of children aged 5 – 10	31
Parent of child aged 12 and over	13
Rural/small market town resident	10
Parent of disabled children	14

Analysis of interview data

All of the focus groups were taped and with the interviews later transcribed in full. We then analysed the data, adopting methodologies that drew from both a framework analysis approach and grounded theory methodologies (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994; Strauss 1987).

While we did have some broad research questions, we did not have a detailed set of observations or hypotheses about informal childcare that we intended to test in our focus groups. In this respect we drew from grounded theory methodologies where researchers do not start with an hypothesis that they later test. Rather, grounded theory analysis starts with qualitative data, which is then coded into different themes, concepts and linkages. New data is constantly compared to previously analysed data. The findings from the coded data are then used to draw conclusions and develop theories.

A framework analysis approach helped us in our coding strategy. Framework analysis is a method where data is coded into an hierarchy of main themes and a succession of sub-themes.

The focus group data was also analysed by two Daycare Trust staff independently of each other. This ensured that the effect of researcher bias and pre-conceptions were minimised. The process we used comprised:

1. Familiarisation with the data – undertaken by two Daycare Trust staff, independently of each other. We listened to the tapes, read the transcripts and reviewed contextual notes.

2. Initial annotation of transcripts with ideas, concepts and emerging themes.

3. Identification of a list of main coding categories, for example, childcare needs for those who work atypical hours.

4. Researcher comparison of the main categories. The two researchers analysing the data compared the main categories each had identified. After discussion a final list of main categories was agreed. The two researchers also started to think about the broad trends that emerged across the groups.

5. Initial data coding – using the main categories, the interview data was then coded into the main categories.

6. Identification of sub-themes. This was done individually.

7. Further coding, followed by analysis of text. Here the two researchers looked at:

   - Semantics – what do participants actually mean?
   - Context – the conversation and dynamic that has preceded somebody making a comment
   - Frequency – how often are comments made?
   - Intensity – the depth of feeling attached to comments. How strong is their wording?
   - Consistency – do individual participants demonstrate a change in opinion?
   - Specificity – do respondents talk hypothetically or provide detailed personal comments?
   - Big ideas – what broad trends emerge across the groups?

8. Comparison of detailed analysis and writing of research findings. The two researchers compared their detailed analysis of each interview and worked together to draft the findings of the research project. The researchers identified the broad trends that emerged across the groups, as well as specific findings that related to specific groups of parents. The lead researcher then drew up final conclusions.

Parents' and carers' surveys

In order to supplement our qualitative data, Daycare Trust undertook two face-to-face surveys of parents and of carers who provided informal childcare. We opted for a face to-face-approach over a telephone survey because the complex nature of childcare packages and the decisions that accompany them necessitated the use of showcards. We interviewed 1,413 parents through an omnibus survey conducted by Ipsos MORI over three weeks in January 2011. Daycare Trust drafted survey questions which were incorporated into Ipsos MORI's omnibus survey. The survey questions were piloted with parents and Ipsos MORI staff also gave feedback on the questions used. The final survey schedule is given in the appendices.

The survey used a quota sampling method to recruit a representative sample of about 6,000 adults and young people over 15 years old. It was conducted face-to-face and in the homes of respondents who were selected from 180 different sampling points in England, Scotland and Wales. (The survey was not undertaken in Northern Ireland). Based on a random location design, the interviewing for the survey was spread over a large geographical area rather than clustered around a few centres. At each sampling points ACORN[8] was used to estimate the numbers of different population sub-types specific to each interview location. By using this proven sample design we were able to represent all sub-sectors of the population at a national and regional level.

A screening question was asked by field workers in order to identify parents who were involved in childcare decision-making, with 1,413 survey respondents out of 6,000 screened in and participating in Daycare Trust's part of the omnibus survey. All the interviews were carried out using computer-assisted personal interviewing questionnaires that produced survey show cards and enabled the interviewer to log and transmit data straight back to Ipsos MORI.

In addition to the Parents' Survey, we also interviewed 857 carers through an omnibus survey conducted by Ipsos MORI over three weeks in December 2010 and January 2011, during different weeks to our parents' survey. Again, Daycare Trust drafted questions which were incorporated into Ipsos MORI's omnibus survey (the questions used are given in the appendices). The same sampling method to the Parents' Survey was used to recruit 6,000 adults across England, Scotland and Wales. Two screening questions were used to identify respondents who provided informal childcare to family and friends, or who had worked as an unregistered nanny, au pair or babysitter during the last six months. From these two screening questions we identified 857 survey respondents who participated in Daycare Trust's part of the omnibus survey.

It is important to note that the survey of informal carers is not comparable with the survey of parents. They were two separate groups of people and no relationship should be assumed between them.

For both the Parents' and Carers' surveys all interviews were balanced on MOSAIC and final tables were rim weighted according to the latest National Readership Survey figures for a nationally representative sample. The weighting factors include age, sex, social grade, working status, region and ethnicity. Rim weighting is superior to the more common cell weighting since it is far less likely to distort the data.

All analysis of the Parents' and Carers' surveys was undertaken by Daycare Trust. We undertook univariate and bivariate analysis, the latter looking at aspects of informal childcare use by social grade, parental work status and so on. As

8. ACORN is a geodemographic segmentation tool that segments the population in a given area into different sub-groups.

there are complex relationships between many of the variables in the two surveys – for example, proximity to carer, childcare use and parental income – we also undertook logistic regression analysis to see which factors were most strongly associated with the use of informal childcare.

A significant proportion of our analysis aimed to explore differences in the use of informal childcare or its provision by social class. The social class variables that were used in the survey were derived from the Nation Readership Survey. It is a slightly different variable to the old Registrar General's social class variables, as it enables all members of a household to be classified according to the occupation of the chief income earner.

All bivariate analyses were subjected to Pearson's chi-square tests or Fisher's exact tests to ensure that the observed differences were statistically significant. Unless otherwise stated, all the relationships presented in this report are statistically significant at a cut-off of 95 per cent. This means we can say with 95 per cent certainty that the differences between groups are the result of a genuine difference as opposed to occurring by chance.

Reflections on the research methodologies

We felt it was important to reflect and learn from our research methodology. The focus group interviews enabled us to gather much valuable data about informal childcare. However, it was challenging in many of the focus groups to focus the discussion on informal childcare. Rather, many parents wanted to tell their 'horror stories' about formal childcare, for example, anecdotes of childminder negligence, or extreme difficulties finding formal childcare. The difficulties finding affordable and appropriate formal childcare were themes that dominated the two focus groups we undertook with parents of disabled children.

Designing the Daycare Trust Parents' and Carers' surveys was challenging. Budgetary constraints limited the length of the survey – we were limited to about 30 questions in addition to the profiling questions undertaken for all parts of the omnibus survey. However, parents may use different forms of childcare for different children. As we did not have time to interrogate childcare patterns by individual child, we decided to focus on the youngest and oldest child in the family in the Parents' Survey.

Both the Parents' Survey and the Carers' Survey would have benefited from each including an extra wave of the omnibus survey. This would have taken the Parents Survey to about 2,000 respondents and the Carers' Survey to about 1,200 respondents. Larger surveys would have enabled more robust analysis of some groups, for example young informal carers, carers from minority ethnic communities and families with a disabled child. (Just 35 out of 857 carers were from a minority ethnic group, a number too small to break down for further analysis.) However, our research budget did not permit us to extend the surveys to secure more participants.

Finally, in both the focus groups and the surveys we asked questions about childcare. Yet parental understandings of what comprises childcare may vary, with some informal childcare, for example, a summer holiday break spent with grandparents, not being viewed as childcare. Looking older childcare may also not be understood or described as childcare by grandparents or parents. This may lead to the under-reporting of informal childcare arrangements in surveys, as well as its absence from spontaneous discussion in interviews.

4. Patterns of informal childcare use in Britain

Both our surveys and qualitative research aimed to establish patterns of use of informal childcare in Britain. We wanted to explore how many parents use this type of childcare, how they use it and for how long. We also wanted to examine who provides informal childcare and whether there are differences in the use of childcare provided by grandparents compared with childcare provided by other relatives, friends or neighbours. This chapter draws on research and provides a unique overview of patterns of informal childcare use in Britain.

The chapter highlights the importance of informal childcare, with nearly half (47 per cent) all the families in our survey using this form of care in the previous six months. The chapter argues most families use informal childcare to help them work. For many parents, too, informal childcare was the only care available outside normal office hours and parents who work at these times were much more likely to use informal childcare.

Nearly half of British parents use informal childcare

Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey showed that 47 per cent of parents who had a role in deciding childcare had used informal childcare for their youngest or oldest child over the last six months (Figure 4). This finding is comparable with smaller quantitative studies as well as data from the Department for Education's Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, of which the 2009 survey indicated that 41 per cent of families in England used informal childcare.

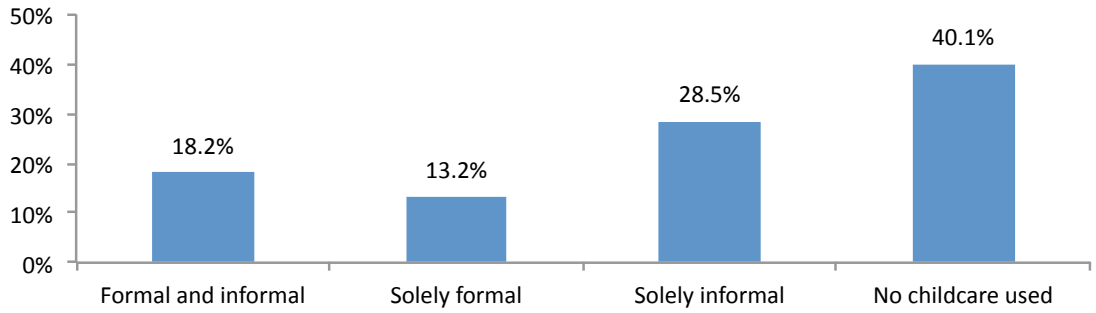
Data from Daycare Trust Parents' Survey data (Figure 4) shows that a greater proportion of families use informal childcare rather than formal provision. Some 47 per cent of families used informal childcare, compared with 31 per cent who had used formal provision for their youngest and oldest children over the last six months. However, the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents indicated greater use of formal childcare, with 55 per cent of families using formal childcare in the reference week. This difference may be accounted for by survey differences, with Daycare Trust's Parents Survey looking at childcare use over a six month period, while the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents refers to a single reference week. Our survey also asked questions about childcare for the youngest and oldest children, so we may have missed some childcare used by middle children that would have been captured in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents. Not withstanding this discrepancy, our survey highlights the importance of informal childcare in the lives of British families.

Grandparents provide most informal childcare

Informal childcare can be provided by many different individuals: relatives, friends, neighbours or babysitters, au pairs and unregistered nannies. Daycare Trust's Parents Survey indicates that grandparents are the group most likely to provide informal childcare to families living in Britain. Figure 4 draws from Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey and provides a breakdown of the different informal carers used by parents for their youngest and oldest child. It highlights the importance of grandparents over all other forms of formal and informal childcare.

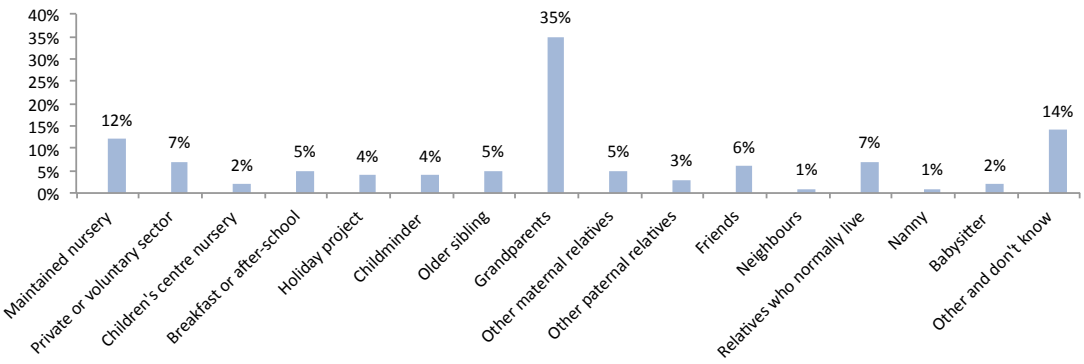
Some 35 per cent of parents who used non-parental childcare used grandparents as their main form of childcare for their youngest child (see Figure 5). Data on the number of hours of informal childcare used by parents in a typical week also supported the assertion that grandparents are the main providers of informal childcare.

Figure 4: Formal and informal childcare use for youngest and oldest child over the last 6 months



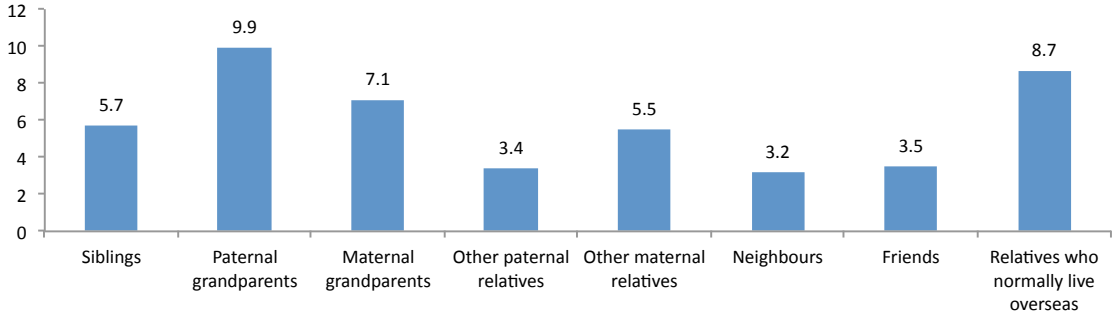
N = 1,413 parents with sole or joint responsibility for childcare decisions
Source: Daycare Trust Parents' Survey

Figure 5: Childcare used in the last 6 months for youngest child

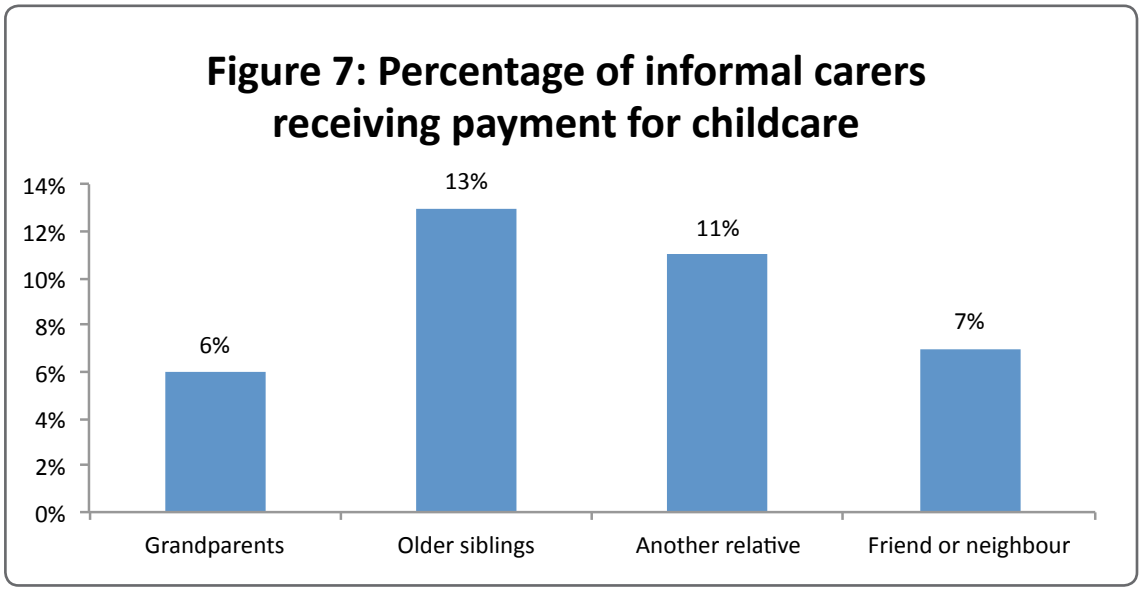


N = 1,413 parents with sole or joint responsibility for childcare decisions
Source: Daycare Trust Parent's Survey

Figure 6: Mean hours of informal childcare provided by different carers every week, as reported by parents



N = 1,413 parents with sole or joint responsibility for childcare decisions
Source: Daycare Trust Parents' Survey



N = 1,413 parents with sole or joint responsibility for childcare decisions
Source: Daycare Trust Parents' Survey

While families' use of informal childcare varied considerably, grandparents tended to provide the most hours of childcare (Figure 6).

Many families also depend on their friends, but for shorter periods of time

While the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents gives some data on informal childcare use, this survey, as well as the majority of local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, does not breakdown informal childcare provision by different types of provider. Rather, most Childcare Sufficiency Assessments aggregate non-professional informal childcare as 'friends and relative childcare'. Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey provides the first detailed breakdown in Britain of informal childcare provision by different provider. Based on data from Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey, we estimate that in Britain:

- 6 per cent of parents had used their friends to provide childcare for their youngest child in the six month reference period
- 5 per cent of parents use maternal relatives other than grandparents to provide childcare for their youngest child
- 3 per cent of parents use paternal relatives other than grandparents to provide childcare for their youngest child.
- 5 per cent of parents have used a child's older siblings to provide childcare for their youngest child[9].

The above data highlights the importance of childcare provided by friends in some families. However, our qualitative and quantitative research shows that friends rarely provide the hours of childcare that grandparents provide. Figure 6 shows other that siblings, relatives, friends and neighbours provide fewer hours of childcare than do grandparents. While these three groups make a lesser contribution to the provision of informal childcare (in terms of hours) than do grandparents and siblings, the care offered by friends and relatives other than grandparents is a significant contribution to childcare in some families. Our qualitative research also showed that where friends and more distant relatives are used to provide informal childcare, they are used for fewer hours every week, or in one-off and emergency situations. It breaches social norms to use friends for long periods of time, or on a regular basis without payment or reciprocal arrangements being in place.

9. All figures refer to the six month reference period of the survey

"I haven't family but I have got friends here, but I cannot put my child every day to other people. If they are your friends, maybe they will do that [childcare] for one day, two days, but after that, you know, you will have to pay them"

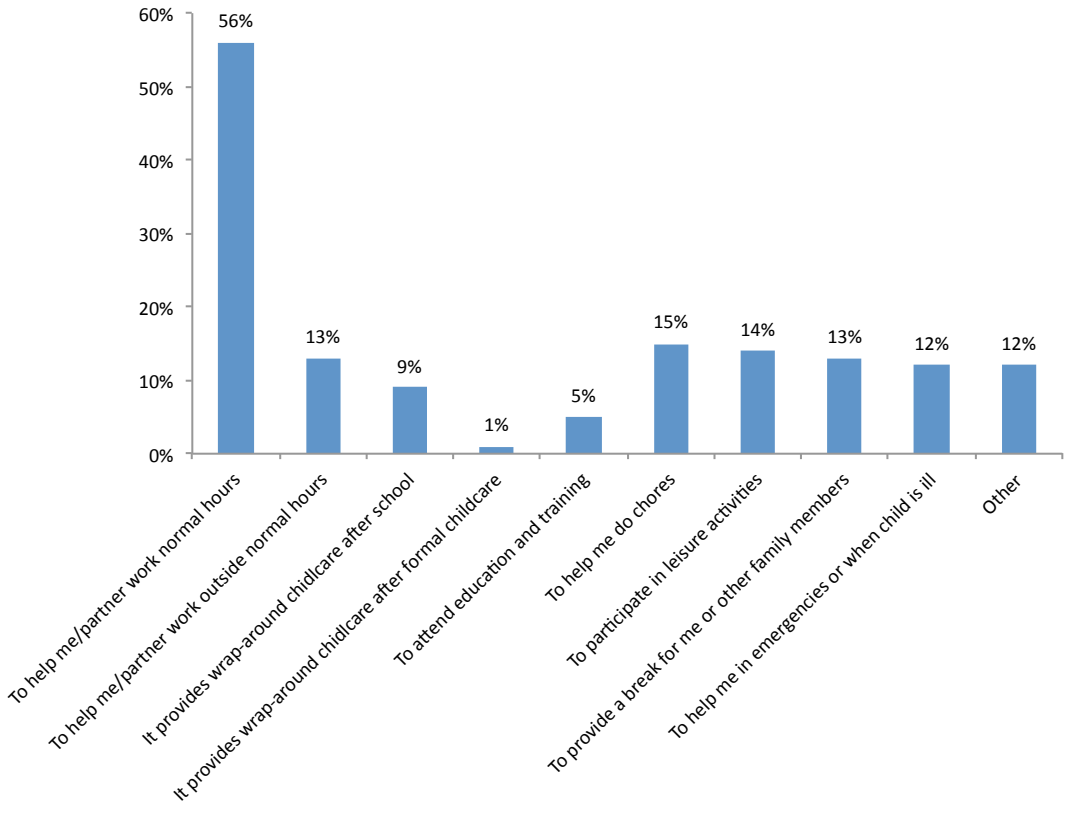
(Mother, Manchester).

While friends and non-grandparent relative carers are an important form of support for some parents, we believe that they are no substitute for formal childcare and very rarely offer the unconditional and reliable informal childcare that many grandparents provide. This assertion has significant implications; it highlights the importance of disaggregating informal childcare in research such as the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents and Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, as different types of carers perform different roles in relation to informal care. It is also important to ensure that extra and flexible formal childcare is made available to social groups that have less access to informal childcare from grandparents.

Informal childcare is inexpensive

Previous research has suggested that many families use informal childcare from relatives and friends because it is either free or low cost (Brown and Dench, 2004). The 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents suggested that just eight per cent of families paid informal childcare providers, although there were differences in the likelihood of receiving payment among different types of informal carers (Figure 7). Where carers received payment it was most frequently to pay for refreshments, travel, or as a fee (Department for Education, 2010).

Figure 8: Main reasons that informal childcare is used for youngest child



Source: Daycare Trusts Parents' Survey.

Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey suggested that a slightly higher proportion of informal carers received payment than indicated in the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents where only eight per cent of informal carers received payment. While informal childcare was free for 48 per cent of parents, another 46 per cent of parents paid up to £10 per week to carers. Just 6 per cent of parents paid more than £10 per week to the informal carers that they used.

Our qualitative research supported this finding with about half of the parents we interviewed receiving free childcare and the remainder making some payment or payment in kind. The interviews indicated that where friends and relatives were paid in cash, payments aimed to cover the cost of transport, refreshment and outings. Other parents rewarded informal carers with gifts or other services.

"I buy her [grandmother] a bunch of flowers every so often or a bottle or cook her something but that's about it, that's all I…you know I can't…I never pay for it (Mother, West Midlands).

And my neighbour at the time, I relied on her to collect the child and she wouldn't take money from me, so what I started to do because I was working at Marks and Spencer's, I'd buy everything at the end of the day, I'd just bring her like three or four bags worth of shopping and just dump it on her doorstep. I would look after her son while she was at work. And my friend would do the same for me, my daughter would stay over with her. But she moved earlier this year and this does not happen any more."

(Mother, London).

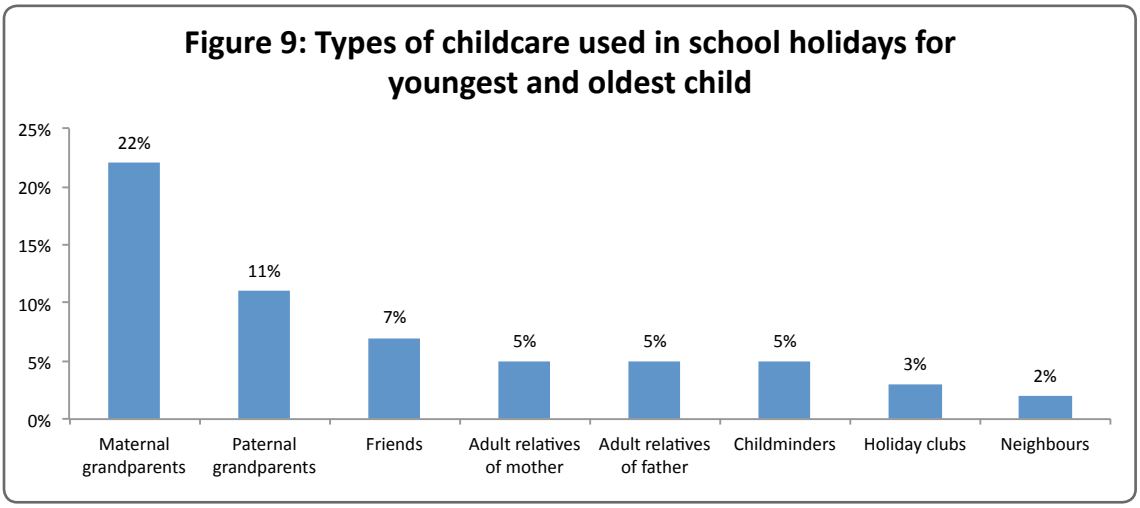
Parents mostly use informal childcare to help them work

Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey, Carers' Survey and qualitative research have enabled us to explore why parents use informal childcare and how they use it. All three components of the research showed that parents mostly use informal childcare to help them work, both during normal office hours and outside these times. Daycare Trust's Parents Survey indicated that 56 per cent of parents used informal care to help them work during normal office hours and 13 per cent of parents used informal childcare to help them work outside normal office hours (see Figure 8). This view was also supported by data drawn from Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey, with 49 per cent of informal carers stating that they provided informal childcare to enable parents to work.

Daycare Trust's Parents' survey as well as our interviews with parents showed informal childcare was also used by parents who were looking for work, studying or undertaking job-related training. The Parents' Survey showed that 5 per cent of parents used informal childcare to help them study. Previous research has argued that student parents are a group particularly likely to use informal childcare, as short-term childcare for a limited number of weeks in the year can be hard to find (Land et al, 2000).

Parents need childcare for their own well-being

While the majority of informal childcare is used to enable parents to work, it is important to realise that parents use informal childcare for other reasons, often connected with their own well-being. Some 15 per cent of parents in Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey used informal childcare to help them undertake chores and 13 per cent used informal childcare to enable them or other family members to take a break, with this trend supported in our interviews.



N = 1,413 parents with sole or joint responsibility for childcare decisions
Source: Daycare Trust Parents' Survey

"Sometimes when you have one or two children you just need a break. You know sometimes it's just like two hours you need to sleep or you need to be able to go shopping without them screaming. We need to be free just for two hours. Me, you know, for two years now, I didn't be alone. I didn't have someone but when my sister came from France, now she looks after them sometimes."

(Mother, Manchester).

The parents of disabled children particularly valued the respite offered by informal carers. The flexibility of informal care was appreciated, because much formal respite care was felt to be inflexible.

"He does receive residential overnight respite care which is fantastic and has been a life-saver for our family – but it's very rigid. We are told when he can go, and there's no flexibility so in terms of if an emergency comes up or if you just want to pop out for a meal with your husband or take your older son to the pictures to see a film that he wants to see, we are totally reliant on grandparents."

(Mother, West Midlands).

How parents use informal childcare

We were interested to explore how parents use informal childcare. Both our literature review, Parents' Survey and qualitative research suggesting parents use informal childcare in six different ways:

1. As the main form of childcare for babies and toddlers
2. In combination with nursery care to ensure an affordable childcare package for pre-school children
3. As after-school and holiday childcare for school-age children
4. In an emergency, for example when a child is ill
5. As a short-term form of childcare for parents who are studying or looking for work, needing a break or undertaking chores
6. As main form of childcare for parents who work atypical hours

Overall, we think there is little evidence to show that informal care displaces formal childcare among children aged between three and five. Those parents who solely used informal care largely had children of school age or had very young children who were too young to qualify for the free early education offer for three and four year olds.

1. As the main form of childcare for babies and toddlers

Daycare Trust's Parents Survey shows that the parents of the youngest children are more likely to use grandparents as informal carers. Daycare Trust Parents' Survey indicated that 13 per cent of all parents used informal childcare for their youngest child because they felt that their child was too young to attend nursery. In the focus groups, too, a significant number of parents of children under two talked about using informal childcare – usually grandparents – because they felt that their child was too young for a nursery.

"I discussed it a lot with my partner and he was adamant that he didn't want our son to go into nursery until he was about two and he wanted me to look after him or my mum."

(Mother, south east England).

"One of the reasons we chose not to put him into a nursery is because – mainly like the emotional side. For him, like when he's fallen over to give him cuddles. He's quite cuddly and if he hurts himself he likes a quick kiss and things like that you know. So I was worried how a nursery would do it because obviously they've got to stay professional and do things a certain way – whether they'd be allowed to cuddle him for as long as they need."

(Mother, Doncaster).

2. In combination with nursery care for pre-school children

Both the qualitative and quantitative research highlighted a large number of parents who used a package of formal and informal childcare. This most often comprised formal childcare in a nursery alongside informal childcare provided by a friend or a relative. Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey indicated 18 per cent of parents had used a package of formal and informal care for their youngest and oldest child during the last six months. Many parents also talked about using a package of nursery and informal childcare in the qualitative research. Combining both formal and informal childcare enabled children to benefit from the educational and social opportunities of nursery care, as well as the intimacy of home-based care. Equally importantly, a mixture of informal and formal care provided an affordable childcare package for many families.

"Cost is the big deciding factor on how much nursery you use. Having my mum look after him two days and two days nursery means I could afford to have Friday off to be with him. My son really loves nursery and he really loves having nanny come over as well."

(Mother, south east England).

3. As wrap-around and holiday childcare for older children

A third significant way that way that parents use informal childcare is to provide before-school, after-school and holiday childcare for older children. Daycare Trust's Parents Survey showed that nearly a quarter of families (22 per cent) with children aged between six and nine used maternal grandparents to provide holiday childcare (Figure 9).

Our qualitative research also highlighted the importance of informal childcare in families with school-aged children.

"She used to go to my gran's. My grandmother even used to pick her up from primary school sometimes for me when I had meetings and things. She used to come all the way from Pimlico, to do that."

(Mother, London).

"I could only afford to send one to the after-school club, so they both go to the grandparents. Both go to their father's nan, she picks them up after school."

(Mother, east of England)

"Six weeks is a long time not to come to school. I am sort of stuck for a week at each. I've got to depend on parents to look after mine for the six week holiday"

(Mother, east of England).

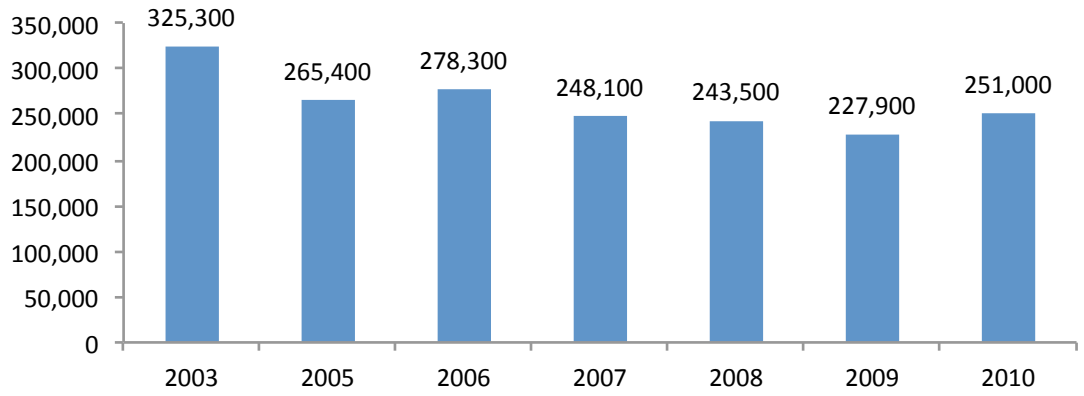
The high cost of after-school and holiday clubs appeared to be a factor that pushed parents to using informal childcare after-school and in the holidays. Daycare Trust research on the costs of formal childcare suggests that the average cost for an after-school club was £45 per week and £95 per week for a holiday club (Daycare Trust, 2011; 2012). While cheaper than a nursery, after-school and holiday childcare is often used for the seven years that a child is in primary education, so costs can mount up. But some parents also indicated that they preferred home-based informal care at the end of the school day, although such sentiments were often used to justify childcare decisions that were largely based on practical constraints such as the affordability of care.

"It's nice just to say that you're going to your nan and granddad's after school, whatever, and you can just chill out and relax."

(Father, east of England).

While there appears to be little displacement of formal childcare by informal childcare for children aged between three and five, we believe that there is evidence that informal care displaces formal care for school-aged children.

Figure 10: Sessional childcare places in England, 2003-2010



N=1,413
Source: Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey

4. As emergency cover

As Figure 8 shows, 12 per cent of parents stated that they used informal childcare in emergencies. Our qualitative research, too, indicated that informal childcare was a key back-up in emergencies, when a child was ill, or when formal childcare was not available.

"Family and friends are my emergency back-up because with the two boys here invariably one of them is ill at some point and gets sent home. If they have the slightest temperature they're not allowed to be here [at the nursery] and if I'm at work I need that back-up plan because they can't come here, so that's when I use grandparents even if it means they have to have a day off work."

(Mother, east of England).

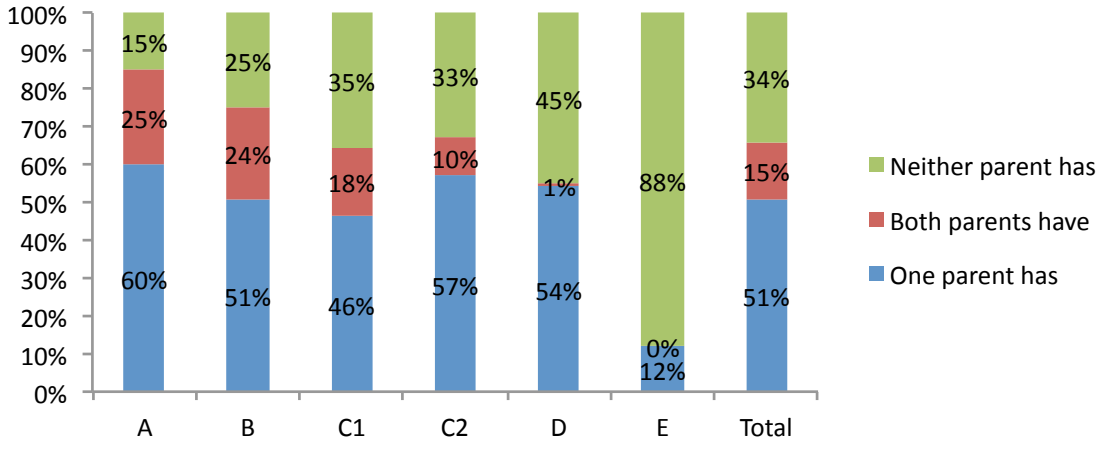
While there are a number of emergency babysitter and childminder services across Britain they tend to be very expensive, charging at least £10 per hour. Moreover, not all emergency babysitting services are registered with Ofsted and its equivalents outside England, so low income parents will not be able to claim support through Working Tax Credits. Moreover, parnents can be reluctant to place their children in the hands of a stranger. Most parents, therefore, tend to use informal childcare in emergencies. Parents, particularly single parents, who do not have these support networks may face real difficulties when their children are ill, or when regular childcare is not operating. These parents may, therefore, find it more difficult to hold down a job. Daycare Trust would like to see local authorities take a more active role in developing emergency childcare provision. Where a child is in good health, vacant places in nurseries could be used to provide emergency childcare. There are also a small number of home-based childcare services, providing registered affordable childcare in the family home. The now-defunct Southwark-At-Home Childcare Service uses registered childminders and other trained staff to provide care in the child's own home, either on a regular basis or in emergencies (see below). We would like to see more of these initiatives.

5. As a short term form of childcare for parents who are studying or looking for work or need to undertake chores.

As noted above, our qualitative and quantitative showed informal childcare was also used by parents who were looking for work, studying or undertaking job-related training. Student parents and those looking for work usually require childcare for a limited number of weeks in a year, and often for a small number of hours each week. Informal childcare was also used by parents who needed to undertake chores. For these two groups of parents, formal childcare is often difficult to find. Childminders and nurseries are often unwilling to care for children for short or irregular periods of time. Sessional crèches are often oversubscribed, whether they are crèches in colleges and universities, sessional provision offered in the voluntary sector or in children's centres. (Data from the Childcare and Early Years Providers Surveys shows that sessional provision has the highest occupancy rate of any form of childcare). There have also been many recent media reports of closures of sessional childcare provision. Some of this provision has not been well-managed from a financial perspective, but public spending cuts have also caused some colleges, universities and children's centres to close sessional crèches. Data from the Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey shows that the number of childcare places in sessional crèches fell after 2003 (partly as a consequence of the expansion of full-time nursery provision). The numbers of places in sessional crèches fell again in the years 2007 – 2009, although the number of places increased in 2010 (Figure 10). It will be interesting to monitor future trends in sessional crèche provision, as public spending cuts continue.

Our qualitative work suggested that parents who do not have informal childcare support networks or access to sessional crèches find it much more difficult to study or look for work.

Figure 11: Atypical hours working in couple households



Source: Department for Education data from Childcare and Early Years Providers Surveys, 2003-2010.

"I've found when I go in there, even when I come here with my baby, there's no facility, my son'll be crying and I'll be – I can't job search, that's out of the question when I appear to Job Search – I can't, because he's crawling now and starting to walk - he's all over the place."

(Mother, London).

The reliance on informal childcare among student parents and those looking for work raises important policy issues. We need to ensure that there is sufficient sessional childcare for parents who do not have informal childcare. We believe that local authorities should have specific strategy to support sessional childcare, incorporated within their Childcare Sufficiency Assessment reports. Such a strategy might include advice on financial sustainability for childcare providers. We also feel that nurseries could make better use of vacant places, offering them to parents who need emergency or short-term forms of childcare.

6. As main form of childcare for parents who work atypical hours

Daycare Trust's research showed that informal childcare is used by parents who had atypical working patterns. In the Daycare Trust parents' survey, 13 per cent of parents were using informal childcare to enable them to work outside normal office hours (Figure 9).

Daycare Trust's definition of atypical hours work comprises two types of work pattern:

- Work outside the normal office hours of 8am to 6pm. Atypical hours working encompasses a wide range of work patterns, including extended hours, evening or weekend work and shift work. Long periods spent travelling to work can also turn 'typical' hours into a typical hours.

- Irregular working patterns, including agency working, zero hours contracts, workers who have only been able to secure short-term employment, some of those working in the informal economy and some self-employed workers.

Previous attempts to quantify atypical hours working suggests that between a third and a half of all workers have atypical work patterns. Hogarth et al (2000) suggested that only 35 per cent of employees work 'standard' hours, with Woodland et al (2002) concluding that nearly half of single parents are working atypical hours. There is also evidence that atypical hours employment is growing as a consequence of the 24/7 society. (Hogarth et al, 2000).

Both our quantitative and qualitative research interrogated atypical hours work patterns, as well as childcare strategies for those working atypical hours. In Daycare Trust's Parents Survey some 43 per cent of respondents in couple households had worked atypical hours and 37 per cent of the respondents' partners had done so (Figure 12). Atypical hours working was strongly associated with social grade with the likelihood of working atypical hours falling down the social grades (Figure 12). This latter trend is supported by Labour Force Survey that shows managers, senior officials and professionals most likely to work longer hours (Rutter and Evans, 2011a).

Daycare Trust's Parents Survey asked the reasons for working atypical hours, with shift work being the most frequently cited reason, with 41 per cent of those in families where one or both parents worked atypical hours citing shift work as the main reason for atypical working patterns (Figure 12). Those in social grades C1, C2 and D were most likely to work shifts. Overtime was another frequently cited reason for atypical hours work patterns. There was a strong association between social grade and unpaid overtime, with those in social grades A and B being more likely to cite unpaid overtime (both planned and unplanned) as a reason for atypical hours working.

In most parts of Britain there is very little formal nursery care available outside the hours of 8am to 6pm, so parents resort to other childcare strategies – shift parenting and informal childcare. Shift parenting – where parents work at different times to manage childcare – is one response to atypical hours working. Previous research about childcare strategies for those who work atypical hours suggests that parents often rely on informal children to enable them to work (Bryson et al, 2006; Le Bihan and Martin, 2004; Singler, 2011; Statham and Mooney, 2003). Analysis of Daycare Trust's Parents Survey supports and refines this assertion.

Daycare Trust's Parents Survey shows that families where both parents work atypical hours are the most likely to use informal childcare (Table 4). The proportion of families using informal childcare where just one parent works atypical hours is just slightly higher than in families where neither parents work atypical hours.

Daycare Trust's Parents Survey and much other research suggests family income appears to affect informal childcare strategies adopted by those who work atypical hours. Those with higher incomes use informal childcare, or if this is not available may employ a nanny. Families with lower incomes working atypical hours solely use informal childcare. Our research strongly indicated that those unable to command high salaries who have no relatives or social networks to provide free informal childcare may not be able to take up employment that involves working outside normal office hours. This assertion emerged as a major theme in five of our focus groups.

Table 4: Formal and informal childcare use among parents with different work patterns

	Working pattern		
Type of care used for youngest child	**One parent works atypical hours**	**Both parents works atypical hours**	**Neither parents work atypical hours**
Formal			
State Nursery School	5.4%	8.2%	8.8%
Nursery or reception class in a primary school	3.9%	6.4%	5.6%
Private of voluntary sector nursery*	7.9%	12.3%	5.3%
Nursery in a children's centre	1.4%	2.3%	2.9%
Breakfast or after-school club run by a school**	3.6%	8.2%	1.9%
Breakfast or after-school club run by another organization	2.0%	1.2%	1.1%
School holiday project*	4.1%	7.0%	2.4%
Registered childminder*	3.2%	7.0%	2.7%
Informal			
Grandparents *	27.1%	35.9%	25.1%
Other adult relatives **	6.1%	12.9%	6.1%
Child's older brother or sister	5.0%	5.8%	2.4%
Neighbours	1.4%	0.0%	1.3%
Friends**	6.3%	11.2%	4.0%
Nanny in own home	0.7%	2.4%	1.3%
Nanny share at a friend's home	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Babysitter	1.8%	1.8%	1.3%
Au pair, mother's help or other domestic worker	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Grandparents or other adult relatives who normally live outside the UK	2.0%	3.5%	1.6%
Other	4.1%	1.8%	2.4%
*= p<.05, **=p<.01, ***=p<.001			
Base: two-parent families			

"If I get an interview and it says oh 9 to 5.30, or 6 or 7, I can't do it, because I've got to pick my little girl up from the after school club that closes at 5.45. I've lost that on a job, and I'm constantly like finding that. Like I went for an interview yesterday and I got there and there was loads of people there and I got down to the final eight and everything and she was like 'yeah because obviously, you're going to have to do 7 o'clock starts' and all this like and I'm just thinking well, I just literally can't do it."

(Mother, London).

"I think the childcare hours are actually suited for people that work 9 to 5 in offices and that probably got higher skilled jobs than what the average single parent would have. I don't think they're really catering for people like us."

(Mother London).

We believe that in an economy where the demands to work outside normal office hours are increasingly frequent, the absence of informal childcare support networks severely restricts the range of employment available to parents. In low income families the presence of informal childcare can mean that the difference between employment and poverty. We think that central and local government should be more active in developing formal childcare outside normal office hours, for those who cannot use informal childcare – a view held by parents that we interviewed. Parents that we interviewed wanted nurseries to be open a little longer – between 7am and 7pm. However, they also voiced the desire for their children to be cared for in a home environment late in the evening or over the weekend.

"In London I think they should definitely do the out-of-hours service because if you look on London as a city anyway there's a lot of people that don't come from London that live in London, people come from a different place or a different country, who might not have family like you've been brought up in London. Even if they were open from like 7 'til 7 or something - an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening, it would help me so much that I would be getting jobs from 9 'til 6"

(Mother, London).

"You know like how you have nannies yeah – obviously nannies that are live in or au pairs..well, we need someone just to put them to bed and stuff like that"

(Mother, London).

Daycare Trust would like to see a much greater acknowledgement of the needs of parents who work atypical hours in local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments. Very few local authorities acknowledge atypical working patterns in their Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, few act to fill this sufficiency gap (Singler, 2011). A small number of local authorities have tried to address the needs of parents who work outside normal office hours or at irregular intervals. The now-defunct Southwark At Home Childcare Service used registered childminders and other trained staff to provide care in the child's own home, either on a regular basis or in emergencies. At-Home Childcare is a Nottingham and Sheffield-based company providing registered childminders who work in the child's own home, out of hours. We would like to see the replication of these initiatives across Britain.

Key points

- In Britain nearly half (47 per cent) parents use informal childcare.
- Parents mostly use informal childcare to help them work, often at times outside normal office hours, when there is little formal childcare available.
- Parents use informal childcare in different ways. It is often used as the main type of care for babies and toddlers, or in combination with nursery care to ensure an affordable childcare package. Informal childcare is used as after-school and holiday childcare for school-age children, or in an emergency when a child is ill. Parents who need short term childcare because they are studying or looking for work also rely on informal childcare because short-term formal childcare can be difficult to find.
- Parents who do not have informal childcare support networks find it much more difficult to study or look for work, as short-term childcare can be difficult to find.
- There is little evidence to show that informal childcare displaces nursery provision, but there is some evidence to show that parents use informal childcare instead of after-school and holiday clubs.
- Grandparents are most likely to provide informal childcare, with over a third of parents (35 per cent) of parents who used non-parental childcare using grandparent childcare as their main form of childcare.
- Many children are also cared for by their siblings, aunts and uncles, family friends and neighbours, but these carers usually provide fewer hours of childcare than grandparents.

5. Factors associated with the use of informal childcare

Almost all previous research on the use of informal childcare has highlighted significant differences in families' use of informal childcare. Previous studies indicate that the groups that use the most informal childcare include single parents, low income working parents, those working atypical hours and parents whose childcare needs vary from week to week. Families who use the least informal childcare include recent internal and international migrants, those from minority ethnic groups and workless families (Department for Education, 2010; Rutter and Evans, 2011a). The differential use of informal childcare among different income groups, as well as among those of different ethnicities has led to significant spatial differences in the use of informal childcare across Britain, with areas with high proportions of internal and international migrants using the least relative care (Rutter and Evans, 2011a).

One of the aims of our research was to elaborate upon previous research and identify which factors are most strongly associated with informal childcare use. This chapter draws from Daycare Trust's Parents Survey and qualitative research to answer this question. Some of these factors or social characteristics associated with the use of informal childcare are inter-related. For example, part-time working will impact on a parent's use of childcare, but it will also impact on parental income that will in turn impact on childcare usage. In order to disentangle these factors, and understand the relative importance of each, this chapter presents a logistic regression model, built from the data in the Daycare Trust Parents' Survey.

Respondent characteristic variables associated with the use of informal childcare

Parents' use of informal childcare was analysed across a range of characteristics (variables). These were:

- atypical hours working
- flexible work opportunities
- family work status
- gross family income
- the family's social class
- work status of the respondent
- distance to the nearest adult relative
- family type
- respondent's ethnicity
- number of children.

The selection of these variables was informed by a previous literature review[10], as well as emerging findings from the 10 focus groups in this phase of the research. We sub-divided these characteristics into four broad categories: employment conditions characteristics, socio-economic characteristics, socio-spatial characteristics and family characteristics.

Tables 5-8 build on information presented in the previous chapters and present Daycare Trust Parents' Survey data on informal childcare use by the above characteristics. In these tables all the cross tabulations were subjected to chi-square tests to determine whether or not the observed levels of informal childcare usage across the variable levels (for example, social grades or income) was the result of chance or a genuine relationship.

Variables shaded in red in Tables 5-8 were not found to have a statistically significant relationship with the use of informal childcare. We have included them here for illustrative purposes however, as the lack of statistical significance does not necessarily mean there is no relationship in the actual population; it simply means that we were not able to discern a statistically significant relationship in our sample.

Informal childcare use by employment conditions

Daycare Trust's Parent Survey shows a significant association between family work status and informal childcare use (Table 5). In two parent households, parents were more likely to use informal childcare when both were working, with 47 per cent of parents using informal childcare where both parents worked. Working single parent households were almost as likely to use informal childcare as two parent households where both parents worked. Crucially, this supports evidence given in the previous chapter that shows that most parents use informal childcare to help them work.

Table 5 shows that almost half of two-parent families in which both parents worked atypical hours had used a relative to care for their child. As previously noted, this is reflective of the lack of formal childcare available outside normal office hours. The rate of informal childcare use dropped to 35 per cent for those families in which only one parent had to work atypical hours – most likely a reflection of the ability of the parent not working atypical hours to cover the gaps in formal provision.

Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey also probed flexible working arrangements, such as job-shares or term-time contracts. We found no statistically significant relationship between the use of a family member for childcare and families' flexible working arrangements, with levels of use relatively similar across all levels of the variable.

10. See Rutter and Evans, 2011a

Table 5: Informal childcare use by work status and employment conditions characteristics

	Used a family member for informal childcare			
	Yes %	No %	Weighted base	Unweighted base
Atypical working hours[11]				
Both parents do	47	53	171	144
One parent does	35	65	558	488
Neither parent does	31	69	375	354
Flexible working arrangements[12]				
Both parents do	34	66	116	98
One parent does	36	64	520	455
Neither parent does	35	66	493	457
Family working status				
Couple – both working	42	58	754	632
Couple – one working	23	77	194	207
Couple neither working	15	85	52	62
Single parent – working	39	61	149	132
Single parent – not working	27	73	137	151
Work status of respondent[13]				
Full-time (30+hours per week)	37	63	661	542
Part-time	46	54	287	261
Self employed	31	69	80	67
ILO economically inactive	26	75	47	55
Unemployed	24	76	106	113
Housewife	23	77	232	254

Source: Daycare Trust Parents' Survey

11. Base = two parent households

12. Base = two parent households

13. Base = all households using childcare

Informal childcare use by income and social grade

A number of previous research studies suggest that less affluent families may use more informal childcare as they are less able to afford formal provision (see, for example, Brown and Dench, 2004). However, this view is challenged by data in the Department for Education's Childcare and Early Years' Survey of Parents that shows that the likelihood of using informal childcare decreases down the income bands, with parents in the lowest income band of under £10,000 per year least likely to use informal childcare (see Figure 2). Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey supports the latter trend. Table 6 presents data on the use of informal childcare by income and social grade. It clearly shows that families with a gross income of £0 to £11,499 were least likely to use a relative to care for their child. Families with a gross income of £11,500 to £17,499 were the second least likely group to have used a relative carer and families earning £30,000 to £49,999 were the most likely to have used informal childcare.

Although income is no longer seen as an accurate proxy for social class or social grade, a similar pattern of informal childcare use was observed across respondents' social grades[14]. That is to say, families in the highest social grade bracket were most likely to have used informal childcare in the past six months and those in the lowest social grade bracket were least likely to have used it. An explanation for increased likelihood of informal childcare use among families in higher income bands and social grades is that those in professional and managerial occupations – and receiving higher incomes – are most likely to have atypical work patterns or work longer hours (Skinner, 2003).

Table 6: Informal childcare use by socio-economic characteristics

	Used a family member for informal childcare			
	Yes %	No %	Weighted base	Unweighted base
Gross earnings				
£0 to £11,499	25	75	223	180
£11,500 to £17,499	32	68	148	104
£17,500 to £29,999	36	64	187	103
£30,000 to £49,999	43	57	227	115
£50,000+	37	63	198	105
Social grade				
A	46	54	69	51
B	37	63	302	229
C1	38	63	379	386
C2	38	62	322	309
D	27	73	217	169
E	20	80	125	149

14. As already noted the social grading scale used here was derived from the Nation Readership Survey. It is a slightly different concept to social class and enables all members of a household to be classified according to the occupation of the chief income earner.

The trend that low income families are less likely to use informal childcare trends seemingly contradicts the body of qualitative evidence that has demonstrated the importance of informal childcare for less affluent working families (Brown and Dench, 2004). The finding also challenges views, articulated in Childcare Sufficiency Assessments and in studies such as Land et al (2000) and Brown and Dench (2004) that working class women offer a great deal of mutual support in the form of informal childcare to their relatives and close friends. There is also a widespread notion of the tight-knit working class community, where families offer mutual support to each other – perhaps a nostalgic view that harks back to the days of *Family and Kinship in East London* (Young and Wilmott, 1957). While some low income women do have these support networks, regular informal childcare offered by friends is more likely to involve parents and carers from higher social classes. This raises some policy issues, as economically deprived parents are less likely to be able to capitalise on the benefits of support networks. We feel that is important that policy makers do not make assumptions about the levels of mutual support in different communities and acknowledge that in some areas many parents do not have access to informal childcare. Staff working in children's centres may wish to consider how they might help parents develop reciprocal support networks.

Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey also enabled us to look at the use of different types of informal care across different social grades. Families are most likely to use grandparents as carers. As might be expected the likelihood of using informal care is strongly associated with social grade, both in term-time and in the school holidays (Table 7). The lowest users of grandparent childcare are parents in social classes D and E.

Previous studies of informal childcare suggests that parents are much more likely to use maternal rather than paternal relatives to provide informal childcare (Brown and Dench, 2004; Chan and Elder, 2000; Wheelock and Jones, 2002). Table 7 supports this to some extent but highlights another trend – very few parents in social classes D and E use grandparent care from paternal grandparents. In our sample, 63 per cent of parents in social grade E and 35 per cent parents in social grade D were single parents. This observation may account for the lesser use of care from paternal grandparents in social grades D and E, but there may be also issues about gender relations and the relationship between a mother and her mother-in-law that require further exploration.

Focus group interviews enabled us to explore further the reasons for this privileging of maternal over paternal relatives. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data we concluded that there were two reasons that contributed to the greater use of maternal relatives and friends. First, in some families decisions about childcare are largely taken by the mother who will tend to favour friends and relatives that she knows the best – a group most likely to be her own relatives and friends. National data showed that nearly a quarter of households (23 per cent) with dependent child were single parent households in 2010, with 92 per cent of single parent families with dependent children headed by women[15]. While many single parent households remain in contact with the ex-partner's family and friends, significant proportions do not. Additionally, family breakdown can fracture relationships. Where a mother has little or no contact with the friends and relatives of her children's father, or where that contact is troubled, she is less likely to use paternal friends and relatives to provide informal childcare:

"Basically I'm from Ipswich originally, her Dad's family is from South London and like the only one of them that really wants to babysit – her Dad never does – he lives in like Surrey."

(Mother, London)

15. ONS data from Labour Force Survey, 2010

Table 7: Percentage of parents using grandparent care for youngest child

	A	B	C1	C2	D	E
% paternal grandparents providing childcare in school holidays	7	10	14	16	5	2
% paternal grandparents providing childcare in term-time last 6 months	19	15	14	16	5	3
% maternal grandparents providing childcare in school holidays	17	24	20	22	13	12
% maternal grandparents providing childcare in term-time in last 6 months	19	22	20	19	16	12

N= 1,413
Source: Daycare Trust Parents' Survey

We were also able to analyse the use of friends to provide childcare in different social grades. Again, Daycare Trust's Parents Survey indicates that the use of friends to provide childcare declines down the social grades, with parents in social grade E being least likely to use their friends to provide childcare (Figure 12). Data from Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey also shows that reciprocal childcare arrangements also decline down the social grades. While reciprocal childcare arrangements account for about eight per cent of all informal childcare arrangements, they are significantly less common in social grades D and E, with just one per cent of informal childcare arrangements in social grade E arising out of a reciprocal arrangement.

Our qualitative research provided a more elaborate understanding of friends' role in providing informal childcare. Parents in all social classes talked about using their friends to provide childcare. However, there were marked differences in how parents from different social classes used their friends to provide childcare. Parents whose occupation indicated social grades D and E talked about using friends only in emergency situations, and often felt guilty in making this request.

"You do just feel a bit of a hindrance asking friends and that don't you? Because most of your friends have got children of their own as well."

(Father, eastern England).

Among middle class parents, childcare provided friends was often planned in advance and appeared less likely to be used in emergency situations. It was sometimes a regular occurrence and in two of the focus groups parents talked about 'play dates' where children went to a friend's house after school to play and have supper, often reciprocating this arrangement at a later date. In the qualitative research parents saw play dates as informal childcare. Friends who provided childcare were either friends of the child from school, or friends of the parents who had children of a similar age. Overall, among middle class parents, informal childcare from friends was seen as a positive experience.

"Play dates are sort of informal arrangements with other parents. Picking her up after school, giving them tea and then you kind of collect them around 6 o'clock, that kind of thing… He has two friends that I can arrange play dates with."

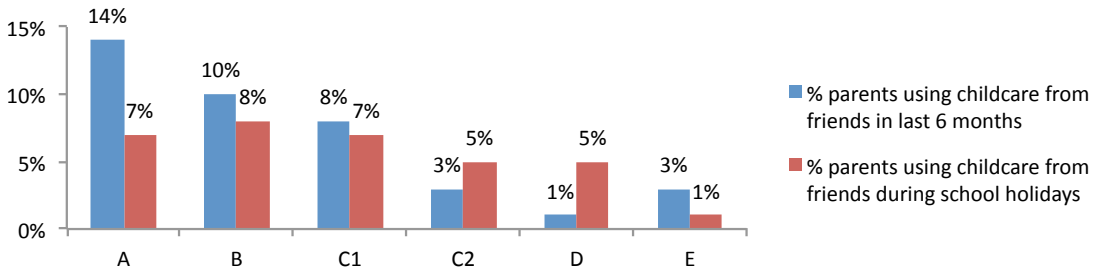
(Mother, London).

"I've got another friend, Donna – she will make a big day of it, you know it's a big treat. I think that's the difference that if you've got a friend or another relative for childcare, it is a treat."

(Mother, London).

There are a number of research studies that show that children from deprived families are less likely to visit homes of their friends (Gleave, 2009). There is also a significant ethnographic literature on social norms in relation to friendships. The latter research shows that working class families are more likely to meet their friends in public spaces and less likely to invite them into the private sphere of the home. The lesser use of play dates and informal childcare from family friends among working class families may be a manifestation of the latter trend, as well as issues such as housing overcrowding. This finding raises a number of important issues in relation to children's social development. Arguably, play dates are an important opportunity for socialisation outside the family. Family friendships cemented by play dates are a form of social capital in families and a source of mutual support and community solidarity. That some children rarely visit the homes of their own and their parent's friends is an issue of concern.

Figure 12: Percentage of parents using friends to care for youngest child during last six months by social grade



N=1,413
Source: Daycare Trust Parents' Survey

Informal childcare use and socio-spatial characteristics

Research on childcare strategies across the rural-urban spectrum or according to settlement patterns is scant. Parents that we interviewed during the qualitative research talked of their difficulties finding formal childcare and the challenges of travelling to it. This suggests that informal childcare may be more widely used in rural areas, to fill in gaps in formal provision. However, we did not find any statistically significant difference in the use of informal childcare between rural, suburban or urban areas, although we found lower levels of informal childcare use in metropolitan areas (28 per cent compared with 37 per cent for rural and suburban areas). The lower likelihood of using informal childcare in metropolitan areas may be a consequence of additional factors affecting families' use of informal childcare in big inner cities, for example, household income or migratory movements that sever childcare support networks.

We also wanted to explore the relationship between informal childcare use and the proximity of informal carers, specifically family members. Unsurprisingly, families living closer to adult relatives were more likely to have used informal childcare (Table 8). Although this

Table 8: Informal childcare use by socio-spatial characteristics

Settlement pattern				
Rural	37	63	259	223
Suburban	37	63	433	380
Urban	35	65	455	424
Metropolitan	28	72	267	266
Proximity to nearest carer				
Within 5 miles	44	56	767	718
6 to 30 miles	40	60	228	201
31 to 150 miles	24	76	110	92
Over 150 miles	13	88	64	52
Outside the UK	5	95	75	73
No living relatives	7	93	96	93

finding is predictable, we felt it was important to include in our analysis as practical limitations – such as proximity to carers – are sometimes overlooked by policy makers. By including these practical constraints in our analysis, we are acknowledging that informal childcare may not be a choice for some families. As we later discuss, this is an important step to take in order to build better understanding of childcare decision-making.

Informal childcare use and family characteristics

We also examined how informal childcare use was associated with different family characteristics: household composition, ethnicity and the number of children in the family (Table 9).

While most of the trends identified in Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey support those established by the Department for Education's Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, one area of marked difference was the respective levels of informal childcare used by single-parents compared with two parent families. Whereas Daycare Trust's Survey found no statistically significant difference between levels of informal childcare use for two-parent and single-parent families (35 per cent and 33 per cent respectively), the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents found that 40 per cent of single-parents families had used informal childcare compared with just 31 per cent of two-parent families (Department for Education, 2010).

Due to the small number of respondents from specific minority ethnic groups, we were forced to group all minority ethnic respondents together in order to generate a group big enough for statistical analysis. Although this is a crude aggregation of a diverse range of people, it enables us to show that white UK parents were more likely than their counterparts from minority ethnic groups to have used informal childcare in the past six months – 36 per cent compared with 23 per cent respectively. A likely explanation for this is that parents from minority ethnic groups are more likely to come from families with a history of migration, a process that often severs support networks who can offer childcare.

Another issue to consider when examining levels of informal childcare use is the number of children in a family. One might assume that parents with more children would be more likely to use informal childcare as they try to juggle a number of different, complicated arrangements and meet the costs of formal provision for two, three or more children. However, we found that parents with more children were less likely to use informal childcare. This may possibly be explained by the lesser likelihood of formal employment among mothers of larger families.

Table 9: Informal childcare use by family characteristic

	Used a family member for informal childcare			
	Yes %	No %	Weighted base	Unweighted base
Family type				
Two parent	35	65	1127	1010
Single parent	33	67	285	283
Ethnicity				
White	36	64	1238	1102
BME	23	77	171	188
Number of children in family				
1	39	61	605	545
2	34	66	558	499
3 or more	25	75	248	247

Further analysis

The informal childcare use trends presented in Tables 5-9 provide an empirical snapshot of the extent to which informal childcare is used by different social groups. Although informative, it is important not too draw too many conclusions from these findings. Some of the differences in informal childcare between social groups may be caused by a number of factors. For example, the lower use of informal childcare in metropolitan areas may not be caused by the settlement pattern *per se*, but rather unemployment among women who live in inner city areas. To better understand the relationship between employment, socio-economic, socio-spatial and family characteristics and the use of informal childcare we need to disentangle the interaction of these variables with each other.

Figure 13 shows the simple relationship between ethnicity and informal childcare use. But we would not want to make predictions about whether or not a family is likely to use informal childcare based on their ethnicity as the relationship depicted in Table 9 and illustrated in Figure 13, as this model does not take into account a range of other factors that may influence the use of informal childcare. Income levels differ across different minority ethnic groups and income, too, may influence the use of informal childcare. Figure 13 shows a more intricate understanding of this relationship, where the relationship between ethnicity and informal childcare use is mediated by another variable, in this case, income.

Figure 13: Simple relationship between ethnicity and the use of informal childcare

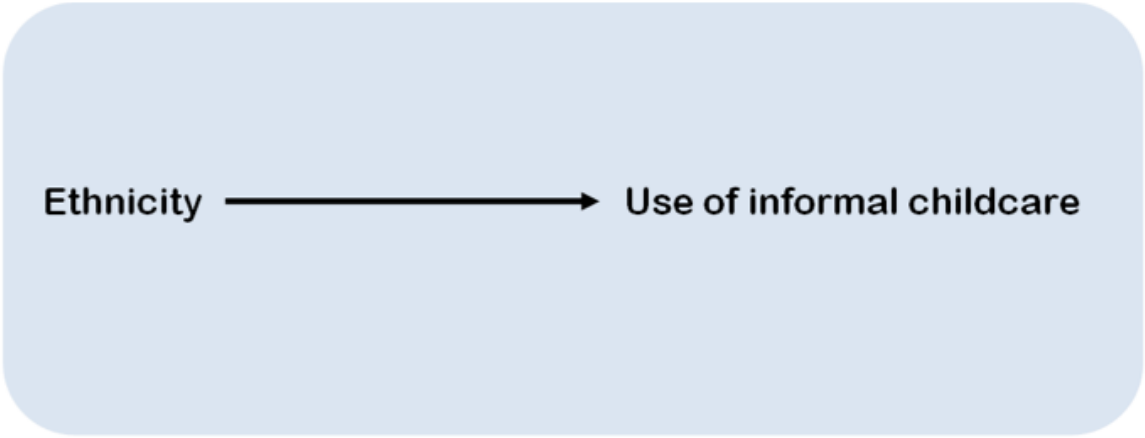
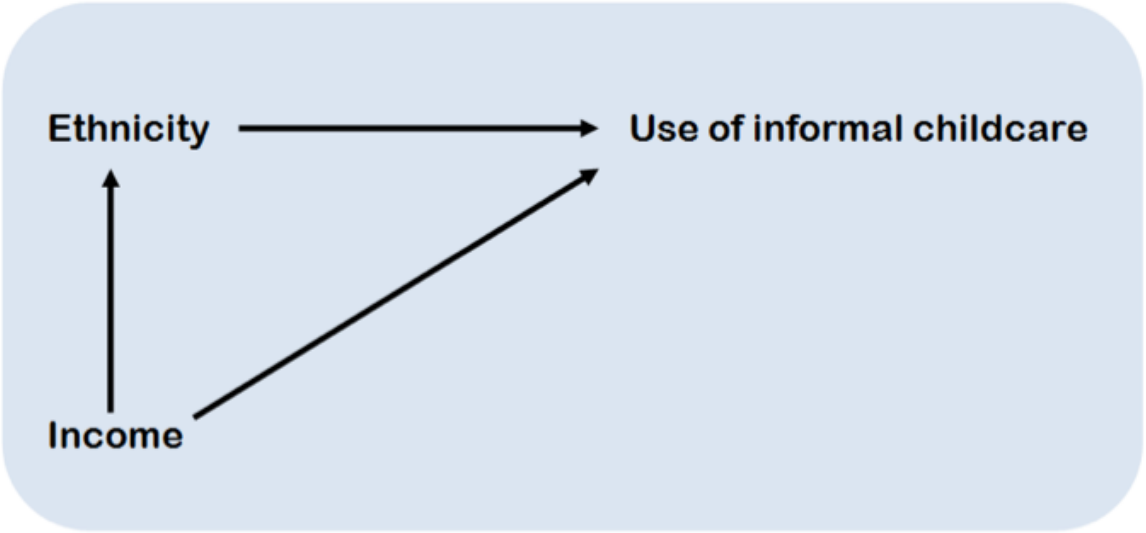


Figure 14: Relationship between ethnicity and the use of informal childcare while controlling for income



In Figure 14, a third variable, 'income' is influencing the relationship between ethnicity and the use of informal childcare. That is to say that white British parents and parents from minority ethnic groups likelihood of using informal childcare may differ depending on their income.

Income also has its own relationship with informal childcare use which will be mediated by other factors such as economic activity.

If we were to draw a diagram showing the interrelationship between all the variables in our dataset we would be left with an incomprehensible web of relationships. In order to untangle the relationship between employment, socio-economic, socio-spatial and family characteristics and the use of informal childcare, we fitted a logistic regression model to the data.

Our logistic regression model

Regression models are statistical models that allow us to predict the value of an outcome variable (in this case whether or not someone used informal childcare) based on the values of a set of predictor variables, for example, work status, income and so on. They also enable us to isolate the effect of each predictor variable by controlling for the effects of the other variables in the model. This means, for example, that we are able to assess the likelihood of using informal childcare for different ethnic groups, while controlling for the mediating effects of the other variables, such as work status, in our model. We are also able to assess whether this relationship is statistically significant as well as assess the reliability of our findings (Agresti, 2002).

A logistic regression model is a specific type of regression model designed to accommodate dichotomous outcome variables. Our outcome variable, whether or not somebody used informal childcare, is dichotomous as it has two mutually exclusive outcomes: a family either used informal childcare, or the family did not.

For the purpose of our analysis in this chapter, the use of informal childcare use was defined as whether or not parents had used a family member to care for their youngest child in the previous six months. This definition has some limitations. It does not capture all informal childcare used by families as it focuses only on care received by the youngest child[16]. The analysis also aggregates all relative care together, although there is some evidence that in the provision of childcare families use grandparents in a different way to other relatives. Additionally, the definition excludes informal childcare provided by friends and 'professional' informal carers such as nannies or au pairs.

We chose this narrower definition of informal childcare for two reasons. First, we excluded nannies, au pairs and paid babysitters as we wanted to examine arrangements in which no provider-customer relationship was present. Second, we also wanted to examine the association between informal childcare use and the proximity of parents' nearest adult relative as we felt this was a vital practical consideration that had not yet been captured in previous studies. To include non-family members in the analysis would have complicated our analysis in relation to proximity.

Using the findings given in Tables 5-9, we identified a number of statistically significant predictors of informal childcare use. We then built a logistic regression model, using these variables. We then ran a number of tests to see how well the data fitted the model. For example, we subjected the model to a number of post-hoc tests to identify outlier variables (statistical anomalies) and ensure that no individual cases were exerting undue influence over the model results. Further information about these tests is given in the appendices.

Table 10 shows the results of our analysis. The variables shaded in red were not found to be statistically significant predictors of informal childcare use but are included here to present the full findings from our analysis[17].

It is important to note that when undertaking logistic regression, we are in effect fitting a statistical model to real world data. Although we use the model to control for the confounding effects of all the variables in our model, we cannot however control for the effects of variables not included in our analysis. As we cannot prove that there are no outside variables influencing our model, we must assume their existence (Agresti, 2002). For this reason we make no claims to causality on the basis of the findings presented here.

16. As we have previous noted, financial constraints limited the number of questions in Daycare Trust's Parents Survey, so we decided to focus on the youngest child.

17. Some variables from tables 1, 2 and 3 were not included in the regression model as they referred to different populations (i.e. work characteristics that were collected for two-parent families only) and measured similar things to variables already included in our model (i.e. family status was very similar to family working status).

Table 10: Logistic regression model for use of informal childcare by a family member

	95% Confidence Interval		
Social Grade (E)	**Odds ratio**	**Lower**	**Upper**
A	*** 7.38	2.451	22.197
B	** 3.63	1.444	9.127
C1	* 2.91	1.221	6.954
C2	* 2.44	1.008	5.922
D	1.59	.652	3.882
Family work status (Couple – both working)			
Couple – one working	*** 0.48	.323	.716
Couple – neither working	0.72	.252	2.073
Single-parent – working	1.16	.691	1.950
Single-parent – not working	0.81	.363	1.786
Distance to nearest adult relative (within 5 miles)			
6 to 30 miles	* 0.67	.457	.990
30 to 150 miles	*** 0.21	.112	.387
Over 150 miles	*** 0.19	.084	.415
Outside the UK	*** 0.04	.010	.176
No living relatives	*** 0.07	.027	.188
Number of children (1)			
2	** 0.64	.467	.880
3 or more	0.65	.418	1.024
Ethnicity (White)			
BME	1.05	.580	1.907
Annual income (£50,000+)			
£0 to £11,499)	0.74	.403	1.359
£11,500 to £17,499	0.84	.463	1.510
£17,500 to £29,999	0.83	.504	1.369
£30,000 to £49,999	0.98	.627	1.520
Settlement pattern (Metropolitan)			
Rural	1.19	.696	2.024
Suburban	1.52	.950	2.430
Urban	1.24	.772	2.004

***= p<.000, **=p<.001, *=p<.05

The odds ratios presented in Table 10 show the ratio of the odds of each group using informal childcare compared to the reference category (in bold italics) for that variable. Numbers above one indicate a higher likelihood of informal care use and numbers below one indicate a lower likelihood of informal childcare use than the reference category. For example, the odds ratio for social grade A (7.38) means that families in social grade A were 7.38 time more likely to use informal childcare than those in social grade E.

Significant predictor – spatial proximity to relatives

Daycare Trust's Parents Survey interrogated the proximity of parents' closest adult relatives. Table 8 has previously shown that there is a correlation between the spatial proximity to carers and the use of informal childcare. Our logistic regression model shows that the proximity of the nearest adult relative is strongly associated in itself with the likelihood of using informal childcare (Table 10). Families whose nearest relative lived between 6 and 30 miles away were 0.67 times less likely to use informal childcare as ones whose relatives lived within 5 miles. Families whose nearest adult relative lives outside the UK were 0.04 times as likely to use informal childcare than families whose nearest adult relative lived within five miles; or, to put it another way, families whose nearest adult relative lives within five miles were 25 times more likely to have used an informal carer than those whose nearest adult relative lived outside the UK.

Our logistic regression model identified distance to nearest adult relative as the most significant predictor of informal childcare use[18]. Families living within five miles of their nearest adult relative were approximately five times more likely to have used a family member to care for their child in the last six months than families whose nearest adult relative lived between 30 and 50 miles away. This is irrespective of other characteristics.

Although these findings may not seem surprising, policy documents, including local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, rarely examine social networks and proximity issues. Rather, the use of informal childcare is typically presented in three main ways: as a preference over formal provision; as a financially viable alternative to formal provision; and to fill gaps in formal provision for parents working atypical or extended hours (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). Central to these representations about the use of informal childcare is the notion of choice. Even where parents use informal childcare because they cannot obtain formal provision, informal childcare is presented as a choice made by parents who have some agency in their childcare decisions. The fact that informal childcare use is less likely to be used by families without nearby social support points to practical limitations that restrict parents' agency in much the same way that cost limits parents' choice of formal provision.

The strong association of a family's proximity to their nearest adult relative and their use of informal childcare further contributes to a discourse grounded in qualitative literature that acknowledges the role of families' circumstances in limiting, shaping and justifying different childcare decisions. French scholar Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) concept of *habitus* is a very useful tool for understanding the political relevance of these practical limitations. Briefly, *habitus* refers to the attitudes and dispositions developed by people as a consequence of, and in reaction to an accumulation of their personal experiences. These experiences are to some extent mediated by the circumstances people find themselves in. As a result, different people develop different moral codes, attitudes, common senses and rationalities. Consequently, what may seem like common sense to some parents may be viewed as bad parenting by others (Gillies, 2007). And, by extension, what may seem like illogical or poor childcare decisions by some, may seem like perfectly logical and rational decisions to others.

18. That is to say that we found a statistically significant difference between all levels of the variable and the base category 'within 5 miles'

Our qualitative research highlighted many instances of how practical constraints inter-played with and influenced attitudes and rationalities to informal childcare. The mother quoted below talked about how the cost of formal childcare meant that she could not afford to send both her children to an after-school club. This mother went on to explain that it was better for her children to be looked after by grandparents because it was more relaxed than an after-school club.

"I could only afford to send one to the centre (after-school club) and the other to the grandparents, so both go to their father's nan, she picks them up after school…. that's just nice sometimes for the kids to actually just you know be at nanny's, kick back, settee, that's a bit more relaxed I guess sometimes because they have a little nap and that. More home comforts and that."

(Mother, East of England).

We discuss childcare decision-making in greater depth in Chapter Seven.

Significant predictor – work status

A family's work status was also found to be a significant predictor of informal childcare use. However, we only found a statistically significant difference in the use of informal childcare between two-parent families in which both parents work and two-parent families in which one parent works, with the former more than twice as likely to have used a family member to care for their child in the last six months. This mirrors findings in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents that showed two-parent families with two working parents were more than twice as likely to use formal provision than two-parent families in which only one parent worked (Department for Education, 2010).

Significant predictor – number of children in the family

A further variable in our model found to be a statistically significant predictor of informal childcare use was the number of children in a family. Again, our findings are similar to those indentified in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents which showed that families with fewer children are more likely to use informal childcare, after controlling for other factors such as work status (Department for Education, 2010). This was surprising given what we know about the complexity of childcare arrangements for families with more than one child. We would expect larger families would use more informal childcare. It is possible that this finding is influenced by an outside variable, such as the age of the children in the family, that we have not accounted for in our model. Parents' fear of burdening informal carers may also account for some of this surprising trend.

Significant predictor – social grade

Analysis of Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey also shows that social grade is a significant predictor of informal childcare use, with the odds of using informal childcare declining down the social grade scale. Starkly, families in social grade A were over seven times more likely to have used informal childcare than those in social grade E.

A possible explanation for these findings lies in the types of occupation categorised as social grade A. As discussed in the previous chapter social grade A incorporates higher managerial and professional roles that often require work outside normal office hours. Parents in social grade A are arguably more likely to work atypical hours that necessitate the use of informal provision.

Interestingly, income in itself is not a significant predictor of informal childcare use. Our research suggests that it is the type of job that parents do, rather than income in itself, that is associated with the likelihood of using informal childcare.

Non-significant predictors

Table 10 shows that ethnicity, income and the settlement patterns were not found to be statistically significant predictors of informal childcare use in themselves. The cross-tabulation of income and informal childcare use presented in Table 6 showed that affluent families were more likely to use a family member to care for their youngest child than less affluent families. But the respective odds ratios for each income bracket show a similar pattern while controlling for other factors. The odds ratio for ethnicity suggests a very similar likelihood to use informal childcare for white British parents and those from minority ethnic groups, once other factors such as proximity to careers and work status have been taken into account. However, this does not mean that we should exclude these factors from our analysis and from policy recommendations.

Further research, based on larger sample sizes and with more detailed breakdowns of income and ethnicity may be able to shed further light on the association between these factors and informal childcare use. As such, we would recommend their inclusion in future studies and models.

Discussion

Our regression model suggests that distance of nearest adult relative, social grade, family work status, and the number of children in a family are all significant predictors of whether or not families use informal childcare. However, we must qualify these findings against the fact that some variance is left unexplained by our model. It could be the case that the variables accounting for the unexplained variance are influencing our findings.

Our findings suggest the need to build a larger body of quantitative evidence of informal childcare practices and childcare practices in general that can provide a statistical context to the relationship between parents' practical circumstances and their childcare arrangements. The need for further quantitative research is supported by the large amount of variance in informal childcare use that our model is unable to explain.

Reflecting on our analysis, we believe that any future quantitative studies must be based on large, robust samples. They would also benefit significantly from more nuanced measurement of family working patterns and family income. The collection of more data on practical issues that may limit childcare choices would also shed further light on this issue.

The links we have drawn between our quantitative findings and the rich body of qualitative literature have been useful in enabling us to interpret the statistical relationships we have identified. We believe that our findings showcase the relevance of more in-depth qualitative work that, using the concept of habitus, has shown the way in which parents' dispositions are grounded in their experiences. For that reason, we cannot place enough emphasis on the benefit of in-depth qualitative research in informing family policy and providing deeper insight into statistical trends.

Although not conclusive, the predictive strength of the proximity to nearest adult relative on informal childcare use points to the practical circumstances that influence parents' childcare decisions. Ultimately, we believe that this finding highlights the need to develop a more empathetic policy discourse around parents' childcare decisions. Concerted attempts to step into a parents' shoes and understand the context in which they make decisions about their childcare arrangements, and indeed broader parenting decisions, can only yield more progressive, engaging policy initiatives.

Key points

- Proximity to the carers was the factor most strongly associated with the likelihood of using informal childcare. Families whose nearest adult relative lives within five miles were 25 times more likely to have used an informal carer than those whose nearest adult relative lived outside Britain.
- Couple households where both parents work and working single parent households were more likely to use informal childcare.
- Households where both parents work atypical hours are more likely to use informal childcare provided by family members.
- Families with just one child are more likely to use informal childcare than larger families.
- The likelihood of using informal childcare decreases down social grades, possibly because parents in professional and managerial occupations are most likely to have atypical work patterns, involving work outside normal office hours when formal childcare is not usually available.
- Family income in itself is not a significant predictor of informal childcare use. Our research suggests that it is the type of job that parents do, rather than income in itself, that is associated with the likelihood of using informal childcare.
- The use of grandparents and family friends to provide childcare declines down the social grades. Qualitative research indicated that working class families tend to use friends in emergency situations. In middle class families childcare provided friends was often planned in advance through playdates and reciprocal childcare arrangements.
- We did not find any statistically significant difference in the use of informal childcare between rural, suburban or urban areas, although we found lower levels of informal childcare use in metropolitan areas, which may be a consequence of the nature of the population of cities.
- Policy makers need to acknowledge that practical constraints affect childcare decision-making. The proximity of an informal carer may restrict parents' use of informal childcare in much the same way that cost limits parents' choice of formal provision.

6. Further social and spatial differences in the use of informal childcare

Drawing on Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey, the previous chapter highlighted a number of factors associated with informal childcare use, including proximity to carers, social grade and parents' working status. This chapter develops some of these themes and analyses further social and spatial differences in the use of informal childcare. The chapter looks at the informal childcare in families with disabled children and subject about which previous research has been inconclusive.

While geographic proximity to carers is usually associated with the likelihood of using informal childcare, some families go against this trend and set up long distance childcare arrangements. This chapter also highlights regional differences across Britain in the use of informal childcare, with London parents least likely to use this form of care.

Informal childcare use in families with disabled children

Previous evidence about the use of informal childcare in families with disabled children is inconclusive (Rutter and Evans, 2011a; Susman-Stillman and Banghart, 2008). Some British research in has shown that parents of more severely disabled children use less informal childcare (Daycare Trust, 2007). However, a number of local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments suggest that families with disabled children use greater amounts of informal childcare than other families, because suitable formal childcare is difficult to find.

Daycare Trust Parents' Survey and our qualitative research enabled us to examine the use of informal childcare in families with disabled children. Our interviews highlighted the difficulties that parents of disabled children face in finding suitable formal childcare for them, an issue highlighted in almost all previous British studies about this group of children (Daycare Trust, 2007; KIDS, 2011; NatCen, 2005).

"She [childminder] started to care for him, but on the day that he had his first fit, she said 'no way, I'm not going to deal with this. So she gave up. I think she panicked, although I did explain to her what to do."

(Mother of a child with epilepsy, London).

"He's quite active and he can be quite destructive when he wants to be. He can't use any mainstream, formal childcare without any one-to-one support. You know, there's a great push on extended schools at the moment and how wrap-around childcare for primary-age children, but he can't access the clubs without their having one-to-one support. Now, when he's in mainstream education he gets one-to-one support but nobody will provide one-to-one support for him at an after-school club."

(Mother of an autistic child, West Midlands).

"I'm particularly troubled by how difficult it is just to get the sort of after-school couple of hours for my disabled child. There are people queuing up for the other one."

Both our qualitative and quantitative research suggested that formal nursery provision is the most frequently used form of childcare for disabled children who are under fives years old. Daycare Trust's Parents Survey indicated that for families with disabled children who are of school age, grandparent childcare is the most frequently used form of childcare, with 27 per cent of parents of these children using grandparent childcare, albeit from a small sample of parents.

Our interviews also highlighted the importance of informal childcare provided by close relatives, usually usually grandparents, were trusted by parents to look after their disabled children. In particular, grandparents were tolerant of challenging behaviour, familiar with medical conditions or were able to provide a familiar environment and routines for autistic children who find it difficult to cope with change.

"You really need somebody who'll look after your child who doesn't mind being bitten. somebody who understands what the biting is. Somebody who's willing to understand that's not just about sort of bad behaviour."

(Mother, London)

"He knows my Mum's house, he knows my Mum and Dad. It's familiar, he feels save. You put him in somewhere that he doesn't know anybody, he can get really unsettled very quickly so informal care is fantastic because you know he's going to be safe there. He knows where the biscuit tin is, he knows where the juice is, so you know he can go straight to stuff without having to sort of like ask, which he can't really do because he's only just got some speech."

(Mother of a child with severe learning difficulties, London).

For school-aged children Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in the likelihood of using informal care between families with children with disabilities and those without (Figure 16). This trend needs to be viewed with caution as there were a small numbers of parents of school-age children with disabilities in our Parents' Survey. Interviews with parents proved more revealing. The likelihood of using grandparent to provide childcare appeared to be similar in families with and without disabled children. However, many parents of disabled children indicated that they very rarely used friends and were sometimes reluctant to use relatives other than grandparents. Parents may not trust their friends to deal with medical or behavioural problems, or their friends were reluctant to provide childcare. For children with limited mobility, friends' houses may not be accessible.

"I have a brother and sister-in-law who I love enormously, not very far away who love [D] too but I know they could not cope when he did his thing."

(Mother, London)

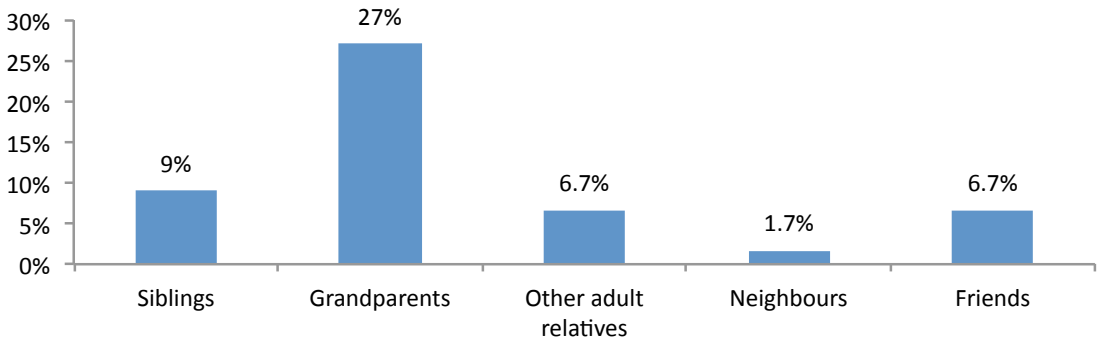
"Even when they haven't got medical needs, people are scared, of the word. Or just scared of autism, ADHD, they're just scared."

(Mother of an autistic child with additional medical needs, West Midlands).

"I mean, you don't realise how many friends have got steps into their house until you've got a child in a wheelchair."

(Mother, London)

Figure 15: Parents use of informal childcare for school aged disabled children



Source: Daycare Trust Parent's Survey

While grandparents often provide important support for families with disabled children, our interviews highlighted factors that can limit the amount of this type of support. The need for care and supervision lasts much longer for disabled children, sometimes until adulthood. At the same time grandparents' increasing age often makes it difficult to provide the care that they could previously provide when the child was smaller and they were younger.

"We have one set of grandparents locally who support us. They're both in their 70s and we are very, very conscious that we have to be very careful about not overloading them with that responsibility. I mean he's a 10-year-old who is still in pads and nappies, so changing him is quite… a lot of hand-onning to do. The trouble is grandparents get older, but our children don't necessarily develop further do they?"

(Mother, West Midlands).

Children with disabilities often need childcare until they are 18. While an increased number of nurseries and childminders are able to meet the needs of young disabled children, our research and many other studies there is very little suitable childcare for older disabled children. After-school and clubs and holiday childcare rarely catered for children over 11 years or children with severe disabilities. Parents also indicated that their children's Statements of Special Educational Needs – outlining the support children should receive – did not cover after-school childcare. Where special schools ran after-school and holiday childcare, siblings without disabilities often cannot attend. The evidence gathered in interviews indicates there is still a significant need to provide more formal childcare for children with severe disabilities.

Transnational childcare arrangements

While proximity to the carer is the most important factor determining the likelihood of using informal childcare, both our quantitative and qualitative research highlighted families that went against this trend and had set in place long-distance childcare arrangements. In some families informal childcare was provided by relatives who normally lived outside Britain and our research shows that informal childcare can span international borders. Daycare Trust's Parents Survey enabled us to estimate the extent to which parents in Britain have developed transnational childcare strategies. In a typical week, outside the school holidays, seven per cent of parents used relatives who normally live outside the UK and five per cent used it as their main form of childcare. Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in the use of overseas-domiciled relatives to provide informal childcare between those of white British ethnicity (seven per cent of our sample using this type of informal childcare) and those from minority ethnic groups (eight per cent using overseas domiciled relatives to provide informal childcare). This probably suggests that retirement migrants of white British ethnicity are providing childcare, as well as grandparents from migrant and minority communities.

Transnational childcare arrangements appear to be a consequence of increased levels of migration over the last 25 years. Today, an estimated 11.3[19]per cent of the population of the UK has been born abroad and an estimated 5.4 million British nationals live overseas (Finch et al, 2010). In some countries the population of British emigrants includes large numbers of older people. In Spain, for example, the estimated population of British nationals was 990,000 in 2008 with 53 per cent of them aged over 50 years (Rutter and Andrew, 2009). We believe that one of the outcomes of increased levels of migration is that larger proportions of parents in Britain use relatives who normally live abroad to provide childcare. Informal childcare provided by relatives who normally live abroad involves different types of migration flow, as illustrated in Figure 16.

Our interviews highlighted instances of children being sent overseas. Parents presented this decision as a necessity forced on them by the absence of appropriate formal childcare in Britain.

Figure 16: Migration flows involved in transnational care arrangements

Child cared for in Britain by a returning British national	Child sent overseas to stay with a British national UK national
Child cared for in Britain by an overseas national who is visiting Britain to provide childcare	Child sent overseas to stay with relative who has always lived abroad

"So she was in nursery for a while but then the job – it was like shift work as well so I couldn't manage that, because the nursery only operated for daytime, so I had to send her to Jamaica for my Mum to help me out there. My Mum and Dad, and they had her. They had her for a while, but then they're getting old, very old, so they sent her back, so then I had her."

(Mother, London).

Overseas domiciled relatives also travelled to Britain to provide informal childcare.

"I relied on my mother when my younger two were born two years apart. By that time I decided to reduce the hours and I paid for the fare for my Mum to come from Pakistan and stay with us and look after her grandchildren. She came for a good block of six months."

(Mother, Manchester).

Seven parents from the 50 families that we interviewed had set up transnational childcare arrangements, although this may reflect the location of our focus groups with six of them held in London and Manchester. Of the seven families with transnational childcare arrangements, three had brought overseas-domiciled relatives to Britain to care for their children. One family had sent older children abroad to grandparents during the summer holidays, three parents had sent much younger children overseas for a protracted period of time because they could not arrange childcare in Britain. That parents are still forced to endure separation from their child is a poor reflection on childcare provision in this country.

Long distance childcare within Britain

Both Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey and the qualitative research enabled us to explore the effects of internal migration on informal childcare provision. The Parents Survey indicated that 13 per cent of parents lived more than 30 miles from their closest Britain-based relative who normally provided informal childcare.

Patterns of residential mobility within this country are complex and, moreover, they have changed significantly in the last 50 years. While the industrialisation of Britain led to significant migration from the countryside to urban areas, the period since 1945 has seen the movement of people from the inner city to the suburbs and new towns. More recently, the loss of manufacturing industry, the growth of new service jobs and the expansion of higher education have led to new patterns of migration within Britain (Champion, 2005). Today, Census and NHS data suggest that about 9-11 per cent of the population move every year and that 2 in 3 moves are within 10 kilometres. While families with children are less mobile than students, some types of family are more mobile, for example those in professional and managerial occupations, those with growing children and single parents (Champion, 2005).

Residential mobility at different times in the adult life course has the potential to fracture childcare support networks, with families moving away from relatives and friends who are able to provide informal childcare. This may account for the lesser use of informal childcare in London, which we discuss later in this chapter. While residential mobility in Britain may lessen overall levels of informal childcare, our surveys and focus groups showed that some families adapt in circumstances where parents live at some distance from informal carers, by developing long distance informal childcare arrangements, either within Britain or spanning international borders.

As previously noted, our Parents' Survey showed that 13 per cent of parents were using relatives who lived more than 30 miles away to provide childcare. Our qualitative research gave a nuanced understanding of parental adaption to internal migration and how long-distance childcare arrangements are set up. These childcare arrangements involved children being sent to stay with relatives or friends, often during the school holidays.

"I don't have family local, they live in Milton Keynes, so when the holidays came, they just got shipped out and obviously they've resented me for that [humour] 'You shipped us off in the holidays' but that's what I had to do otherwise they'd be staying at home and I couldn't do that because I'd just be worrying all day long"

(Mother, London).

Grandparents or other relatives also come to stay, thus providing care in the child's own home.

"She [grandmother] comes down by train on Tuesday night and looks after the children for Wednesday and Thursday. On Friday I don't work. So it is nursery two days, grandma two days and me on Friday"

(Mother, south east England).

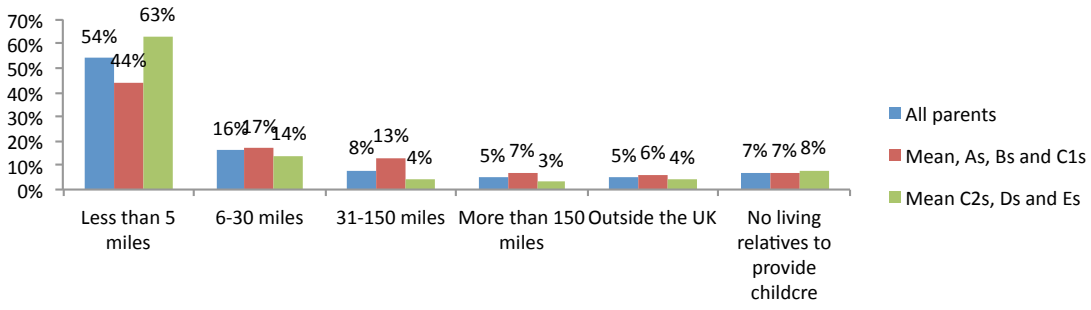
Our focus groups included a mixture of low income parents and those with higher incomes. While many of the lower income families had grandparents who lived some distance away from them, it appeared that it was only among the higher income parents that long distance childcare arrangements were used. Among low income groups even moderate distances between parents and carers appeared to limit the use of relatives to provide informal childcare.

"She's [grandmother] is about 25 minutes drive away, she is the other side of Sheffield, so it is not kind of round the corner or anything like that. We have to schedule in advance to see her and she can't care for her [grandchild]."

(Mother, Doncaster).

This finding needs to be qualified by the small number of people that we interviewed in focus groups (n=50). However, we also reviewed data in Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey (Figure 16). There appears to be relationship between social grade and distance to the main informal childcare provider. Parents in social grades C2, D and E were more likely to live within five miles of the main informal provider and less likely to use informal childcare further than five miles away (Figure 17). Our qualitative research suggests that long distance childcare arrangements require some financial outlay. Long distance childcare requires that the parent or informal carer has spare bedrooms, the use of a car or can afford efficient public transport. The greater financial outlay needed to maintain long-distance informal childcare arrangements may have a role in the greater use of this long-distance childcare among social grades A, B and C1. However, other factors may also influence this trend, such as higher residential mobility among professionals, managers and senior officials and the greater likelihood that these social classes will work outside normal office hours and thus use informal childcare.

Figure 17: Distance from home to main provider of relative care, by social grade



N = 1,413
Source: Daycare Trust Parents' Survey

Regional differences in the use of grandparent childcare

Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey showed major regional differences in the use of grandparent childcare by across Britain, with parents in Scotland most likely to use grandparent childcare and those in London and the East Midlands being the least likely (Figure 18). This finding supports a trend highlighted in the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents.

We have been unable to fully explore the causes of the greater use of grandparent childcare in Scotland, although there may be demographic causes. Scotland's population comprises a much lower proportion of international and internal migrants than do other parts of Britain. As a consequence greater proportions of Scottish parents live near a relative who can provide childcare. This assertion was born out in Daycare Trust's Parents Survey, which showed that 78 per cent of Scottish parents lived within 30 miles of a relative who provided informal childcare, compared with 54 per cent of London parents. Key informants from Scottish childcare organisations have also suggested that there is a greater expectation among families in Scotland that grandparents will provide childcare.

We have no explanation of why grandparent childcare use was so low in the East Midlands. The lesser use of grandparent care in London may be a consequence of international and internal migration – processes which often sever childcare support networks. In 2010 an estimated 34 per cent of London's population was born abroad[20]. It is also a region experiencing net internal migration of young people: many young UK-born people move to London to study then remain there to work and start their family. Data from the Office for National Statistics showed 178,100 people moving into London from elsewhere in the UK between March 2009 and March 2010.

20. Estimate from the Labour Force Survey, Quarter 4, 2010

Our qualitative research showed that many London parents were aware that their peers had less access to informal childcare than do parents elsewhere. In two of the focus groups, London parents articulated the need for extra childcare in London:

"in London I think they should definitely do the out-of-hours service because if you look on London as a city anyway there's a lot of people that don't come from London that live in London, people come from a different place or a different country, who might not have family or like you've been brought up in London."

(Mother, London).

The lesser use of grandparent childcare in London raises important policy issues. The nature of London's economy and travel patterns in the capital means there is big demand for childcare outside normal office hours. Given this, it is essential that London local authorities are aware that parents in the capital have less access to informal childcare than elsewhere in Britain. Local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments in London should account for the lesser availability of informal childcare, but they seldom do. Previous research conducted by Daycare Trust suggests that in the absence of informal childcare there is an unmet need for childcare outside normal office hours in London (Singler, 2011). Parents who neither have informal children nor can afford a nanny may be prevented from working. It is worth noting that of the regions and nations of this country, the rate of female employment is lowest in London at 61.5 per cent of the working age population between October 2011 and December 2011[21]. The cost of formal childcare and the absence of relatives to provide childcare may be factors contributing to lower female employment in the capital.

Figure 18: Percentage of parents using grandparent childcare in last 6 months by GB region and nation

N = 1,413 parents with sole or joint responsibility for childcare decisions
Source: Daycare Trust Parent's Survey

21. NOMIS labour market statistics

Key points

- Parents of school-aged disabled children often find it very difficult to find formal childcare, particularly if the child has a severe disability.
- The likelihood of using grandparents to provide childcare appeared to be similar in families with and without disabled children, but many parents of disabled children indicated that they very rarely used friends and were sometimes reluctant to use relatives other than grandparents.
- While close geographic proximity to grandparents is usually associated with an increased likelihood of using informal childcare, some families go against this trend and set up long distance childcare arrangements, within Britain or spanning international borders.
- There are major regional differences in the use of grandparent childcare across Britain with parents in Scotland most likely to use grandparent childcare and those in London the least likely. The lesser use of grandparent care in London may be a consequence of international and internal migration to the capital, processes which often sever childcare support networks.
- Central and local government policy, including Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, need to acknowledge that London parents have less access to informal childcare and ensure that there is sufficient formal provision, including affordable childcare outside normal office hours.

7. The childcare decision-making process

A key aim of our research was to improve our understanding of childcare decision-making, as there has been very little previous British research on this issue. This chapter draws on our quantitative and qualitative work and looks at parents' opinions of informal childcare, their decision-making and eventual childcare use.

The chapter argues that for parents across all social grades structural constraints such as childcare affordability, the timing of formal childcare and the proximity of that care to the home or the work place are pre-eminent factors in childcare decision-making. Subjective factors such as trust in a carer and views about childrearing tend to be invoked after a decision has been made about childcare, often as a means of self-justification for the childcare arrangement that a parent has made. As such, these values are much less significant in determining childcare arrangements.

Parental satisfaction with informal childcare

The limited numbers of studies about childcare decision-making have shown that parents of all social classes are able to articulate strong preferences for the type of childcare they want to use (Bell et al, 2005; Brown and Dench, 2004; Duncan and Edwards, 1997; Himmelweit and Sigala, 2004; Vincent and Ball, 2006; Vincent et al, 2008). We wanted to examine parents' opinions about childrearing and childcare and see how much these opinions influenced childcare decision-making and eventual childcare use.

Our quantitative research suggested that almost all parents were satisfied with the informal childcare that they received. However it should be noted that parents who have had an unsatisfactory experience of informal childcare may not use it. Thus the high level of parental satisfaction with informal childcare is an observation that needs to be viewed with some caution. Our focus group interviews with parents did suggest some selection of informal carers by parents. Some parents had an unsatisfactory experience with a particular informal carer then later declined to use this carer again. A small minority of parents felt that some potential informal carers were unreliable.

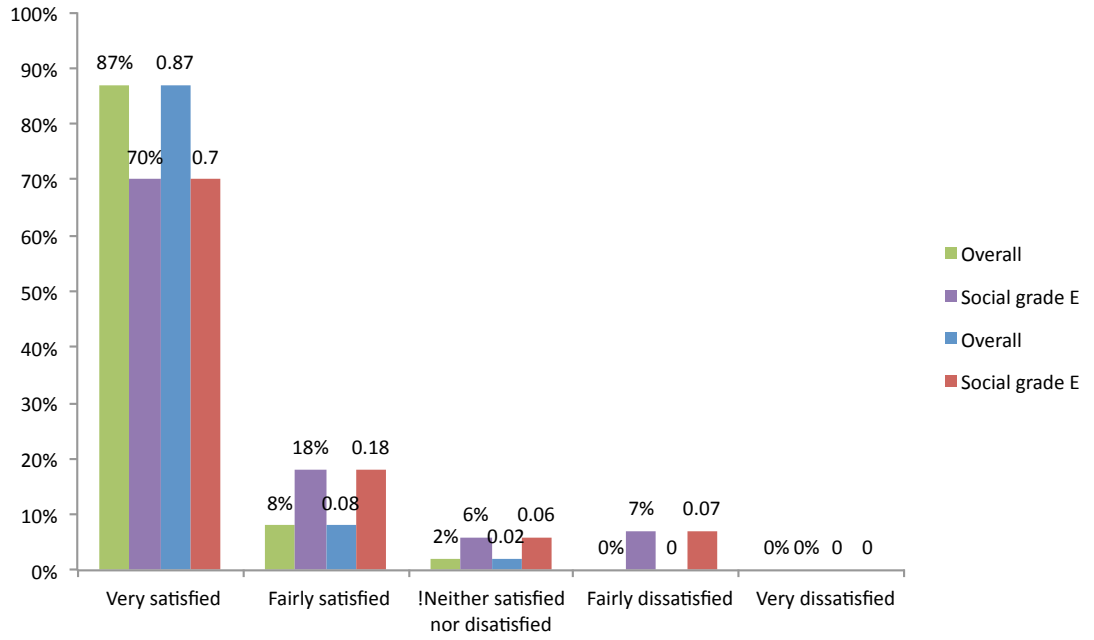
"If I worked at the weekends, her dad's family could look after him, but that would not be reliable."

(Mother, London).

"They're [friends and relatives] not always there, you know they'll say tomorrow they'll do it, and you wake up in the morning, 'Oh I forgot, I've got an appointment.' You know that just messes the whole of my plans up so I always have a B Plan – as well as an A Plan because if A goes wrong I've got B to fall on."

(Mother, London)

Figure 19: Levels of satisfaction with informal childcare



N = 1,413 parents with sole or joint responsibility for childcare decisions
Source: Daycare Trust Parent's Survey

Overall, Daycare Trust's Parents Survey indicates that 87 per cent of parents were very satisfied with the informal care that they received. However, levels of satisfaction with informal childcare were lower among parents in social grade E. (Figure 19). Similarly, the majority of parents (81 per cent) found their informal childcare arrangements to be very reliable, but perceptions about reliability again decreased for parents in social grade E, with 67 per cent of parents in this social grade finding their informal childcare arrangements to be very reliable.

There may be a number of explanations for lower levels of satisfaction with informal childcare arrangements among parents in social grade E. Research shows lower levels of trust in childminders among parents in lower social classes (Vincent and Ball, 2006). This lack of trust may extend to others who provide childcare in the home environment. Those providing informal childcare for the most disadvantaged parents may also be intrinsically less reliable or capable of providing satisfactory informal childcare. Another explanation is that parents in social class E may have less ability to exercise choice in their informal childcare provider. While parents in higher social classes may decline to use a relative or friend that they consider unreliable or unsatisfactory, the most disadvantaged parents may have much less choice. Our qualitative research supports all of these explanations.

Views about child-rearing and informal childcare

Our qualitative research enabled us to explore parents' opinions of informal care and views about child rearing. Generally, parents' opinions about informal childcare fell into three categories:

- Logistical views focusing on the affordability and flexibility of informal childcare
- Views about trust: that informal childcare was generally provided by adult who was known to and trusted by the parent.
- Perceptions that informal childcare was better for babies and very young children as it was provided in a home environment

Affordability and flexibility: There was an overwhelming consensus in all of the parent focus groups that informal childcare was far more flexible that formal childcare. This was the most cited benefit of informal childcare.The flexibility of informal childcare was particularly important for parents who worked outside normal office hours, and those whose hours of work vary from week to week or are unpredictable.

"Sometimes you don't get the hour that you actually need in the nursery – you know, it doesn't fit in with work. So you I have to use my mum then...and if I get appointment and stuff, my mum always does the run."

(Mother, London).

Most informal childcare provided by friends and relatives is free, or involves a very small financial outlay to compensate carers for the costs that they incur. This was felt by parents to be another benefit of informal childcare.

Trust: parents viewed informal childcare as a service that was provided by a trustworthy adult known to both child and parents. Some parents talked about trusting their relatives and close friends, but not trusting childminders and nurseries to look after their children. Parents felt that nurseries may neglect their child and concerns about childminders focussed on the view that the childminder worked alone and unsupervised.

"I remember always hearing – you never hear the good stories about childminders – you always hear the horror stories. I did go to see a couple of childminders for her. There was a really nice lady but, I still thought, you are going to be responsible for my child, all day, you know and when I shut the door I don't know what is happening."

(Mother of a toddler, London).

Trust in carers was a particularly important issue for parents of disabled children and those with specific medical needs.

"You know he is going to be safe there, you know that mum and dad know what he needs, so that is a benefit of informal care."

(Mother of disabled child, West Midlands).

Overall, two groups of parents gave great importance to issues of trust. As mentioned above, parents of disabled children attached great deal of weight to trusting carers. Additionally, new parents or those with just one child appeared to attach greater significance to trust in the carer. This suggests that parents may be more anxious about childcare arrangements for their first child.

The desire for home-based childcare: Overwhelmingly, parents felt that very young children – the under twos – were best looked after in a home environment, ideally by a parent or a close relative. This was the third most cited benefit of informal childcare. Inevitably, home-based informal childcare was compared with nursery care, with the latter sometimes viewed as impersonal or neglectful of the individual needs of very young children.

"We looked at nurseries, but none were ideal in location and opening hours. I think then my husband and I decided that we did not want to go down the nursery route. We wanted to look after her at home. I wanted to look after her myself as much as possible, but obviously financially I needed to get back to work. So we decided to use both the grandparents."

(Mother, south east England).

Many parents who used informal childcare stated that home-based care was the ideal for babies and very young children. This was a view that was constant across all social classes. (It should be noted that parents of young children who attended nurseries did not articulate such views).

For children aged between two and five, however, parents had different views about childcare. Nursery education was felt to be important, as it supported children's social and educational development.

"Her vocabulary has developed and she is really chatty from talking to lots of people. You wouldn't get that, the social side of things, if she had just stayed at home with us"

(Mother, London).

While parents wanted some nursery care, they also felt that some home-based care was also desirable. For many parents a combination of formal and informal childcare, or schooling and informal childcare was their ideal, as it combined a learning environment with the intimacy of one-to-one care in the home environment. When a child reached school-age, the learning-home combination was also an ideal for many parents.

"My son really likes the nursery, for the social side, but he really likes nanny coming over too."

(Mother, Yorkshire).

"I quite like the fact that my son does a couple of days at nursery and a couple of days at home with grandma because it gets that good mix of spending time with other children and being at home."

(Mother, south east England).

"I'd view it differently if he was in nursery full time. I think I'd feel more guilty. You're leaving them full-time it's a bigger deal. He's going and doing normal things like I'd do with him and he is out and about with people. So I think it's a nice balance having a mixture of both because it feels as good if I was with him."

(Mother, Doncaster).

"After school it's nice for them to see their grandparents and be relaxed with their family, sitting in their own garden and not sharing it with hundreds of kids and that"

(Father, eastern England).

It is important to note, however, that parents' views about home-based care appear to be articulated post-decision, after they have set up childcare arrangements, and in order to justify these arrangements. We discuss this post-decision justification in greater detail later in this chapter.

Informal versus formal childcare?

As already noted, parents looked to informal childcare for a nurturing and home-based form of childcare, as an exclusive form of childcare for babies and later to complement nursery or school. While parents may solely use informal childcare for babies, Daycare Trust's Parents Survey suggests there is little evidence to suggest a displacement of formal childcare by informal provision for pre-school children aged between three and five. For this age group the majority of parents use informal childcare alongside free early education. While there are concerns that the take-up of free early education is lower among some social groups, factors other than informal childcare may account for this trend (Speight and Smith, 2010).

In most families there were no 'either/or' questions in relation to formal and informal childcare. Parents tended to look for these different forms of childcare to provide different things. Parents looked to informal care to provide flexible childcare in a home environment.

"Nursery offers that structured time with children and independence. They do things there that you wouldn't do at home. But we use informal care to fill the gaps and he's got the one-to-one attention at home with grandma."

(Mother, Doncaster).

Generally, our research showed parents did not look to informal carers to provide an early education for their child – instead they looked to nurseries to provide this. When a child reached school age, most parents believed that it was the responsibility of schools to provide education. Again, parents did not look to informal after-school childcare to provide an educationally stimulating environment.

"He is getting the learning and social side at the nursery, so when he goes to grandma's he can just relax. Two days there [at the nursery], two days with grandma and one day with me is the ideal and we can afford that."

(Mother, Manchester).

In summary, parents look to the two different types of childcare to provide different things. They expected schools and nurseries to provide educational stimulation, and informal childcare to provide a flexible and home-based form of childcare.

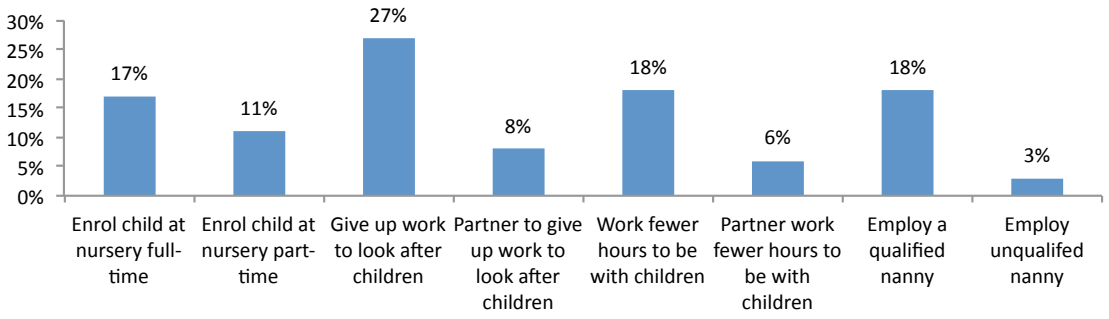
This view was supported by quantitative data from Daycare Trust's Parents Survey. In this survey we asked parents about changes they would want to make to their childcare arrangements for their youngest child if money was no object (Figure 21). Most (77 per cent) parents did not want to make any changes to their childcare regimes. Only 17 per cent of parents wanted to enrol their child in a nursery full-time and 11 per cent in a nursery part-time. The most significant change that parents did want to make was to give up work or reduce hours, to secure more time with their children.

This suggests some preference for home-based childcare. It also indicates that one of the biggest influences on parents' childcare choices is not a lack of childcare but the need to work and earn money. This is important because it repositions childcare choices as being part of a wider set of issues. It suggests that parents' attitudes to childcare are bound up with their attitudes to work

Models of decision-making

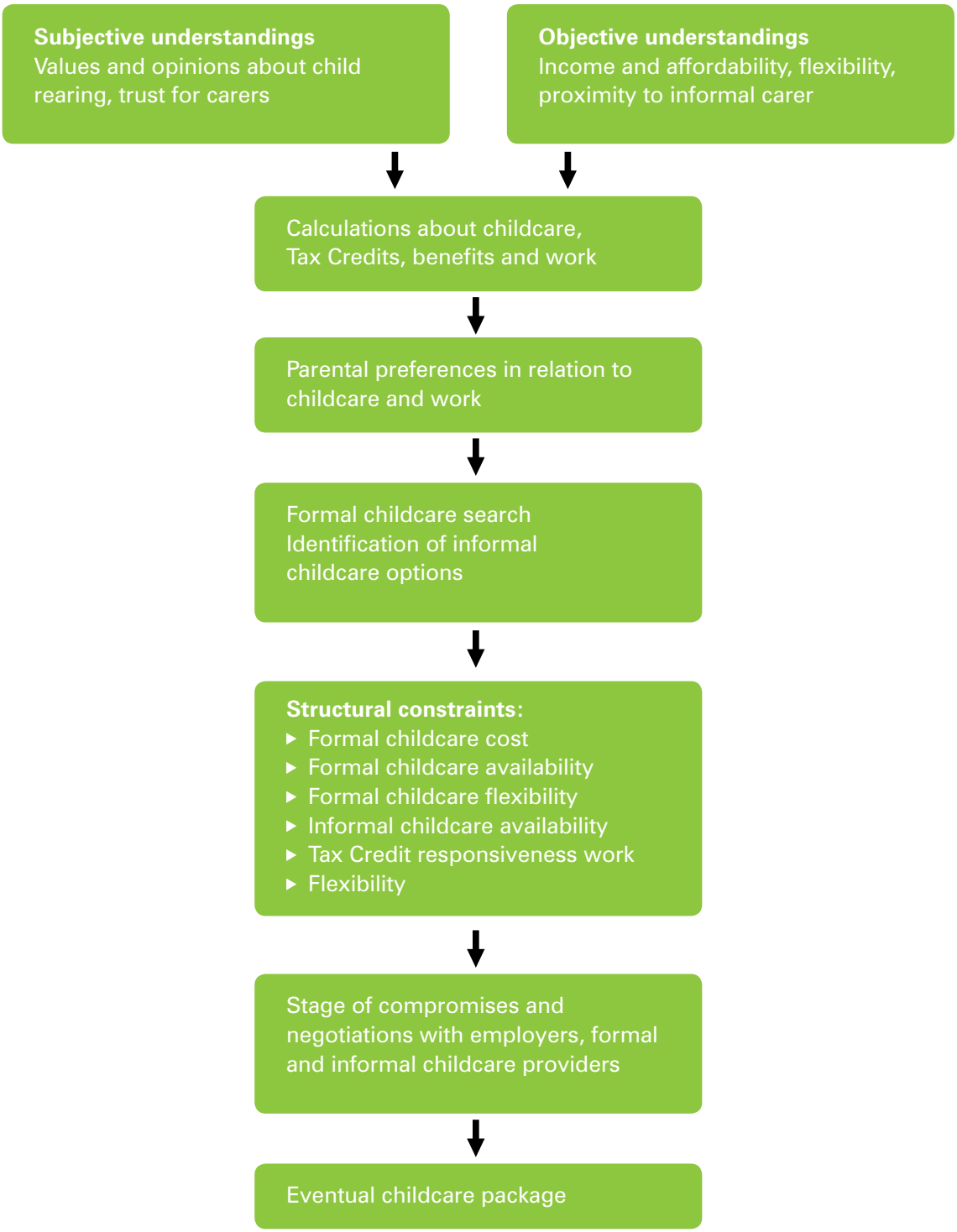
Understanding childcare decision-making processes is a key aim of this research project, as this is such a little understood area in this country (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). We have previously outlined a model of childcare decision-making suggested that families' subjective views about informal childcare sit alongside the more objective understandings of childcare options when parents start to think about childcare (Figure 21) (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). Subjective understandings that we felt influenced childcare decisions include values about childrearing, as well as trust for carers. Objective understandings that influence childcare decision-making include the affordability of formal childcare, work patterns and the proximity and availability of informal carers. Our research aimed to probe the subjective and objective understandings of childcare, as well as understand the weight that parents place on each type of factor when deciding to use childcare.

Figure 20: Types of childcare changes parents would make for youngest child



N=163
Source: Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey

Figure 21: A model of decision-making in childcare



We examined who parents consulted when they chose childcare. Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey suggested that the most important source of advice is word-of-mouth information from friends and relatives, with 35 per cent of parents turning to them for advice. Reliance on oral information from friends and relatives declined down the social grades: 48 per cent of parents in social grade had used word-of-mouth advice from friends and relatives, compared with 26 per cent of parents in social grade D and 31 per cent in social grade E. Parents in social grade E were most likely to have used no advice when choosing childcare.

Daycare Trust's research suggests that childcare decision-making is a strongly gendered process, a view supported in other studies (Vincent and Ball, 2006). Daycare Trust's Parents Survey suggested that 35 per cent of childcare decisions were solely made by women, 57 per cent were made jointly and 8 per cent were made solely by men. It should be noted that 17 per cent of parents in Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey were single female heads of household and this group may be much less likely to make a joint decision with a male. While we interviewed both men and women in the qualitative phase of our research, it was always the mother that made initial decisions about childcare, save for one household headed by a single father. Fathers, who were involved in childcare decision making tended to be consulted at a later stage of decision-making. They were usually invited to approve their partner's initial decisions.

"It was mostly me who decided. I remember saying to him 'would you like to visit the nursery with me and he said 'no, you choose. You go and visit them and choose one you like and I'll come and look'."

(Mother, south east England)

" I think my husband didn't see the nursery until about six months, they had like an open evening to come and he had a look round."

(Mother, Manchester).

Previous research has also looked at parental agency in childcare decision-making (Bell et al, 2005; Dickens et al, 2005; Vincent and Ball, 2006). Vincent and Ball (2006) suggest that middle class parents actively engage in today's diverse childcare markets. They argue that working class parents have much less choice in determining childcare options as a consequence of their lower household income and inability to pay for some forms of childcare. The lower levels of qualifications – educational cultural capital – held by working class parents also means that they are less likely to be able to negotiate flexible employment (Vincent and Ball, 2006). Dickens et al (2005) also examine parental agency in an influential study on childcare markets. This research suggests that parents align themselves along a continuum of 'childcare beneficiaries' and 'childcare customers'. Childcare beneficiaries have limited purchasing power because of their low incomes and use little formal childcare apart from the free early education offer. Childcare customers, on the other hand, have a much higher degree of purchasing power and interact with the diverse childcare market. We were interested to probe the extent of parental agency in decision-making in choosing informal childcare, and the extent to which childcare use was a real choice.

Our quantitative research has shown the strong association between a family's proximity to their nearest adult relative and their use of informal childcare (see Chapter Five). This suggests that objective factors are pre-eminent in childcare decision-making, a view supported by our qualitative phase of the research. This observation suggests that previous research may have overestimated the ability of parents to be childcare customers and engage with the market.

Our research suggests that parents, usually mothers, first weighed up objective issues about both work and childcare.

"I knew I had to go back to work and I talked to my boss about doing three set days a week so that mum could have him for those days."

(Mother, Doncaster).

At this initial stage parents thought through the childcare options that were affordable and those which were practical in relation to nearness to the home or work. These practical issues were used to make a mental 'long list' of childcare options that might include formal and informal childcare. Using this 'long list' parents then researched childcare options further, making more detailed calculations about work, benefits, childcare affordability and proximity (see Figure 22). Parents may visit nurseries at this stage, search for childminders or initiate discussions about informal childcare with relatives.

"After I decided we had to use a nursery I went round and screened them all, about six nurseries and whittled it down to I think two…. We also talked to granny, but this wasn't an option."

(Mother, south east England).

After parents have made a more definite choice about childcare, perhaps deciding to use a particular nursery or nursery in combination with grandparents, they then engage in compromises and negotiations with employers, formal and informal childcare providers. Eventually, parents finalise their childcare arrangements.

"My mum took leave to help me when I first went back to college. When I got a job, I found a nursery and my mum wanted to help me one day a week. She asked her boss for a day off, but after lots of to-ing and fro-ing he would not let her. Then he changed his mind and let her."

(Mother, London).

Our qualitative research suggested strongly that subjective values – about trust, home-based childcare and so on – were usually invoked, post-decision, in order to justify parents' actual childcare arrangements. If parents had chosen a nursery, they would praise the educational benefits of nursery care. Those parents who used informal childcare stated how much they valued this form of childcare because it accorded with their own values and attitudes about childrearing. Parents articulated post-decision attitudes to childcare in nine of the ten focus groups and across the range of social grades. Below we give two examples of post-decision justifications of childcare arrangements:

"I couldn't afford to send them both to the [after-school] club... The clubs round her are dreadful, they just... you know, you go in the door and there are kids running around... I don't think anyone can look after your children better than you or a relative, parents or grandparents."

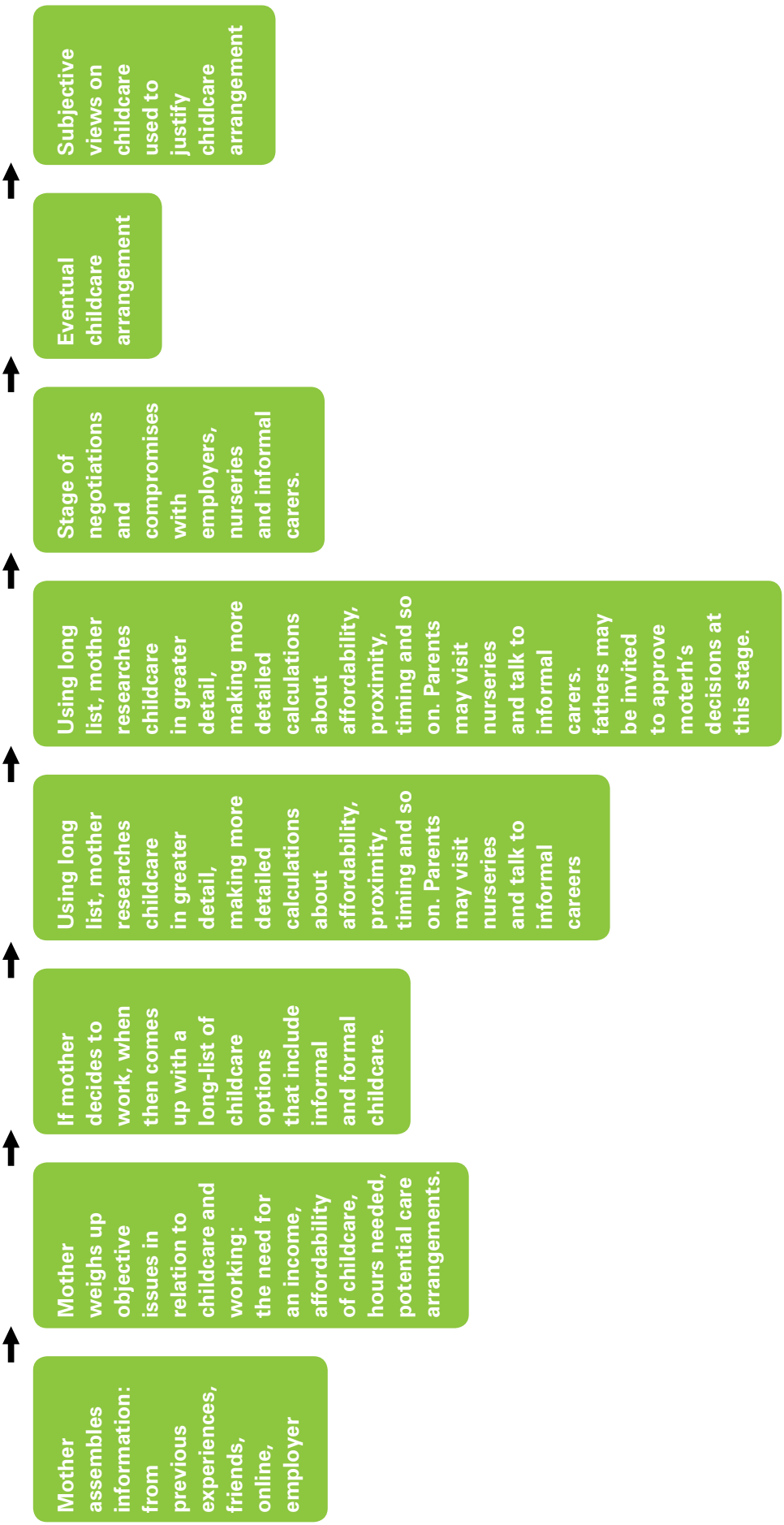
(Mother, Manchester).

"My mum, she works nights, she is a nurse, so she can't do it [provide informal childcare], so she [daughter] has to go to the nursery. In the nursery, they talk about Poland, but if it's informal, they don't get the world. She is in an environment where she is being taught about the world."

(Mother, London).

Drawing on our research evidence, we have amended our model of childcare decision-making, shown in Figure 23 below.

Figure 22: An amended childcare decision-making process



We have concluded that childcare affordability, the timing of formal childcare and the proximity of that care to the home or the work place appear to be the pre-eminent factors in childcare decision-making for parents of all social grades. Subjective factors such as trust in a carer and views about childrearing tend to be invoked after a decision has been made about childcare, often as a means of self-justification for the childcare arrangement that a parent has made. This would end to suggest that most parents on low and middle incomes have a more limited range of choices in determining their childcare. Structural constraints such as affordability, timing and location of childcare limit a parents' choice to a small range of nurseries, childminders and informal carers. Values and attitudes about bringing up children and childcare are determined, or at least significantly mediated, by the circumstances in which parents find themselves.

The pre-eminence of objective factors such as affordability, location and the flexibility of hours in determining childcare arrangements was a trend across all social grades (our focus groups comprised parents in all social grades, although there were no parents with household incomes of more than £120,000 per year). Parents in all social grades also articulated a range of subjective views about childcare. On the basis of our qualitative research, we do not think that parents can be neatly divided into 'childcare customers' who are able to exert choice and 'childcare beneficiaries' who passively accept free early education places, as suggested in Dickens et al (2005). Of course, parents with higher incomes have a great range of options available to them, but the vast majority of parents in Britain face significant structural constraints in determining their childcare arrangements.

Key points

- Parents looked to informal carers to provide different things from formal childcare. They looked to informal carers to provide a nurturing, home-based type of childcare and to formal childcare to help develop a child's cognitive and social skills.
- Word-of-mouth information from friends or relatives is the most frequently used source of advice for parents.
- Most initial decisions about childcare are taken by women.
- Structural constraints such as childcare affordability, the timing of formal childcare and the proximity of that care to the home or the work place appear to be the pre-eminent factors in childcare decision-making.
- Decisions about childcare are taken alongside decisions about employment.
- Subjective factors such as trust in a carer and views about childrearing tend to be invoked after a decision has been made about childcare, often as a means of self-justification for the childcare arrangement that a parent has made. Values and attitudes about bringing up children and childcare are determined, or at least significantly mediated, by the economic circumstances in which parents find themselves.

8. Profiling Informal Carers

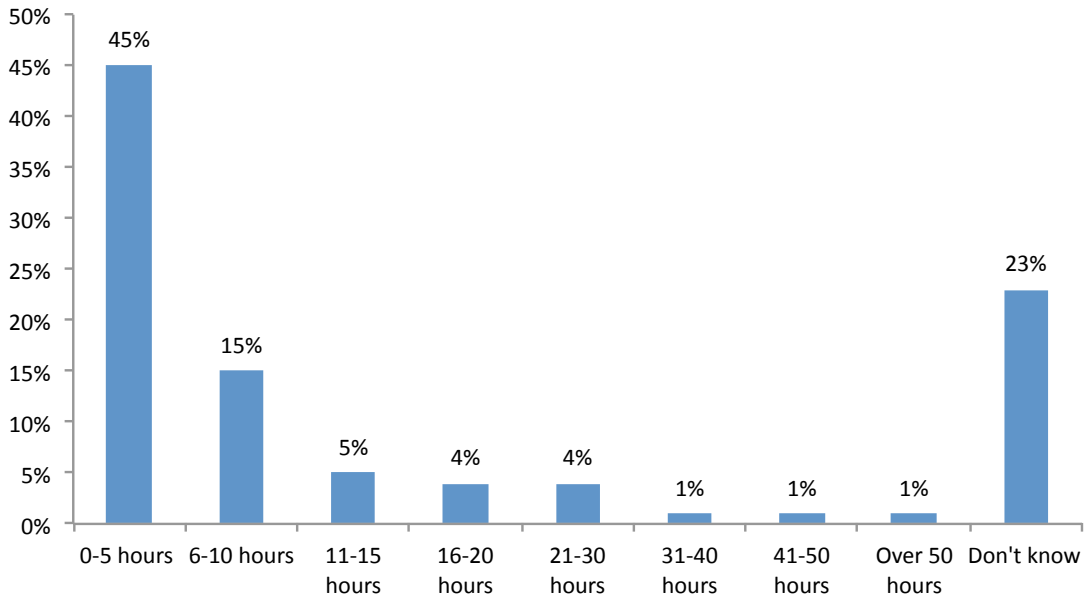
Although there has been a limited amount of qualitative and quantitative research on informal childcare in Britain, very few studies have attempted to build a profile of those who provide informal childcare. Drawing from Daycare Trust's Carers Survey, this chapter provides new analysis of providers of informal childcare. It looks at the overall numbers of people who provide informal child care, who receives this care, how much care is given as well as data on the social characteristics of informal carers. The chapter profiles young carers aged 15-24 and grandparent carers in greater detail.

Overall provision of informal childcare

Of the 6,029 persons aged 16 who participated in our survey of carers, some 14 per cent had provided some form of informal childcare in the past six months. Based on these figures – that 14 per cent of the post-16 population provides informal childcare we estimate that there are approximately 6.9 million people providing informal childcare in the UK today[22]. By way of comparison, the wholesale and retail trade was the largest sector of the British economy at the time our survey was conducted. It employed fewer than five million people[23].

Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey highlights the considerable number of hours of childcare provided by informal carers, with the median number of hours of care given in a week estimated as four hours. Figure 6 in Chapter Four gives a breakdown of the hours of care given in a week by specific groups of informal carers. This shows that it is grandparents who provide the most hours of care. Figure 23 gives a more detailed breakdown of the hours of care provided every week by informal carers. It is important to note that many carers (23 per cent) found it difficult to estimate the number of hours of childcare they provided in a typical week.

Figure 23: Number of childcare hours provided per week, as reported by carer



N=857

Source: Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey

22. Based on mid-2010 population estimates of people aged 16 and over in Great Britain provided by the ONS

23. Estimated 4,755,000 based on ONS Workforce Jobs by Industry dataset (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/tsdataset.asp?vlnk=495&More=Y)

Our interviews also highlighted the substantial time commitment of informal carers, particularly grandparents.

"He goes to nursery two full days a week and he spends two days at home with his grandmother. We also moved closer to my parents to make it easier."

(Mother, South east England).

"Both of them go to their father's nan, she picks them up after school every day and I depend on my parents to look after them for the six weeks holiday."

(Mother, east of England).

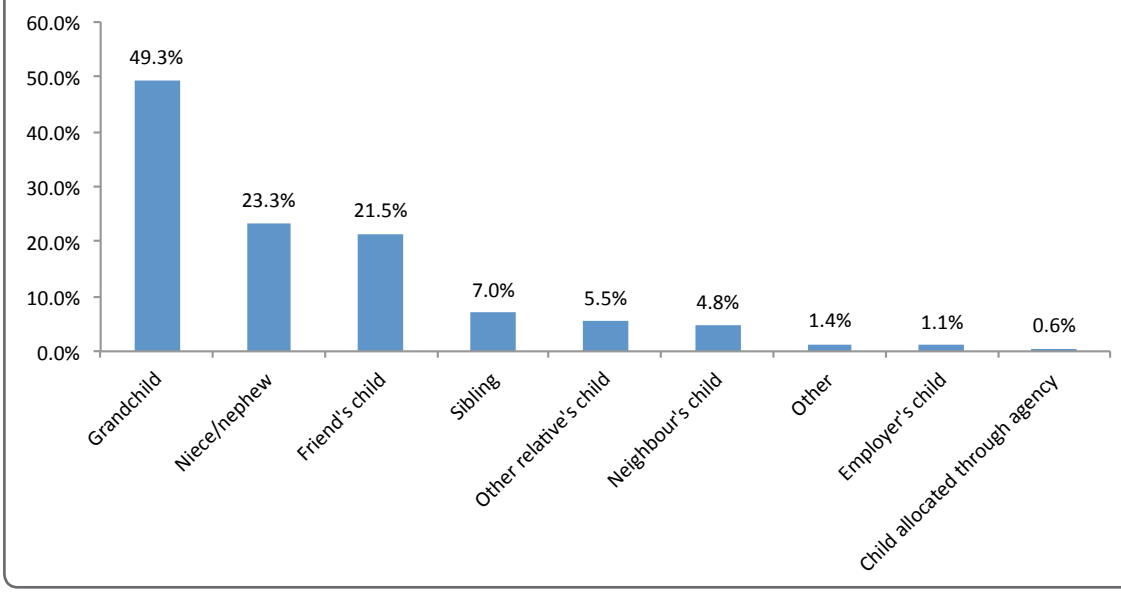
Recipients of informal care

Confirming findings from previous studies of parents[24], Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey shows that informal childcare was most likely to be given to a grandchild – more than twice as likely as any other form of informal childcare (Figure 24). Some 49 per cent of all those who provide informal childcare are looking after a grandchild or grandchildren. This would suggest that about 7 per cent of the population of this country – about 3.5 million people – are grandparents who care for their grandchildren. At a time when debates about older people are dominated by concerns about the cost of providing care for them, it is important to reflect that very large proportions of the older population provide care.

Nieces or nephews – another close family bond – was the second most common recipients of informal childcare, whereas care given to a sibling or another relative's child was far less common, at just seven and six per cent respectively.

There is a marked difference between the percentage of informal carers who say they provide care for a friend's child (21 per cent) and those who say they provide care for a neighbour's child (5 per cent). This may indicate the importance of the relationship between informal carer and child or informal carer and the child's parents, with informal care more likely to be provided for a family that is emotionally close as opposed to physically close.

Figure 24: Recipients of informal childcare arrangements



N=857
Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

24. Se Rutter and Evans, 2011ab)

Voluntary versus professional informal childcare

Daycare Trust Carer's Survey indicated that 89 per cent of informal carers gave their services for free and 2 per cent of carers gave reciprocal help to other parents. A further 9 per cent of carers received some payment for the informal childcare they provided, a group who comprised relatives and friends who received money for the care they provided as well as professional informal carers – nannies, babysitters, au pairs and domestic workers - whose care was a job.

Some per cent of our post-16 sample were providing informal childcare in a 'professional' capacity, either being employed by a family or providing childcare through an agency. However, Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey indicated that just 0.2 per cent of our adult sample were providing childcare to an employer's child or a family allocated to them by an agency. Most informal carers who are paid for their services appear to offer this 'professional' care on an informal basis, as a babysitter or unregistered childminder, rather than as a formally recruited nanny. The data from Daycare Trust's Carers Survey thus suggests that the majority of paid informal childcare in Britain is provided on an informal basis rather than by nannies and au pairs who are formally recruited and employed. This raises some important questions about the interface between formal and informal childcare, as well as the regulation of nannies and babysitters.

We discuss this issue, as well as unregistered childminding in greater detail in Chapter 10.

Numbers of children looked after by carers

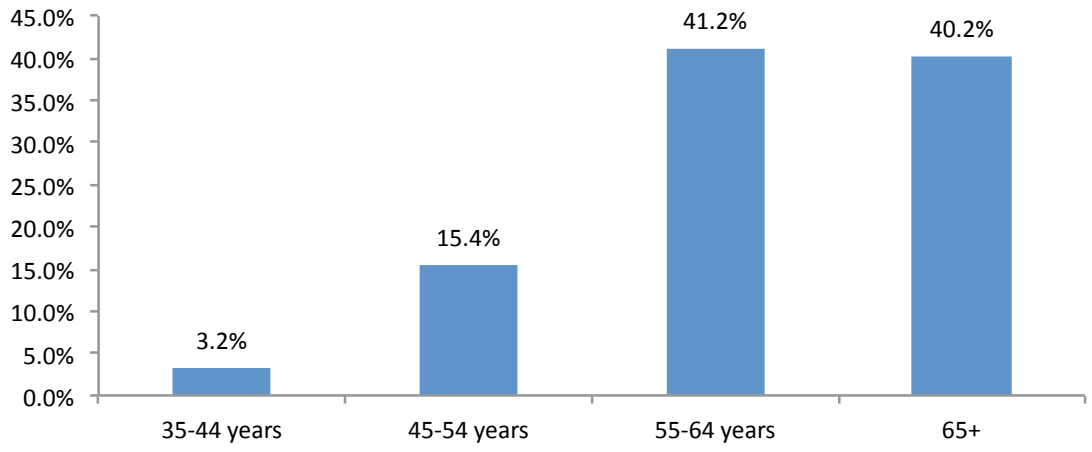
Both our interviews with parents and previous studies suggest that significant numbers of people who provide informal childcare look after more than one child. Parents interviewed in our qualitative work often told of a significant burden of care undertaken by relatives, who often looked after four or five grandchildren:

"My mum was looking after my sister's two children, even though it was just pick up after school. But four was too much for my mum and none of the children got one-to-one. My mum and dad initially had him for three days a week and they just looked shattered and so I put him in nursery."

(Mother, south east England).

Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey probed how many children were cared for by informal carers and found that 65 per cent of informal carers had looked after more than one child over the last year (Table 11).

Figure 25: Age band of grandparent carers



N=857

Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

Table 11: Number of children cared for in the past year

No. of children	Frequency	Per cent
1	281	32.8
2	262	30.5
3	131	15.3
4	64	7.5
5	36	4.2
6 to 10	47	5.5
11 to 15	4	0.5
16 to 20	4	0.4
21 or more	5	0.6
Don't know/Refused	22	2.6
Total	**856**	**100**

N=857
Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey, 2010-11

We expected carers in the 15-24 age band to have cared for the largest number of children, because this age group is most likely to babysit. Our results supported this assumption, with 7 per cent of those over in the 15-24 age bracket and 14 per cent of those aged 25-34 looking after 6 or more children, compared with just 1 per cent of those over 65 years old. Nevertheless, 73 per cent of informal carers aged 65 years or older were looking had looked after more than one child in the last year.

Profiling grandparent carers

As nearly half of people who provide informal childcare are grandparents, we disaggregated data from Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey to build a profile of grandparents as a discrete group.

Overall, this analysis showed that grandparent carers have a similar socio-economic profile to adults of the same age in the overall population. Patterns of housing tenure among grandparent carers reflect the overall population of a similar age band. Some 25 per cent of 55-64 year olds and 26 per cent of those aged 65 years and over stated they had a health problem. This is similar to rates in the overall population, as reported in the Census and Labour Force Survey.

The social grade distribution of grandparent carers is largely similar to the overall proportions of adults in different social grades in the overall population, albeit with a slightly higher proportions of grandparent carers coming from social grades A and B and lower proportions from social grades D and E (Table12).

Table 12: Social grade of grandparent carers in Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

Social grade	% of overall survey in this social grade	% grandparent carers in this social grade
A	4%	5.3%
B	23%	27.7%
C1	29%	23.6%
C2	21%	21.8%
D	16%	15.9%
E	8%	5.6%

N=857
Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey, 2010-11

While grandparent carers have many similarities to adults of the same age in the overall population, there are some key differences. Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey suggests that grandparent cares are less likely to come from a minority ethnic group. Among those of white British ethnicity, some 59 per cent of all informal carers were grandparent carers. Among the minority ethnic population just 22 per cent of informal carers were grandparent carers. This reflects the process of migration separating young adults of childbearing age from their parents. Children from some minority ethnic groups are also less likely to have four healthy grandparents than the overall child population which may also account for the lower proportion of grandparent carers among minority ethnic groups in the two Daycare Trust surveys (Hawkes and Joshi, 2007). As already noted in this report, is important that central and local government recognise that some sections of the population are less likely to have grandparents who can provide childcare and ensure that there is sufficient formal provision at the time of day that parents need it.

Age of and employment status of grandparent carers

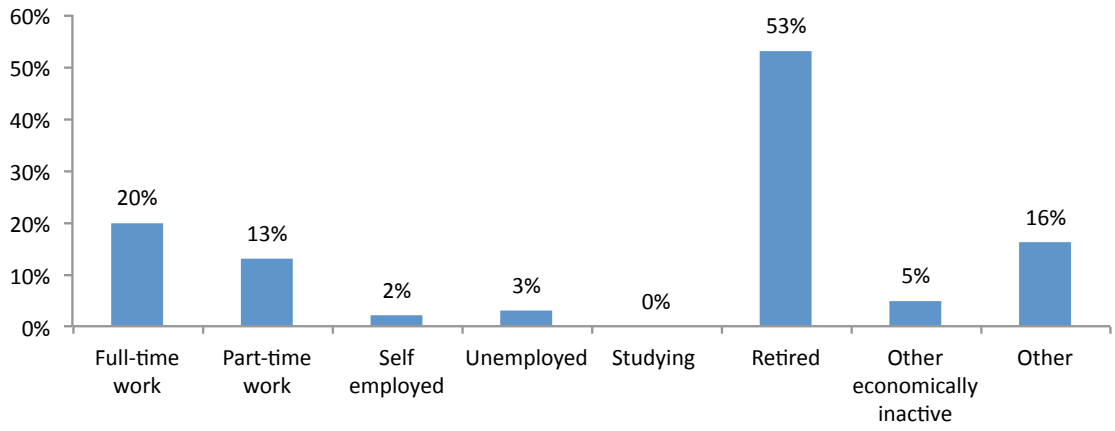
Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey showed that 40 per cent of grandparent carers were aged 55-64 years and 41 per cent were aged 65 years and over (Figure 25). The mean age of grandparent carers was 62.5 and the median age was 63 years. The ages of grandparent carers in our survey ranged between 37 and 85 years and Figure 26 presents further data on the age distribution of grandparent carers. This is a little older than indicated in previous studies (Gray, 2005a). We attribute the older age profile of grandparent carers to an on-going increase in the average age that a mother first gives birth – from 26.8 years in 1979 to 29.4 years in 2009[25]. Obviously, an older cohort of parents will tend to be associated with older grandparents.

25. Office for National Statistics data on the age of first birth. The data is standardised to reflect changes in the composition of the population.

While grandparent carers were a little older than indicated in previous studies, it is important to note that 60 per cent of grandparents in Daycare Trust's Carers Survey were under 65 years old. Moreover, younger grandparents provided more hours of care. Carers aged 45 – 54 years offered an average of 11.8 hours of care per typical week, those aged 55-64 who offered 11.4 hours of care per week and those aged 65 years and over undertook 8.3 hours of care per week. An explanation for this difference is that older grandparents may have older grandchildren who, in turn, require fewer hours of childcare.

As might be concluded from the age profile of grandparent carers (Figure 25) a significant proportion of them were still working. Figure 27 presents data from the Carer's Survey about the economic activity of grandparent carers, showing that 60 per cent of grandparent carers were economically inactive and 53 per cent were retired, but 35 per cent of grandparent carers were still in work. In future the proportions of grandparent careers still in work is likely to increase further, as the retirement age is raised. Among parents we interviewed in our qualitative research, many of them indicated that their parents were still working. In some cases this limited the amount of informal childcare that grandparents could provide.

Figure 26: Economic activity of grandparent carers



N=857
Source: Daycare Trust Carers Survey

"My mum, she is still working, she works nights, she is a nurse, so she can't do it."

(Mother, London).

"My mum wanted to help, but her boss wouldn't let her work four days a week."

(Student mother, London)

"My mum, she's only 47, she's not an old grandma… When I had my first one she didn't have to work you see, so she was happy to look after him, her first grandchild and stuff, but then I had the second one and she was working by then. Without really thinking I sort of assumed she would do these things and then it's like she's like 'Well no, I have to work full-time now, I can't do this' and you know it causes a bit of tension."

(Mother, Manchester).

While many grandparents are working, our interviews suggested that many are still providing substantial amounts of childcare, or helping on a regular basis.

"My boyfriend's mum she works, but she still has been having my little boy on a Saturday for us so that we can both go and work, but she's worked all week , so we feel bad."

(Mother, East of England).

That the majority of grandparent carers are under retirement age and still working raises important policy issues. As already noted in this report, relative carers offer an important service, particularly to parents of very young children and those working atypical hours. Government needs to consider ways that it can support working grandparents who provide childcare. One approach would be to enable the transfer of parental leave from parents to relative carers. This might be particularly important for single parent households with absent parents. Government could also extend the right to request flexible working to grandparents and other relative carers who provide regular childcare.

Grandfathers' role in caring for grandchildren

Daycare Trust's Carers Survey showed that 40 per cent of grandparent carers were male and 60 per cent female. This does not support Wheelock and Jones' (2002) assertion that grandparent carers are overwhelmingly female. Moreover our survey showed that there was no significant difference in relation to the average hours of care given between male and female grandparent carers. Our interviews with parents also supported the view that grandfathers play an active role in caring for grandchildren.

"My dad wasn't active you know he wouldn't change nappies, I don't think he ever changed ours yet my father-in-law is the one who changes the nappies, especially if they're dirty ones, my mother-in-law won't – it's the other way round."

(Mother, south east England).

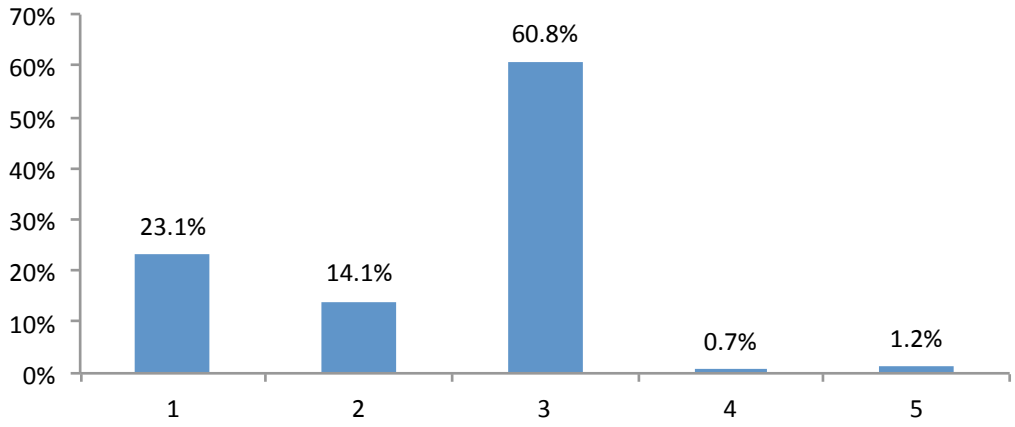
"My dad's quite good on disciplining the boys, my mum's useless because she just thinks that they should come to nanny's house and have lots of treats."

(Father, south east England).

While most grandfathers provided informal care alongside their wives or partners as a couple, we came across grandfathers who were caring for their grandchildren alone, usually because their wives were still working.

We believe that the greater than expected involvement of grandfathers in caring for their grandchildren may be a consequence of shifting gender roles over the last 40 years. Indeed, much recent research highlights changing gender roles in the British families (Equal Opportunities Commission, 2003). Fathers' care of infants and young children has risen by 800 per cent between 1975 and 1997, from 15 minutes to two hours on the average working

Figure 27: Payment of 15-24 year olds for informal childcare



Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

day – at double the rate of mothers', despite the fact that over this period fathers' time spent at work was also increasing. A father who had young children in the 1970s, when gendered attitudes towards childcare began to change in Britain, is now likely to be a grandfather who also has a more involved role in childcare.

These changed gender roles raise important issues for formal childcare staff and schools. While many children's centres welcome male carers, our interviews indicated that not all do so. The gendered language used in notices, newsletters and everyday speech can exclude fathers, uncles and grandfathers. Previous research by Daycare Trust supports this view, with grandfathers who were interviewed telling of the exclusive and unwelcoming nature of some parents and toddler group, where grandfathers felt excluded because they were male and grandfathers (Rutter and Evans, 2011b). It is important that children's centres and other settings are seen to extend a welcome to all carers – male and female, parental and non-parental.

Profiling young carers

While the largest proportion of informal carers are older adults who are looking after grandchildren, another group of carers are young people who are caring for siblings or undertaking some babysitting. There is little British literature on sibling cares and babysitters, so analysis about this group of carers helps fill this knowledge gap.

Daycare Trust's Carers Survey indicated that 13 per cent of our sample of 15-24 year olds were providing some informal care. Table 14 gives a breakdown of the type of care they were offering, indicating that most informal childcare given by those in the 15-24 age bracket is of a voluntary nature. But if the care provided by young people is compared with older age bands, Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey indicates that those in the 15-24 age bracket are more likely to provide informal care in a 'professional' capacity than those in older age bands, with Table 13 also giving data on the type of care given by those aged 45-64 years.

Table 13: Breakdown of care type by age band

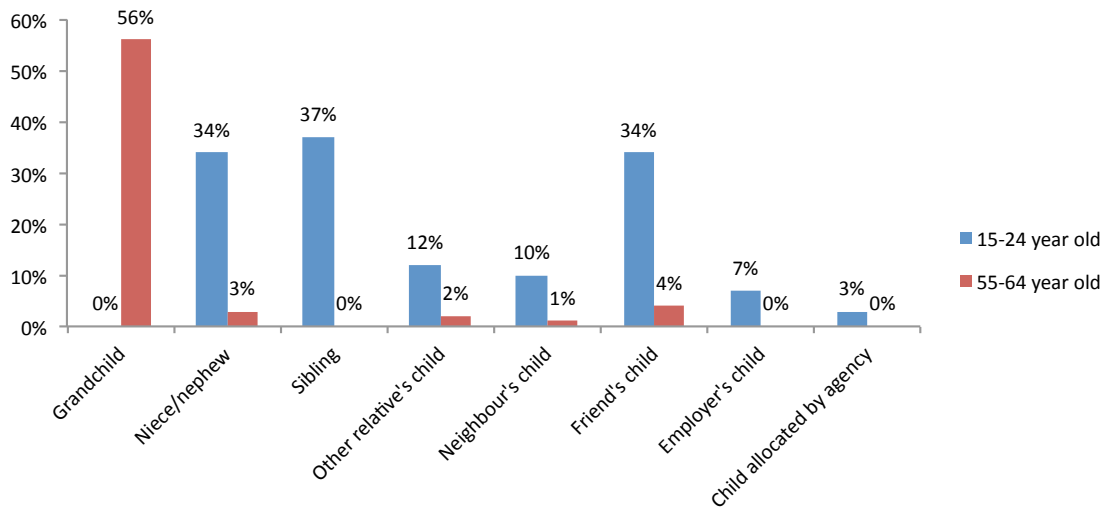
	Professional care as unregistered nanny, au pair, babysitter, unregistered childminder	Voluntary care to child/children of friend or relative	Personal and voluntary care	No informal care undertaken
% of 15-24 year olds who undertook this type of informal are in last 6 months	3.4	6.1	3.8	86.7
% of 45-64 year olds who undertook this type of informal are in last 6 months	1.5	10.3	3.4	84.9

Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

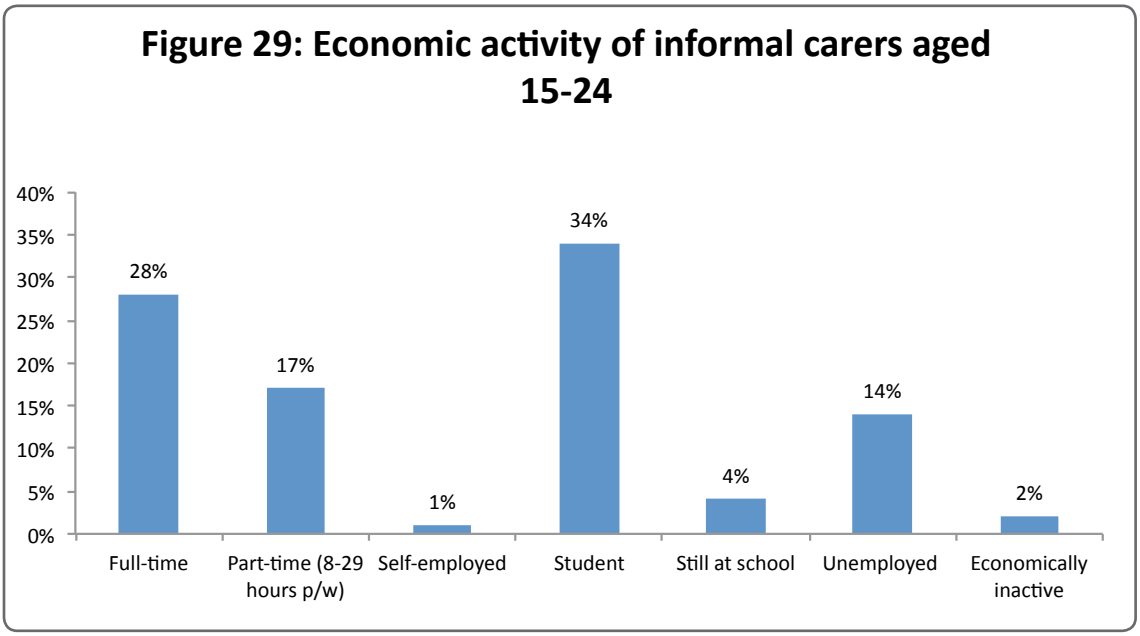
Daycare Trust's Carers Survey interviewed 129 15-24 year olds who were providing childcare, who represented 13 per cent of their age cohort. Of these 129 young people, 61 per cent were receiving no payment for the childcare that they offered and just under one quarter (23 per cent) were being paid for all the children that they looked after (Figure 27). This ratio supports the data shown in Table 14 and suggests that about a quarter of informal carers in the 15-24 age group solely offer informal care in a professional capacity, another quarter offer voluntary and professional care, and just over half solely offer their services voluntarily.

Daycare Trusts' Carers Survey showed that informal carers in the 15-24 age band are most likely to look after siblings, nieces and nephews and the children of friends (Figure 28). As might be expected young carers look after a different group of children compared with older carers (see Figure 28). Young carers are most likely to look after a sibling. They are also the age band most likely to be formally employed as nannies to provide childcare.

Figure 28: Recipients of care arrangements for carers aged 15-24 and 55-64



Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey



N=129
Source: Daycare Trust Carer's Survey

The above figures add up to more than 100 per cent, as carers may look after children with different relationships to the carer

Daycare Trust's Carers Survey also enables us to look at economic activity among young carers. Most informal carers in the 15-24 age bracket are still in the education system, as students in further and higher education (34 per cent of carers) or as school students (4 per cent of carers) (Figure 29).

If young informal carers are compared with their overall age cohort some important differences emerge. Young carers are more likely to be students, but less likely to be in employment, or unemployed and seeking work. Just 12 per cent of our sample were unemployed, a far lower proportion than among the overall 15-24 population. (At the time of the survey 42 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds and 21 per cent of 18-24 year olds were unemployed). This finding needs to be viewed with caution, as it was based on a small sample (129 young people). But it suggests that young carers in the 15-24 age bracket may have different social or personal characteristics than the overall age cohort. For 15-24 year olds informal childcare may be an activity undertaken by students and less often by the unemployed. This is an issue that we will be investigating in further research.

Key points

- Informal carers provide a median of four hours of care every week, with grandparents providing the most hours of care.
- Grandfathers are playing an increasingly important role in caring for their grandchildren, with our survey showing 40 per cent of grandparent carers were male.
- Over two-thirds of carers (65 per cent) look after more than one child.
- The majority of grandparent carers are under retirement age and the average (mean) age of grandparent carers was 62.5 years.
- Over one third (35 per cent) of grandparent carers still work, with many of them providing considerable amounts of informal childcare.
- Grandparents and other relatives who provide regular informal childcare should be given the right to request flexible working. There should also be greater flexibility about the use of parental leave, enabling grandparents to use parental leave entitlements.
- Grandparents need to be viewed differently from other informal carers, as they provide much more regular childcare than do most other informal carers.
- Young carers who babysit or look after siblings, nieces and nephews are another significant group of informal carers. Nearly one in six (13 per cent) of 15-24 year olds in Daycare Trust's Survey provided informal childcare.

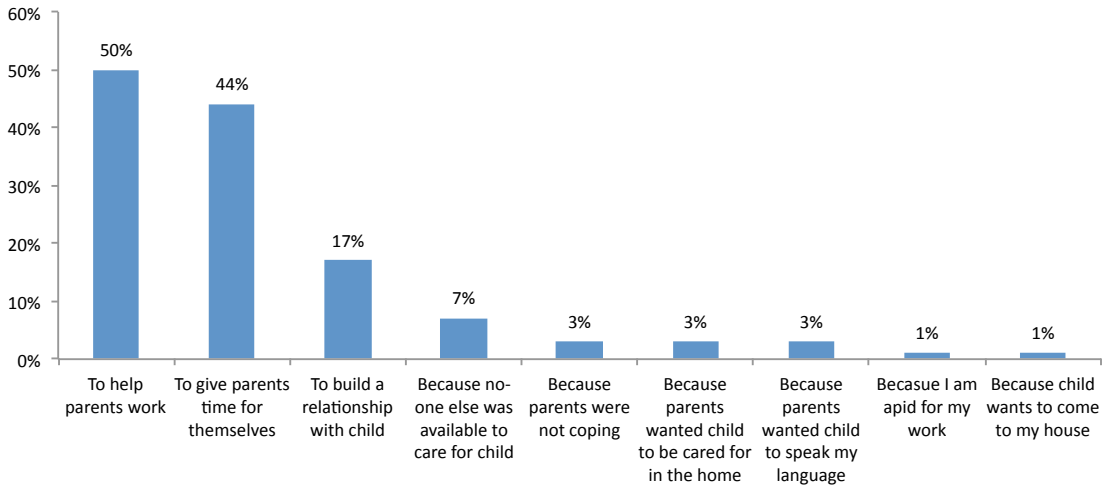
9. Carers' Experiences of Providing Informal Children

There has been very little research that has analysed the experiences of those who provide informal childcare. The small amount of literature on this issue has focused on grandparents and suggests that the large majority of them place a very high value on caring for their grandchildren (Clarke and Roberts, 2003). As a consequence of this knowledge gap, one of our key research questions was to look at carers' experiences of providing informal childcare. This chapter draws from Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey and looks at carers experiences of providing informal childcare. It examines how these childcare arrangements arise and carers' satisfaction with these arrangements. It also interrogates the impact that providing childcare have on carers' lives.

Setting up informal care arrangements

Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey probed why an informal carer offered to provide childcare. The majority of carers were providing childcare for work-related or financial reasons. Some 50 per cent of all informal carers said that they were providing informal childcare to help parents work and 9 per cent stated that they were providing childcare to help parents financially (Figure 30). Some 17 per cent of carers stated that they were providing informal childcare to build a relationship with the child, suggesting that informal childcare had mutual benefits to both carer and parents.

Figure 30: Reasons given by carer for providing care for youngest child



N=857

The above figures add up to more than 100 per cent, as carers had option of giving more than one answer

Source: Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey

Daycare Trusts Carers' Survey also looked at how caring arrangements arose. We wanted to see if parents automatically assumed that grandparents would look after their grandchildren and to test if there were cultural obligations to provide informal childcare. We wanted to investigate this because some literature suggests that among Scottish and Welsh parents there are greater expectations that grandparents will provide childcare (Wheelock and Jones, 2002). Additionally, some local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments[26] suggest that in among some minority ethnic groups there is an unspoken assumption that a grandmother will look after her grandchildren.

Figure 31 presents data from Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey on how informal care arrangements arose. Overall, most (62 per cent) informal care arrangement arose after parents asked a carer to look after their child or children. Just 7 per cent of carers stated that the parents assumed that the carer would look after the child, although this rises to 15 per cent for carers in the 45-54 age group. There is no significant difference in the proportion of care arrangements that arise because of an unspoken assumption across the social grades, nor according to ethnicity or regions or nation of residence within Britain.

Interviews with parents suggest that a small proportion of parents assume that grandparents will look after their grandchildren.

"I think expectations to care are there definitely. See my husband's mum she's 67, she loves having the grandchildren. I want my time, I want to pamper myself, I want to go shopping. I'm saying to myself, she can have them while she is still young."

(Mother, Manchester).

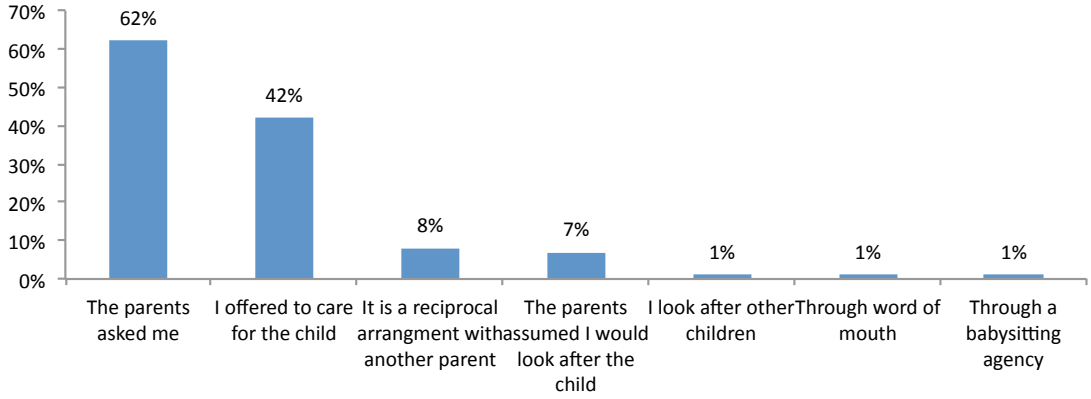
However, most parents interviewed in the qualitative phase of the research did not make the assumption that their own parents would care for grandchildren. These parents talked of asking grandparents, and in some cases, being refused. Overall our quantitative and qualitative research refute the notion that informal childcare arrangements often arise as a consequence of unspoken cultural norms that oblige grandparents to look after their grandchildren.

Generally there were few differences in the genesis of these informal care arrangements across different social grades and among carers with different ages and work statuses. However, carers under 25 years old were least likely to offer their care (27 per cent did so) and more likely to be asked by the parent (76 per cent) or be assigned to the parents through a babysitting agency (3 per cent).

There was one significant class difference in that reciprocal childcare arrangements were less frequent in social grade D and E. Some nine per cent of carers in social grades A, C1 and C2 provided childcare as a consequence of a reciprocal arrangement, as did eight per cent of carers in social grade B. But just four per cent of carers in social grade D and one per cent in social grade E undertook childcare as a consequence of a reciprocal arrangement. This finding can be put alongside the lesser use of friend childcare in social grades D and E to suggest that some sectors of society have less developed forms of mutual support – and social capital. We have previously discussed this trend in Chapter Five.

26. See Rutter and Evans, 2011a.

Figure 31: How care arrangements for yougest child arose



N=857

The above figures add up to more than 100 per cent, as carers had option of giving more than one answer

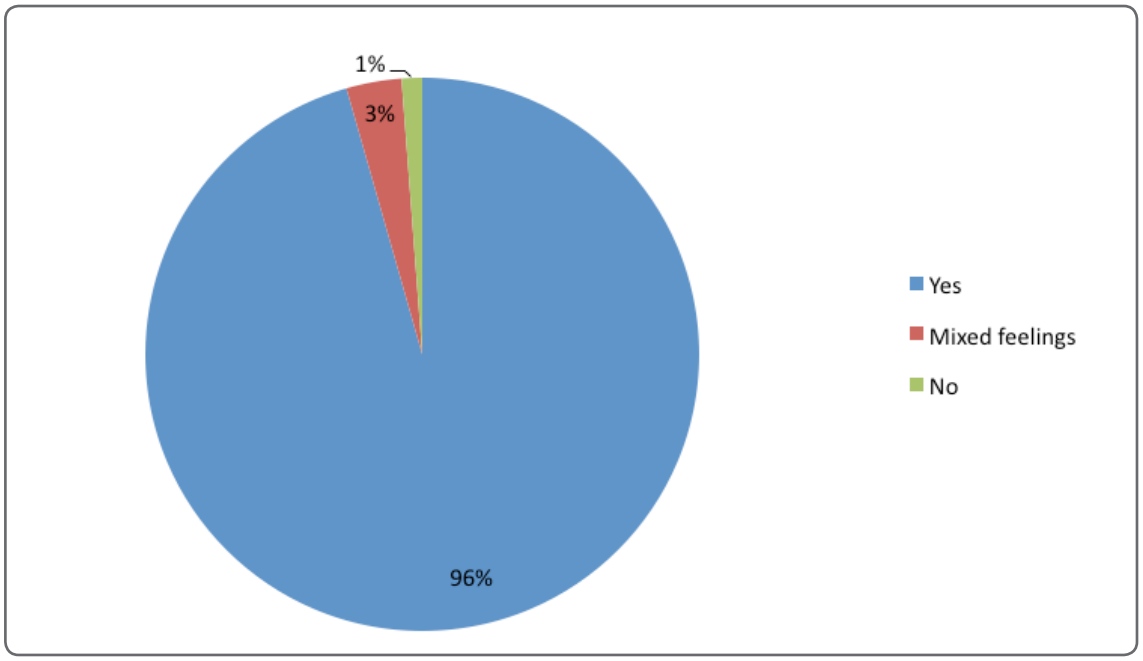
Source: Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey

Overall satisfaction in providing childcare

Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey indicated that almost everyone (96 per cent) who provided informal care was satisfied with this arrangement (Figure 32). This satisfaction was observed for all informal carers in our sample, irrespective of ethnicity, social grade, gender, age or employment status. However, it should be acknowledged that these results will be skewed by virtue of the fact that those who have significant negative experiences of providing informal childcare may refrain from providing these services.

The group least happy providing informal childcare were carers aged 25 – 34 years, but even among this group 89 per cent of informal carers were happy providing care.

Fig 32: Are you happy providing childcare for these children?



N=857
Source: Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey

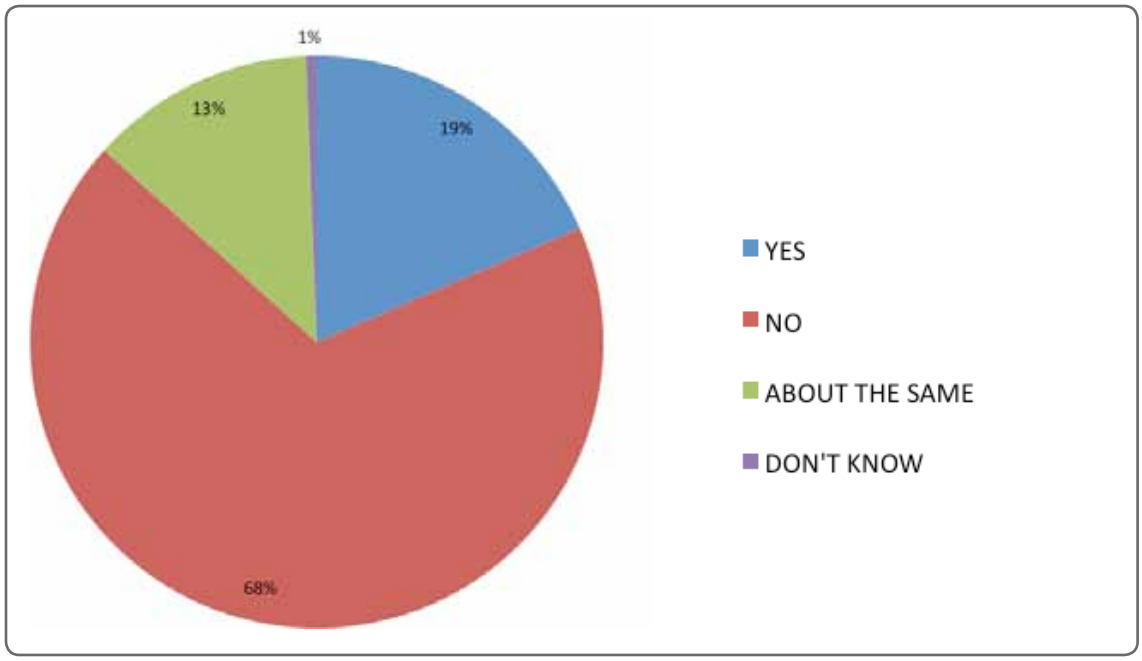
Just 38 of the 857 carers in our sample were unhappy or had mixed feelings about providing informal childcare, limiting the analysis we could do on this issue. Of these 38 respondents, 11 felt that parents took advantage of them or did not value what they did. Just 1 respondent out of 857 stated that she had been forced to give up her main job or cut down on hours, as a consequence of informal childcare obligations. This finding was surprising when put alongside studies such as Gray (2005a) and a small number of local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments that suggest that the obligation to provide informal care forces older women out of the labour market. Our qualitative research threw more light on this issue and suggests that grandparents who have work obligations actively decline to provide childcare, rather than being forced out of work.

Based on this evidence we think that there is little to suggest that large numbers of older women are being forced out of the labour market by obligations to provide informal childcare. This potentially negative impact of informal childcare may well have been over-estimated.

Expectations about hours of care

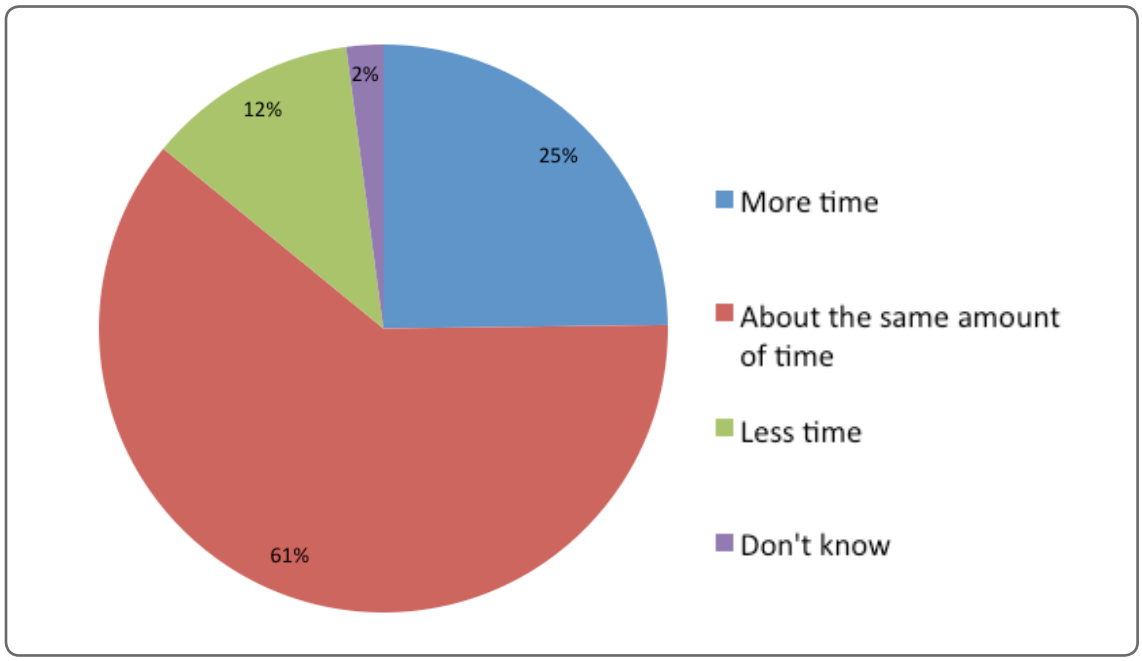
As we have already noted, some informal carers provide considerable numbers of hours of childcare every week. We were surprised that so few informal carers felt that they were looking after children for too long a period. As noted above, just 11 carers felt they were not valued or exploited, and just 1 carer out of 857 felt they were obliged to provide too many hours of childcare. Despite this, Daycare Trust's Carers Survey suggested that about a fifth (19 per cent) of carers had provided more hours of childcare than they originally expected to undertake (Figure 33). Although 19 per cent of carers were undertaking more care than they expected, 76 per cent of carers wanted to maintain or increase their hours of care (Figure 34). Just 12 per cent of carers wanted to spend less time providing informal childcare (Figure 34). This is again indicative of high levels of satisfaction among carers with informal childcare arrangements.

Figure 33: In the last year, have you provided more childcare than you expected to undertake?

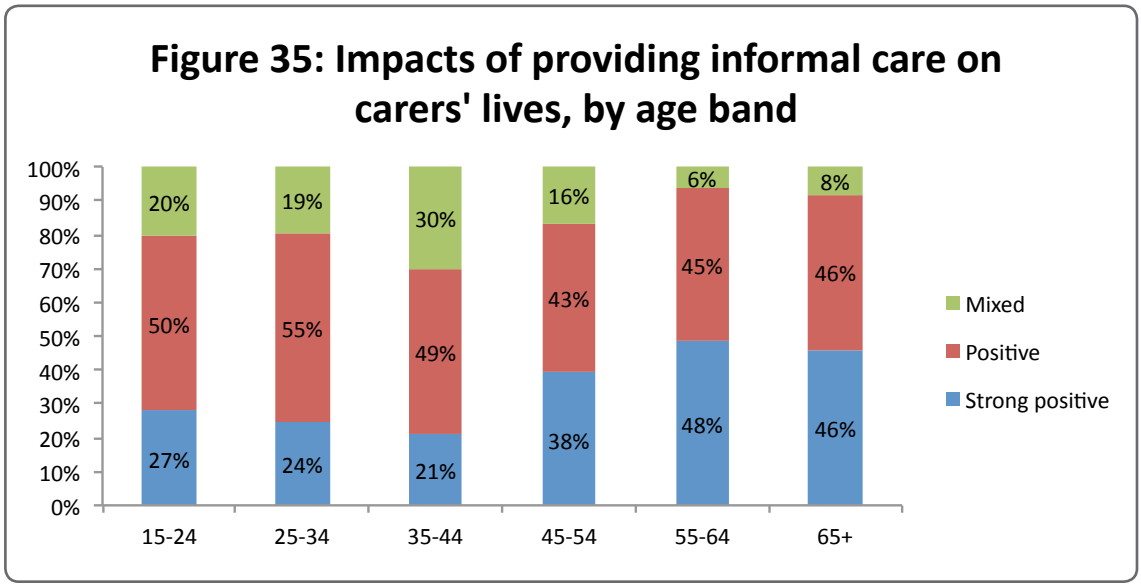


N=857
Source: Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey

Figure 34: How much time would you like to spend caring for these children?



N=857
Source: Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey



Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

Impacts of providing informal childcare on carer

As we have already noted, the vast majority of informal carers were happy with their role and many were providing childcare in order to maintain a bond with a child or children. The view that providing informal childcare is a positive experience is further evidenced by the fact that 84 per cent of participants stated that the informal childcare they provide had had a 'strongly positive' or 'positive' impact on their life (Figure 35). Again, these results need to be viewed with a little caution as those who feel that informal childcare has a negative impact on their lives may refrain from looking after children.

There were some differences across age bands in the impacts that providing informal childcare had on carers' lives. There was no significant difference across carers' age bands in the proportions of carers who felt that providing informal care had a negative or strongly negative impact on carers' lives. However, younger carers were more likely to state that providing informal childcare had a mixed impact on their lives. Older carers were more likely to state that informal care had a strong positive impact on their lives (Figure 35).

The majority of informal carers aged over 45 are grandparents, who tend to have a different relationship with the children in their care than do adults who care caring for the children of friends. This is likely to account for the view held by older carers stating that providing informal care had a strong positive impact on their lives.

Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey interrogated the nature of the positive impacts:

- I enjoy being with the children (75 per cent of carers who believed that providing care had a positive or mixed impact on their lives).
- I have been able to develop a close relationship with the children for whom I care (38 per cent of above group).
- I have experienced new things (18 per cent of the above group).
- My children enjoy spending time with the children for whom I care (13 per cent of the above group).
- The experience is useful for my career (3 per cent of above group).

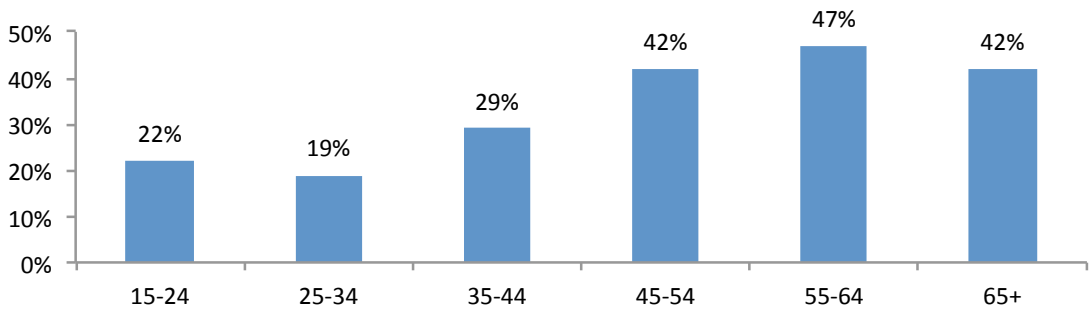
- The money is useful (2 per cent of the above group).
- It keeps me young and active (1 per cent of the above group).
- Other (3 per cent).

N=738
Source: Daycare Trust Survey of Carers

Reasons associated with pleasure emerged as the main positive impacts of providing informal childcare. As might be expected, there were differences in the positive impacts of informal care across different age bands. Those who cited that my children enjoy spending time with the children for whom I care were almost all in the 25-44 age bracket, with 31 per cent of 25 – 34 year old parents and 39 per cent of 35 – 44 year old parents citing this as a positive impact of providing informal care. Among those who cited that informal childcare was an experience useful for their careers, almost all were in the 15- 24 age group. Greater proportions of older carers felt that informal childcare gave them the opportunity to develop a close relationship with the children in their care (Figure 36).

Overall, Daycare Trust's research shows that informal childcare is not an altruistic activity carried out by grandparents, relatives and friends at a cost to themselves. Few carers feel that providing informal care has negative impacts on their lives and there is little evidence to show that older women are being forced out of the labour market by the obligation to provide informal childcare. Rather, informal childcare arrangements are mutually beneficial for both carers and parents. Informal childcare is a low cost and flexible form of childcare for the parent. It also provides the opportunity for the informal carer to bond with the children in their care. Further qualitative research on this issue would be useful, to provide greater insight into the decision making process of informal carers who often take on significant responsibilities in exchange for the enjoyment gained from spending time with the children for whom they care.

Figure 36: Percentage of informal carers who cited that informal childcare was positive and gave them the chance to develop a close relationship with children in their care



N=738
Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

Key points

- Most informal care arrangement come about after parents ask a carer to help them look after their child, but more than two in five carers (42 per cent) offer to care for a child.
- Reciprocal childcare arrangements were less frequent in social grades D and E and regular informal childcare offered by friends is more likely to involve parents and carers from higher social classes.
- Very few carers stated that the duty to provide informal care had a negative impact on their lives and there is little evidence to show that older women are being forced out of the labour market because of informal childcare obligations.
- Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey indicated that almost everyone who provided informal care was satisfied with this arrangement, even though 25 per cent of cares had spent more time caring than they first anticipated. Three quarters of carers enjoyed spending time with the children for whom they cared.
- Younger carers were more likely to state that providing informal childcare had a mixed impact on their lives.
- Informal childcare arrangements are usually mutually beneficial for both carers and parents, ensuring low cost and flexible form of childcare for the parent and for the carers opportunities to bond with the children in their care.

10. The impacts of informal childcare on children

Informal childcare can impact on children in many different ways: on their later educational outcomes, on their behavioural and social development. In some cases, too, informal are can have an impact on children's welfare and basic safety, as not all informal childcare arrangements are safe. Drawing from our quantitative and qualitative research, this section presents new evidence on the impact of informal childcare on children. We examine the educational impacts of informal childcare, as well as looking at the impacts of this form of care on children's well-being and safety. The section presents new evidence on the extent of unregistered childminding and on families who use multiple childcare providers.

Educational impacts of informal care

Research on the educational impacts of informal childcare highlights a number of complex issues. Children who solely receive parental or informal childcare are generally less school-ready than those who have received some formal childcare in a nursery (Hawkes and Joshi, 2007; Hansen and Hawkes, 2009). Other literature highlights a divergence of opinions about the educational impacts of informal childcare. Importantly, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHHD) Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development, undertaken in the United States, suggests that it is the quality of both parental and informal childcare that are associated with children's later educational outcomes. Analysis of this dataset shows that the quality of relative care is positively correlated with better cognitive outcomes at 4.5 years – better quality grandparent and relative care leads to better cognitive outcomes in children (Belsky et al, 2007).

Our qualitative research suggested more nuanced parental opinions about the educational impacts of informal childcare. A small number of parents had concerns about their children being bored, or not being stimulated by their informal carers. However, our qualitative research also showed that most parents use informal childcare in combination with nursery care, or after the school day. When this happens, parents do not look to friends and relatives to meet their child's learning needs and do not make judgements about the ability of informal carers to provide a stimulating learning environment. Rather they look to informal carers to provide a nurturing environment.

"This sort of care has its benefits too. With the informal that's just nice sometimes for the kids to be at nanny's. They can lie back on the back settee, that's a bit more relaxed I guess. Sometimes they have a little nap and that."

(Father, east of England).

While parents may not look to informal carers to meet their children's learning needs, it is important from a child development and welfare perspective that carers provide a nurturing and a stimulating environment for children. Indeed, there is a growing literature that examines the impact of ignoring children or leaving them to watch television or play computer games for protracted periods of time. Additionally, children may also spend significant periods of time with informal carers, particularly in school holidays. Both our quantitative and qualitative research examined carers' ability to promote a learning-focused and stimulating home environment. We asked carers questions about their involvement with homework supervision, reading, painting, cooking and going on local walks and outings.

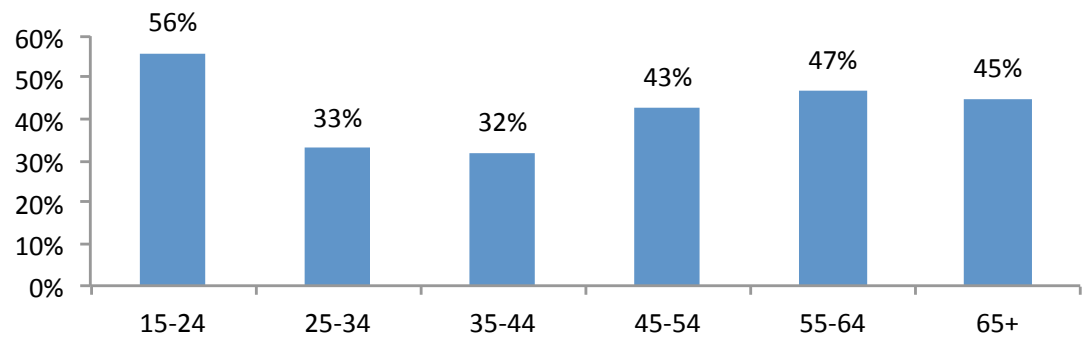
Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey highlighted the active nature of many informal carers. Some 43 per cent of informal carers supervised homework. The supervision of homework is an activity that is undertaken fairly consistently across different social grades of carers. However, the age of the informal carer appears to be associated with the extent of homework supervision with younger and the oldest informal carers being most likely to supervise homework (Figure 38). Younger sibling carers (who themselves may be at school) and grandparents may be more likely to supervise homework.

Overall, 72 per cent of informal carers read with the children for whom they cared. Again there were no large differences in this activity across the different social grades but again there differences associated with the age of the care. Some 63 per cent of carers under 45 years old read or looked at picture books with the child or children for whom they cared, compared with 78 per cent of carers aged 45 or over.

Fewer informal carers got to meet a child's teacher or nursery worker. Some 13 per cent of informal carers got to meet the teachers or nursery workers of the children for whom they cared, with this figure rising to 22 per cent of informal carers aged between 55 and 64 years. This suggests that although many informal carers encourage a rich home learning environment, contact with the nursery or school is still largely the responsibility of the parent.

Some 75 per cent of carers took the child or children for whom they cared on local walks or outings and 57 per cent of carers painted or cooked with them. Again, undertaking these activities was associated with the age of the care, with older carers being more likely to go

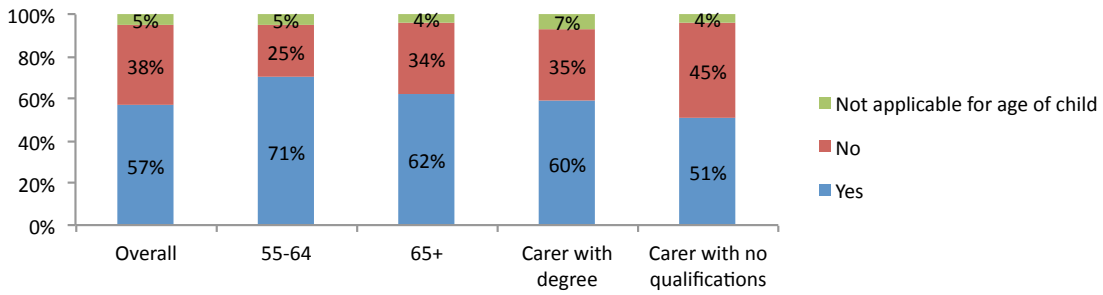
Figure 37: Per cent of informal carers supervising homework, by age of carer



N=857
Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

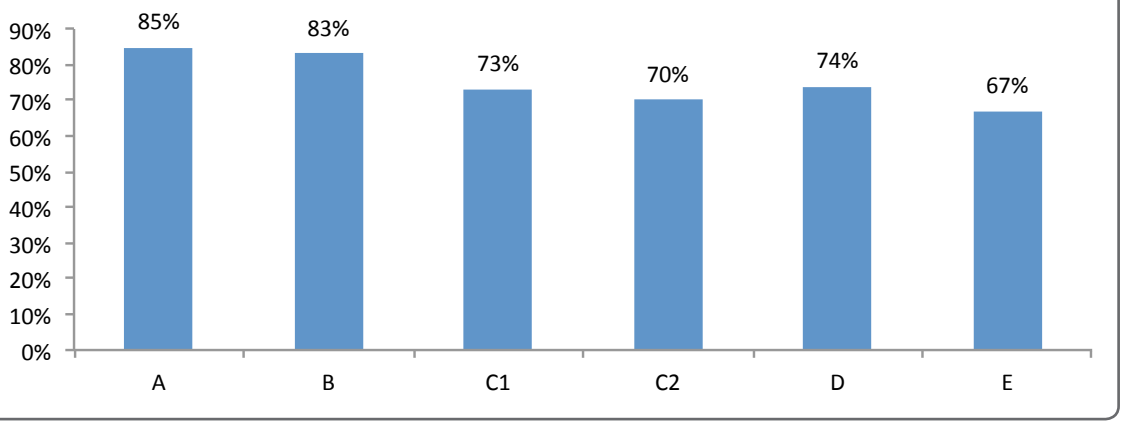
on walks and outings than those under 45 years. Some 71 per cent of informal carers aged 55-64 years painted or cooked with children. While reading and the supervision of homework are not associated with the social class of the carer, painting, cooking and going on local walks and outings appear to be (Figures 39 and 40).

Figure 38: Percentage of informal carers undertaking painting or cooking with child by carer characteristic



N=857
Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

Figure 39: Percentage of carers taking children on local walks or outings by social grade of carer



N=857
Source: Daycare Trust Carers' Survey

We were unable to understand if ethnicity is associated with carers' engagement with learning focused activity, as we had a small sample of informal carers from minority ethnic groups (35 out of 865). However, we were able break down carers' involvement in homework supervision, reading, painting and cooking and local outings by the total hours of care given – although the hours of care given do not relate to individual children. Only the likelihood of a carer undertaking homework supervision appears to be strongly related to the hours of care given, with 43 per cent of those caring for children for up to five hours every week supervising homework, compared with 57 per cent of those who look after a child for 5 – 10 hours per week. For the remainder of the activities – reading, painting or cooking and going on local outings – there is no strong increase in these activities among carers who looked after children for more than five hours every week.

Neither our qualitative nor quantitative research explored in greater detail why some informal carers engaged in activities such as reading and others did not. Evidence from the Carers survey put alongside research on the home learning environments suggests a core of basic educational activities such as reading with a child that almost all parents and close informal carers undertake (Crozier, 2000; Desforges, 2003; Smith et al, 2009). In addition to 'core' home learning activities, there appears to be a group of more elaborate and time consuming activities that are undertaken by fewer parents and informal carers, for example, painting, cooking or visits to museums and libraries. Overall, Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey suggested that 38 per cent of carers did not paint or cook with the children for whom they cared.

Activities such as painting and visits to local museums require equipment, transport or a financial outlay. They also require the carer to be confident and knowledgeable. Yet these activities are often of great education value, providing a richer home learning environment, ultimately impacting on children's learning in school (Desforges, 2003).

Arguably, both children's centres and schools have a role to play in supporting the home learning environment of children in informal care. While Sure Start children's centres run programmes to support parents build a positive home learning environment, previous research by Daycare Trusts suggest that many informal carers, particularly grandparents, feel excluded from these groups.

"I did use other clubs, but they weren't particularly ones for grandparents and I found them rather cliquey. There were obviously for young people."

(Grandfather interviewed by Daycare Trust and cited in Rutter and Evans, 2011b)

At the time of writing, information from the Grandparents Association suggested that there were only 30 grandparent and toddler groups across England, although where these groups were run they were valued by the grandparents who used them (Gray, 2005b). This contrasts with the United States where there are many more grandparent support groups as well as home learning programmes that work with informal carers. Indeed, more than a quarter of states in the United States now fund programmes

to support informal carers (Drake et al, 2006; Porter, 2007; Porter and Rivera, 2005). These interventions include the distribution of written advice on child development, face-to-face information child development and the distribution of children's books and educational toys to informal carers. Some programmes to support informal carers also undertake home visits, where informal carers receive advice and mentoring in the home. Additionally, in the United States there are many support groups for informal carers, where ideas and information can be shared and problems discussed, as well as play and learn groups for informal carers and children.

Daycare Trust would like to see children's centres play a great role in working with informal carers, ensuring that informal carers are always made to feel welcome. Expanding the number of grandparents's groups requires greater consideration. Many grandparent carers are in their 40s and 50s – the youngest grandparent in Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey was 38 – and may not identify with the popular image of a grandparent and be reluctant to attend grandparents groups.

Impacts of informal childcare on children's social development

As already noted, our research shows there is a lesser likelihood of using friends as informal carers among parents of lower social grades. Our interviews suggest that among middle class parents, childcare provided by friends was often planned in advance, often as reciprocating 'play dates'. Much previous writing about child development stresses the importance of interactions outside the family home as having an important role to play in the socialisation of children. Children are socialised through observing and interacting with their parents, but primary and secondary socialisation also occurs in the contexts of visits to the homes of friends and relatives. Although, we collected a limited amount of evidence on this issue, we were concerned that children from disadvantaged families seemed less likely to participate in play dates, and less likely to be cared for by adults who were not their parents. This indicates fewer opportunities for socialisation outside the immediate family home and is an area which requires further research.

Children's well-being and welfare

Our qualitative and quantitative research enabled a very limited exploration of the impact of informal care on children's well-being and welfare. As previously discussed, the Daycare Trust Parents' Survey suggested that almost all parents were satisfied with their informal childcare, although a few voiced concerns about informal childcare in the interviews, mostly about conflicting views about discipline. Parents articulated far more concerns about formal childcare for young children than they did about informal childcare. Overall, parents of young children felt that informal childcare from a close relative was the next best type of care for a young child – a child under two or three – after parental care. After a child reached two or three years old, many parents believe that some formal nursery is important as it helped children develop cognitive and social skills.

Overall, most parents felt that their experiences of using informal childcare were positive and that the nurturing environment associated with informal children provided by a close relative or friend contributed to children's well-being. But there were some families whose informal childcare arrangements were chaotic and had the potential to be unsafe.

"From the time I had my son, when anyone said 'Let me have him' it's like 'Ok'. As long as my son, he's clean, he's got his food, I'm OK. With the second one you are less fussy, I don't care who has him as long as he is OK."

(Mother, London)

Some parents used unregistered child minders and in many cases children were cared for by young or inexperienced carers. A few informal carers that parents described in interviews appeared to have poor supervisory skills or had mental health or alcohol abuse problems.

"There is my family, but they are all a bit crazy, although they have him, I don't really trust them."

(Mother, London).

"I've got a boyfriend now, I just met this guy... He can be a bit dodgy… He finishes work about 6 o'clock and he comes to my house at 7 o'clock and he can help [look after two children]."

(Mother, London).

Our qualitative research suggested that it was the most disadvantaged parents had these potentially unsafe childcare arrangements. They were often single parents with a greater need for childcare. Generally they were unemployed or had badly paid jobs, so did not have the money to pay for formal childcare. Parents with few qualifications or limited prior experience had little power with employers to negotiate family friendly hours of work.

This is the first time that British research on informal childcare has highlighted concerns about child welfare and safety associated with informal childcare. However a number of North American studies have examined this issue. Knox et al (2003) highlight the unsafe nature of some informal childcare in a study that looked at childcare usage in a number of deprived areas in the United States. This research showed some families using multiple forms of informal childcare, with children being looked after by a range of relatives, friends, babysitters and unregistered childminders. Some of the carers in this study were very young and inexperienced. Some also presented a hazard to children, through their problem use of drugs or alcohol.

Daycare Trust's findings raise a number of policy issues. Those concerned with child welfare need to consider how unregistered childminding might better be regulated, an issue which we discuss below. More broadly, those concerned with children's welfare need to consider how to minimise parents' use of unsafe forms of informal childcare. Here parents had turned to potentially unsafe forms of childcare because safe and affordable forms of childcare were not available or affordable. Daycare Trust believes that two approaches are needed in order to minimise parents' use of unsafe forms of childcare. First, parenting classes might better enable parents to judge risks in using informal childcare. Second, we need to expand the supply of safe and affordable forms of childcare for those parents who presently turn to friends, relatives and neighbours to look after their children. We need more sessional childcare that can be booked at short notice. We need more registered child minders and nurseries who are able to work outside normal office hours. And we need more registered childcare services service, where trained carers can look after children in their own homes, with registration enabling parents to claim Working Tax Credit support.

Unregistered childminders

As noted above, unregistered childminding has the potential to put children at risk. Children may be placed in physically dangerous environments, or in the care of people who are a risk to children. Unregistered childminders may lack the skills to look after children safely – they may have no knowledge of first aid, for example. Both the Millennium Cohort Study and a survey of childcare in Northern Ireland have shown small, but significant numbers of parents using unregistered childminders, with the Millennium Cohort Study suggesting that 1.8 per cent of parents were using unregistered childminders.

Both our qualitative and quantitative research supported the view that there are significant numbers of unregistered childminders working in Britain. Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey asked parents if they knew of unregistered childminders working in their local area with three per cent of parents stated that they did. This question, however, assumed some prior knowledge of childminder registration procedures among parents – that parents would know the difference between a registered and unregistered childminder. Our qualitative research suggested a higher incidence of unregistered childminders, with parents talking about childcare arrangements that were unregistered childminding in seven of the ten focus groups. In one group, a mother whose job involved shift work stated:

"I've got this woman who does 6 to 9 and sometimes she does overnight and late time work as well. She doesn't advertise, but I could give you her number. If you're really stuck and desperate, then who cares really, you know you're just going to do what you have to do."

(Mother, London).

Another mother, new to the country, described unregistered child minding arrangement in her own community. This mother had a three year old child and a baby of 12 months and no other adult relatives in Britain. She used unregistered child minders to help her complete her chores.

"We pay for each other. I mean I know from my country other ladies from my country. We have good relationship with each other as friends, but when I need to book my children with them I have to pay because they work like this."

(Mother, Manchester).

In another instance two eastern European women had planned to attend one of our focus groups, but they withdrew after coming to the venue because they were concerned they would be prosecuted for providing illegal childminding to members of their own community. (This incident suggests some awareness of childminding registration in the migrant community in this area).

There were over 800 complaints about unregistered childminding to Ofsted's complaints hotline in the 2009–2010 academic year, resulting in 49 enforcement notices (Ofsted, 2010). We do not know why so few complaints to Ofsted resulted in action, although proving a person violates registration requirements may be hard. Unregistered childminding was noted as a problem in seven per cent of the 2008 local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, with some arguing that significant component of unregistered childminding is when childminders who care for children over the age of eight – for whom registration is voluntary – also care for children under this age and do not register with Ofsted and its equivalents.

Gray and Brueghel's (2003) study of childcare in Northern Ireland argue that the costs of formal childcare and shortages of registered childminders were demand-side drivers of unregistered childminding, but in many instances those providing unregistered childminding were trusted friend and neighbours. Research on the informal economy also suggest that unregistered childminding offers work opportunities for people with few qualifications and that cash-in-hand payments are also attractive to some women (Williams and Windebank, 2003). For others, the process of registration with Ofsted and the local authority may be too expensive or daunting, suggesting the need for support.

Our research supported most of these assertions about the drivers of unregistered child minding. In particular, the costs of formal childcare emerged as a reason for using an unregistered child minder. But our qualitative work highlighted a further and equally important driver – their flexibility for families who had no other flexible informal childcare. Unregistered childminders usually provided the same type of childcare to that provided by a friend or relative, for example, childcare in emergencies or outside normal office hours. We believe that if local and central government wishes to reduce the incidence of unregistered child minding, it needs to develop greater amounts of flexible and affordable for parents who work in the evening, overnight and at the weekend. This means more sessional childcare, registered home-based childcare and out-of-hours childminding.

Regulating babysitting?

As previously noted, some parents use babysitters to look after their children. Daycare Trust's Parents Survey indicated that two per cent or parents had used babysitters to look after their youngest or oldest child in the last six months. A further one per cent of families had used neighbours to provide childcare for their youngest or oldest child, a group that overlaps with babysitters. This is a lower figure than we expected, as our qualitative work indicated that a significant number of parents used babysitters, with parents in eight of the ten focus groups using babysitters. Parents who work in the evening were a group that was particularly likely to use babysitter. It was only in the two focus groups of parents of disabled children where there was no babysitter use.

Daycare Trust's Carers Survey suggested a higher rate of babysitting, with 6 per cent of carers in the 15-24 age bracket having looked after friends or neighbour's children in the past six months. In the same survey 7 per cent of 15 – 24 year olds were paid to provide childcare. If these rates of babysitting were projected across the whole country, this suggests about 120,000 15 – 24 year olds who undertake babysitting duties. We have no robust data against which to place our own estimations about babysitting. The Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents does not have a specific category for babysitters. The majority of local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments do not mention babysitters, even those that discuss informal childcare, an omission that is surprising.

Our qualitative work indicated that some parents had good experiences of using babysitters, particularly older neighbours. However, a few parents used young and inexperienced babysitters who were a potential risk to their children.

"At the weekend or if I am going out with my boyfriend then babysitters cheaper for me because a formal person would charge me like £7 an hour or something and it's too expensive whereas the girl across the road who's 16 charges me a tenner. However, the downside of that is she's not as experienced and I have to keep reminding her about things. At first when she started she didn't change the nappy, I had to say to her 'You know you must change the nappy.' She will help herself to food, drink whatever as much as she'd like, she'd open things that are not open and she'd feed the baby and leave the plate with the bit on the floor. She went on a website on the internet there's some sex things as well and when I came home I thought well ok, she's 16 and I was scared to say anything because I was thinking I don't want to offend her."

(Mother, London).

As we have noted, better parental education has the potential to make parents more aware of the risks of using a young and inexperienced babysitter. Personal, Health and Social Education, delivered in schools has the potential to raise awareness among young babysitters about safety issues. The British Red Cross runs a training course for young babysitters. This course, delivered over at least 15 hours, covers expectations, rights and the law, accident prevention and fire safety, first aid and dealing with challenging babysitting situations. The British Red Cross recommends that participants need to have reached their 14th birthday by the final session. Evaluation of this initiative has been good and this course should be promoted. It might also be incorporated into Personal, Health and Social Education lessons in schools.

The development of affordable registered babysitting services for working parents is another option to consider, as registration with Ofsted, and its equivalents outside England, would enable parents to claim the childcare element of Working Tax Credit. At the moment, some nanny agencies have babysitters on their books who can be hired out, but very few of these babysitters are on Ofsted's voluntary register, so working parents cannot claim Tax Credits. Attendance on a first aid course and a Criminal Record Bureau check might be a minimum requirement for registration on a registered babysitting scheme. The launch of registered babysitting services could also be used as a basis for awareness raising about the potential risks of using young and inexperienced babysitters.

There are, of course, disadvantages of a registered babysitting service. Registration might give a false notion of safety to parents. And the parents who are at the greatest risk of using inexperienced babysitters are the ones who may be least willing or able to pay for a registered babysitter. Nevertheless, it is an idea that may be worth exploring, particularly for parents working outside normal office hours.

Children's social development compromised by multiple childcare packages

A further way in which informal childcare may impact negatively on children's welfare is through the use of multiple forms of childcare, where children find it difficult to develop secure and trusting relationships with their carers. Some research about the impacts of institutional (nursery) childcare on children's later social and behavioural outcomes has attributed later negative social and behavioural outcomes in children to high levels of staff turnover often seen in poorer quality nurseries and the consequential lack of bonding with carers (Melhuish, 2004). As a consequence, many quality improvement initiatives for nurseries focus on improving staff retention.

In addition to staff turnover in nurseries, children's attachment to carers can also be eroded by using a large number of carers for a child, both formal and informal. Daycare Trust's Parents' Survey highlights a proportion of parents who are using multiple forms of childcare. Table 14 gives data from the Daycare Trust Parents' Survey on the number of informal carers that parents had used for their youngest child over the last six months. It shows a small number of parents who had used four or more different carers over the last six months, often in addition to formal childcare. This finding is supported by data from the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, where 9 per cent of parents of children under two and 20 per cent of parents of three and four years olds had used three or more formal and informal childcare providers in the reference week of the survey (Department for Education, 2010).

Table 14: Number of different informal carers used by parents over the last months

Number of Informal Carers	Number of Parents	% of parents
1	414	29.3%
2	113	8%
3	40	2.8%
4	13	0.9%
5	4	0.3%
6	0	0%
7	1	>0%

N=1,413
Source: Daycare Trust Parents' Survey

Our qualitative research highlighted the very complex nature of some childcare arrangements.

"I've got one child, who is 17 months. She gets looked after predominantly by my sister. I work two days a week so two days a week. My sister covers three weeks out of the month and the fourth week gets covered by my in-laws but that's about to change because my mum's going to take over a week as well, so my sister will do two weeks, my mum will do one week and my in-laws will do another week."

(Mother, south east England).

"When I'm at college he goes to his Dad's, my mum's or, my Nan, or my cousins."

(Mother, London).

We did not collect survey data on the length of time that specific childcare arrangements had been in place as this would have been methodologically challenging, but our qualitative research suggested a small number of children had multiple formal and informal carers over a short period of time, with some formal childcare lasting for very short periods of time. One child had nine different types of care before he reached the age of two, in addition to informal childcare from his family and their friends. This formal childcare comprised a child minder at two weeks old, a private nursery while the mother attended a six week welfare-to-work training programme, two more private nurseries while the mother worked, an evening child minder, another unregistered evening child minder, followed by a daytime childminder. This mother explained how she came to use one of the private nurseries.

"It was because I started college and I was missing a couple of days and I was on a six-week probation and I couldn't fail on that six weeks probation so I had to find a nursery – emergency – so basically I went on the internet and phoned up all the nurseries that had vacancies… When I finished the course I pulled him out of the nursery."

(Mother, London).

These multiple and often short term childcare arrangements had the potential to impact on children's behaviour. Our qualitative work showed that all the parents who had used multiple and short-term forms of childcare talked about their children feeling unsettled or manifesting changes to their behaviour. One mother of a three year old boy has used an unregistered child minder, neighbours, a sessional crèche, two private nurseries and a children's centre nursery since arriving in Britain. She talked about the impact of these changes on his behaviour.

"But now, you know, he become terrible. He forgets everything I learn him after when he started that nursery. My son he lost weight. He become really naughty"

(Mother, Manchester).

Another parent who had used multiple forms of childcare described the impact of these care arrangements on the child.

"I used to work really irregular hours and she never used to know whether she was seeing me, or whether she was seeing my partner's Mum, or my partner was having her or, my Mum was having her. She just never knew whether she was coming or going and she wouldn't settle."

(Mother, Doncaster).

The parents who used multiple and short-term forms of childcare had a number of social characteristics in common. All of them had low or modest incomes and none of them were able to use grandparents to provide informal care for significant periods of time. Additionally, all of the parents were either looking for work and obliged to attend welfare-to-work programmes, or had insecure and temporary work. While a parent attended a welfare-to-work programme, formal childcare costs were paid, but once that parent had found work (often low paid), this subsidy ended and the parent had to withdraw the child from the nursery. One single parent described how she was forced to remove her young daughter from a nursery.

"The Job Centre paid for the Nursery while I was at college, because they will pay for you to go back to college or part-time work for a certain amount of time. So they paid for it so I didn't look into what Nursery costs were until I came here and found employment, and I nearly had heart failure when I found out the cost. I had to take her out of the nursery"

(Mother, London).

Daycare Trust believes that researchers and policy makers need to give greater consideration to the capacity of multiple and short-term forms of childcare to impact on a child's behaviour. We need more research on this issue: analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study would enable us to test the relationship between using multiple and short term forms of childcare and unsettled behaviour. The Department for Work and Pensions, together with Work Programme providers need to give much greater consideration to ensuring continuity of childcare for parents who attend welfare-to-work provision. We are intending to examine the multiple and short-term forms of childcare in greater detail in the last phase of our research on informal childcare.

Key points

- Children who solely receive informal childcare may be less school ready than children who have received high quality formal childcare, but the free early education offer means that this is a small group of children.
- Most informal carers, particularly grandparents, do provide a nurturing and stimulating environment for the children for whom they care. Nearly half of informal carers read with the children for whom they care, or supervise homework.
- While reading and the supervision of homework are not associated with the social grade of the carer, undertaking painting, cooking and going on local walks and outings decline across the social grades.
- Both our qualitative and quantitative research supported the view that there are significant numbers of unregistered childminders working in Britain. Some three per cent of parent who replied to the survey knew of unregistered childminders and our qualitative research suggested a higher incidence of unregistered childminding.
- While most informal childcare is safe and nurturing, among a minority of disadvantaged families, informal childcare arrangements can be chaotic and disorientating for the child, as well as having the potential to be unsafe. The use of multiple, short-term forms of childcare can compromise children's learning and emotional and social development. Very young babysitters and unregistered childminders have the potential to put children at risk.

11. The broader impacts of informal childcare

The previous chapter has focused on the impacts of informal childcare on children's welfare and development. Our research also suggests broader impacts of informal childcare: on parents and other household members, on carers and on wider society. We look at some of the impacts on carers of informal childcare later in the report. Here we draw on our qualitative and quantitative research and discuss the impacts of informal care on families and on wider society.

We have previously argued that informal childcare has four broad types of impacts on families and on wider society:

- Psycho-social impacts with informal childcare acting as a protective factor for families experiencing stress, with informal childcare better enabling families to cope
- Inter-generational solidarity
- Community impacts with the networks formed by informal childcare acting as a form of social capital
- Economic impacts on families and on wider society (Rutter and Evans, 2011a).

Drawing on quantitative and qualitative data, we discuss each of these four types of impacts below.

Psycho-social impacts on the family

The concept of protective factors and resilience draw on ecological models of child development, as well as Michael Rutter's work with physically and sexually abused children (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Brooks-Gunn, 2001; Rutter, 1985). Rutter and others outline protective factors (sometimes called mediating factors) and resilience on one hand, and risk factors (adverse factors) and vulnerability in children's lives. Protective factors are attributes or conditions that make it more likely that an individual or household will achieve some degree of resilience as an outcome and less likely that individuals will manifest distress severe enough to render them dysfunctional. Masten et al (1991) provide another definition of resilience as:

"… the process of, capacity for or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances."

(Masten et al, 1991; Rutter, 1985)

Our qualitative research showed that informal childcare was an important protective factor for families with disabled children. Care offered by grandparents provided a respite for parents, enabling them to spend time as a couple, with their other children, or to undertake work and household chores. The care offered by grandparents often enabled parents and siblings of disabled children to cope better as a family.

"He does receive residential overnight respite care which is fantastic and has been a life-saver for our family – but it's very rigid. We are told when he can go, and there's no flexibility so in terms of if an emergency comes up or if you just want to pop out for a meal with your husband or take your older son to the pictures to see a film that he wants to see, we are totally reliant on grandparents."

(Mother, West Midlands)

The evidence to show that informal childcare was a significant protective factor in families without disabled children was much less clear. On the one hand informal childcare did enable parents to work and manage their lives much better. Daycare Trust's Parents Survey suggested that 13 per cent of parents used informal childcare because it provided a break for them or other members of their family. But we were unable to explore how families would cope if informal childcare was not available.

Inter-generational solidarity

Almost all developed societies are experiencing an ageing demographic profile as fertility declines and life expectancy increases. Many debates about welfare reform in developed societies have focused on the economic burdens of ageing societies in relation to pension payments and healthcare expenditure. Both media commentators and some research have suggested that inter-generational solidarity in developed countries is decreasing because of demands on the welfare state (Eurobarometer, 2009). Growing individualisation, and the nuclearisation of families have also been presented as threats to inter-generational solidarity (Silverstein and Bengston, 1997). In such a context, some public policy interventions have focused in improving the bonds between young and old and increasing levels of inter-generational solidarity. For example, the previous Labour government required English local authorities take action to promote community cohesion. In many areas local authorities supported community cohesion projects to bring together young people and the over 50s, as they considered inter-generational bonds to be weak.

Cherlin and Furstenberg (1986) argue that grandparent childcare is an important component of inter-generational communication and solidarity in western democracies and that societal norms about respect for older people are often reproduced through grandparent childcare. We were consequently interested to test the conclusions of the above research. But any examination of 'intergenerational solidarity' requires a clear definition and existing literature on inter-generational solidarity is based on very different conceptualisations and definitions. Some literature defines inter-generational solidarity at a micro or family level, viewing it along axis of:

- Emotional closeness
- Similarities of opinions and values
- Geographic proximity
- Contact
- Instrumental assistance (Roberts and Bengtson, 1990; Silverstein and Bengtson, 1997).

Both our quantitative and qualitative research support the assertion that informal childcare increases inter-generational solidarity at a household level. Obviously, informal childcare provided by grandparents of a form of instrumental assistance that involves contact between generations. Informal childcare promotes emotional closeness with Daycare Trust's Carers Survey indicating that 36 per cent of those providing informal childcare said that the provision of care enabled them to develop a close relationship with the children for whom they cared and 75 per cent of carers enjoyed being with the children. Previous chapters of this report have examined the proximity of informal carers to carer (Daycare Trust's Parents survey suggested that 54 per cent of parents live within 5 miles of their main informal carer). Parents also talked of moving closer to their own parents, so they could provide informal childcare.

"We were looking at living in Guildford or Basingstoke or Andover and we just thought 'God nobody's winning then'. Everybody's sort of stretched so we moved sort of close to my mum and dad, primarily for that reason [informal childcare] and yeah, there is really good bond there. My oldest is seven now and they know the routine, that my mum and dad know where all their stuff is, they know what the drill is."

(Father, South east England).

While many parents articulated conflicts over parenting – mostly about diet and discipline – with grandparent carers, the practice of providing informal childcare enabled parents to overcome these conflicts.

"We've had some arguments because she (grandmother) doesn't really do discipline. She's got discipline in the way she wants to do discipline, not the way I want her to do it. She'll let him do things like empty the kitchen drawers and everything that I won't. We discussed it from the start about how we would do discipline, how we are going to organise it, so that we would have the same mindset."

(Mother, South east England).

"My dad's quite good on disciplining the boys, my mum's useless because she just thinks that they should come to nanny's house and have lots of treats and so we have this rule now that when it's nanny's house it's nanny's rules when it's mummy's house it's mummy's rules because we were getting quite a lot of conflict."

(Mother, South east England).

While informal childcare clearly forges inter-generational solidarity at a household level, other literature on inter-generational solidarity has focussed on neighbourhood interactions or on macro-level opinions. The academic literature that focuses on the neighbourhood level tends to use definitions of inter-generational solidarity that encompass:

- Social interactions between different generations at a neighbourhood.
- Shared values between different generations at a neighbourhood level.
- Trust and reciprocity between different generations in a neighbourhood (Pain, 2005).

Literature on macro-level intergenerational solidarity tends to define inter-generational solidarity as:

- Absence of ageism and age-related stereotypes.
- Absence of inter-generational conflicts.
- Agreement between generations on what is best for society.
- Political decision making that accounts for all generations (Eurobarometer, 2009).

Tesch Roner et al (2002) argue that macro-level discourses are now much more significant in determining intergenerational solidarity than household or community level interactions. In societies where extended families have been dismantled Tesch Roner et al (2002) argue that inter-generational solidarity is much less determined by individual relations but by politicised national discourses.

At a macro-level informal childcare is a cross-generational exchange of services which has the potential to challenge national discourses that the old are a burden to society. We found rather limited evidence to suggest that informal childcare impacted on neighbourhood and macro-level intergenerational solidarity. There was little evidence to show that the provision of informal childcare affected neighbourhood interactions between young and older people. A previous literature review undertaken by Daycare Trust indicated that there was very little media coverage about grandparent childcare in Britain (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). This limited coverage had largely focused on research reports produced by Grandparents Plus (Grandparents Plus, 2010). We concluded that there is a disconnect between inter-generational solidarity at a household level and national discourses about the old. This is a trend about which organisations advocating for older people need to respond.

Community impacts

A number of previous studies have argued that informal childcare arrangements can develop into stronger networks among parents (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). Brown and Dench (2004) cite one example of a group of African mothers who met at a church service and often watched over each other's children. This arrangement eventually developed into a playgroup and a babysitting circle. We were interested to examine if informal childcare can facilitate the formation of social capital.

Social capital is a contested term, attracting a large literature from a sociological and social anthropology perspective. Broadly, it comprises resources based on social networks and can be distinguished from economic capital, cultural capital (skills, work experience and qualifications) and symbolic capital - the cultural value that is attached to economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). While there has been as burgeoning interest from policy makers in central government about social capital formation, there has been very little debate about informal childcare in the context of social capital formation. Lowndes (2000; 2003) argues that this omission is because childcare networks involve children and caring and they are seen as belonging to the private sphere of the family, rather than the public sphere of the community, hence they are often not viewed as social capital. Lowndes (2003) also asserts that that women who set up and are active in babysitting circles do not view themselves as being 'volunteers' and active in the community because babysitting is seen as private sphere activity.

While a significant minority of parents use relatives to provide informal childcare, Daycare Trust's Parents Survey shows that in the previous six months just six per cent of parents had used friends to provide informal childcare for their youngest child, a trend that was also supported in our qualitative research where it was a minority of parents who used friends. Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey suggested that eight per cent of adults who provided informal childcare did so on a reciprocal basis, with the parents also helping the carer. Our qualitative work highlighted some examples of reciprocal childcare arrangements as well as organised 'play date' systems where parents shared after-school childcare.

"I would look after him, my neighbour's son, while she was at work. And my friend would do the same for me, my daughter would stay over with her. But she moved earlier this year and this does not happen anymore."

(Mother, London).

As previously noted, both our quantitative and qualitative research has shown that reciprocal childcare arrangements are much less frequent among families in the lower social grades. Daycare Trust's Carers' Survey suggested that nine per cent of informal carers from social grade A were involved in reciprocal childcare arrangements, but just four per cent of carers from social grade D and one per cent from social grade E provided reciprocal informal childcare. This differential distribution has social implications. As already noted children in the lower social grades seem less likely to

27. ONS population estimates

experience socialisation in the homes of friends and neighbours. Communities where play dates and babysitting circles are rare may have fewer opportunities to accrue social capital. Crucially, too, parents in communities that lack mutual support networks may struggle to find emergency and one-off childcare that friends often provide. In our interviews a number of parents talked about their perceived isolation and how it left them without emergency back-up.

"I'm not close to anyone in her [daughter] school or in my area. My main people are in south London that I'm close to. My mum always says I'm isolated, I need to make friends"

(Mother, London).

Clearly, both emergency childcare and mutual support are important for parents. Some health visitors and family support workers have tried to facilitate the support networks, but not all do so. The National Childbirth Trust also helps its members set up support groups for new parents – groups that often develop into long-term mutual support networks. However, membership of the National Childbirth Trust requires a financial outlay. Given that our research shows disadvantaged parents are less likely to provide reciprocal childcare and organise after-school 'play dates', we believe that all children's centres should see it as a key mission to facilitate mutual support networks among parents.

Economic impacts of informal childcare

Informal childcare also has a number of economic impacts, including important labour market and fiscal impacts. One of the impacts that we wanted to explore was the potential of informal childcare to exclude some carers from the labour market, particularly older women. However, the evidence that we present in Chapter 10 refutes this assertion; we think that there is little evidence to suggest that large numbers of women in their 50s and early 60s are prevented from working by the obligations to provide informal childcare.

Some economic impacts of childcare may accrue through the substitution of subsidised childcare – through Working Tax Credits, childcare voucher support or free formal childcare – by informal childcare. Potentially, parents who choose to use informal childcare rather than subsidised formal care may be saving public monies. As we argue in earlier chapters, parents of babies and those with school age children are most likely solely to use informal childcare. Daycare Trust's Parents Survey suggests that 29 per cent of parents solely used informal childcare for their youngest and oldest child.

In previous chapters we have argued that informal childcare enables a large number of parents to enter or remain in the labour market, particularly single parents, low income households or parents working atypical hours. Daycare Trust's Parents Survey indicated that informal childcare helped 56 per cent of parents to work and 13 per cent of them to work outside normal office hours. This is a very considerable number of parents across Britain. If these proportions were projected on to the numbers of families with dependent children in Britain – an estimated 7,657,000 families in 2010[27] - up to 4.3 million families may use informal childcare to help them work, and nearly 1 million families may use informal childcare to help them work outside normal office hours.

It is difficult to know what employment decisions parents would make if they did not have access to informal childcare. Some parents may change their jobs or reduce their hours. Other parents would certainly not participate in the labour market. Even if the proportions of parents who did not work was small, for example, around 500,000 families, the fiscal impact of this would be significant, through parents greater need for benefits and their small contribution to the exchequer through taxation.

Coming up with a more precise estimate of the economic impact of informal childcare provision is very challenging, from a methodological perspective (Holloway and Tamplin, 2001). To make this estimate, we would need survey evidence to show the extent to which informal childcare substitutes for subsidised formal childcare. In order to calculate the labour market impacts of informal childcare we would need survey data on the counterfactual condition – parents work decisions where informal childcare is not available to them. At present, household surveys in the UK do not capture this data.

Key points

- Informal childcare may have positive psychosocial impacts on families with disabled children by acting as a protective factor enabling greater coping in families with disabled children, providing a respite for parents, enabling them to spend time as a couple, with their other children, or to undertake work.
- The provision of informal childcare – a cross generational exchange of services – has very little impact on dominant discourses that the old are a burden to society.
- Disadvantaged parents are less likely to provide reciprocal childcare and organise after-school 'play dates', and as such have less access to mutual support and emergency childcare that friends provide for each other. We believe that all children's centres should see it as a key mission to facilitate mutual support networks among parents.
- Although difficult to quantify, the provision of informal childcare has major economic impacts. Most importantly, it enables parents to work and make a positive contribution to the exchequer through taxation.

12.Conclusions and recommendations

Daycare Trust's research set out to examine a form of childcare used by nearly half of parents in Britain, but about which little is known. We looked at who uses informal childcare and for what purpose. We also wanted to profile the informal carers' themselves and understand more about the lives of carers.

Our research has highlighted the importance of informal childcare to families, with nearly half (47 per cent) the parents we surveyed using informal childcare for their youngest child. Most parents use informal childcare to help them work, often outside normal office hours, at weekends or in holiday periods when schools and public sector nurseries are shut. As such, informal childcare has major economic impacts, supporting parental employment, helping families move out of poverty and make a positive contribution to the exchequer through taxation. Informal childcare assumes particular importance in sectors where large proportions of available work involves some out-of-hours working, in retailing, health and social care, transport and in the hotel and catering sector. For many parents having access to informal childcare support networks can help mean the difference between work and unemployment.

Of all informal carers, grandparents are the group most likely to provide informal childcare, with over a third of parents (35 per cent) who used non-parental childcare using grandparents as their main form of childcare. Grandparents tend to provide more hours of informal childcare and more regular care than other informal carers: our survey suggested that grandparent carers provided an average of nine hours of care every week. Given this substantial time commitment it was surprising to learn that over one third (35 per cent) of grandparent carers still work, often at the same time as providing considerable amounts of informal childcare. Policy interventions need to support grandparents carers, including those who are still in work. At a time when the dominant portrayal of older people focuses on their burden on society, we also need to highlight the contribution that grandparents make in the form of informal childcare.

While grandparents provide the most hours of informal childcare, many families in Britain also receive help from their friends. Daycare Trust's two surveys indicated that the use of friends to provide childcare declines across the social grades. Our interviews suggested friends are used to provide one-off and emergency children in working-class families. Among middle class parents, childcare provided friends was often planned in advance, often as a reciprocal arrangement.

Daycare Trust's research highlighted some striking regional differences in the use of informal childcare provided by grandparents and other close relatives. While over half of parents in Scotland (51 per cent) used grandparents to provide childcare, just 18 per cent of parents in London did so. The lesser use of grandparent care in London may be a consequence of international and internal migration to the capital, processes which often sever childcare support networks. Central and local government policy, including Childcare Sufficiency Assessments, need to acknowledge that London parents have less access to informal childcare.

Families who do not have informal childcare networks need to be able to access affordable and flexible formal childcare, including childcare that operates outside normal office hours.

We investigated which factors were most strongly associated with the use of informal childcare, as well as looking at how parents make childcare decisions. Family work-status is strongly associated with the use of informal childcare, with two parent families where both parents work being most likely to use informal childcare. Households where both parents work atypical hours are more likely to use informal childcare provided by family members. The likelihood of using informal childcare decreases down social grades, possibly because parents in professional and managerial occupations are most likely to have atypical work patterns, involving work outside normal office hours when formal childcare is not usually available. This finding challenges the dominant view that it is low income families that use the most informal childcare.

The factor that was most strongly associated with informal childcare use was the proximity of the parent's closest adult relative. Families whose nearest adult relative lives within five miles were 5 times more likely to have used informal childcare than those whose nearest adult relative lived between 30 and 150 miles away. That informal childcare is less likely to be used by families without nearby social support points to practical limitations that impact on childcare decision-making. Our research on this process showed that structural constraints such as childcare affordability, the timing of formal childcare and the proximity of that care to the home or the workplace appear to be the pre-eminent factors in childcare decision-making. Parents, usually mothers, weigh up these structural constraints at the start if the decision-making process. Subjective factors such as trust for the carer and views about childrearing tend to be invoked after a decision has been made about childcare, often as a means of self-justification for the childcare arrangement that a parent has made. Thus, values and attitudes about bringing up children and childcare are determined, or at least significantly mediated, by the economic circumstances in which parents find themselves.

Our research has also enabled us to fill in some of the many gaps in knowledge that we have previously identified. We know much more about the childcare decision-making process. We know much more about the use of childcare among parents on welfare-to-work programmes. Here our research has highlighted an alarming trend: the use of many short term forms of childcare as parents progress through different forms of training. We also know more about the use of informal childcare in families with disabled children: the likelihood of using grandparent to provide childcare appeared to be similar in families with and without disabled children, but parents of disabled children rarely use friends to provide informal childcare.

Despite the importance of informal childcare in the lives of families, it is often undervalued by policy makers in both central and local government. The majority of the 2008 Childcare Sufficiency Assessments undertaken by local authorities failed to analyse families' use of informal childcare at all. Yet for parents, informal childcare is part of an overall childcare package or system. In many families, formal childcare usage is affected by the availability of informal childcare and vice versa. We believe that local authorities cannot understand demand for formal childcare without analysing informal childcare.

This lack of understanding of informal childcare by policy makers appears to be a consequence of it being seen as a 'private sphere' activity, with only formal childcare falling into the realm of the public sphere. In Britain there remains confusion and disagreement in public policy about how and where the boundaries between in the public sphere and in the private sphere of the home should be drawn. Debates about policy responses to informal childcare falls into this blurred area between public and private sphere.

Daycare Trust's research has led to the developement of a series of policy recommendations. Most importantly, we need to view informal childcare in a more positive light. Public policy must understand, value and support informal childcare to a much greater extent than at present and we should not see it as an inadequate alternative to formal childcare. The focus of public policy on informal childcare should be to maximise its benefits, while at the same time extending formal provision to those families without access to any good quality childcare, whether formal or informal. We also need to recognise the contribution that grandparents to families through the provision of informal childcare.

Policy makers need to see informal care and formal care as part of the same system. Local authority Childcare Sufficiency Assessments need to give much more attention to the use informal childcare. Local authorities, too, need to give much more attention to the childcare needs of families without access to informal childcare. Families in the armed forces, former armed forces families, those living in temporary accommodation, internal and international migrants are groups of people who may have fewer nearby support networks who can provide informal childcare. Social interventions need to focus on low income families who do not have access to informal children, as without affordable formal provision, or informal childcare, parents will not be able to work, look for work or study.

We have highlighted some important differences in the use of informal childcare across different social grades. The most economically disadvantaged parents used less informal childcare and appeared to have less access to the mutual support and emergency childcare that informal carers can offer. Our second recommendation is that all children's centres should see it as a key mission to facilitate mutual support networks among parents.

Our research showed that parents who work outside office hours or whose work patterns are irregular are particularly reliant on informal childcare to be able to work. While informal childcare can help these parents stay in work, the breakdown of informal care arrangements often means that parents have to leave work. We need to make formal childcare work more effectively for parents who do not have access to informal childcare. Local authorities could better utilise vacant places in nurseries to provide sessional childcare for student parents and those looking for work. We need more registered at-home childcare services for parents who work outside normal office hours. Here an agency or local authority brokers childcare that is provided in the family home by carers registered with Ofsted. These initiatives could be replicated more widely across Britain. The present Working Tax Credit system does not work for many families in the peripheral labour market who move in and out of work and uptake of the childcare element of Working Tax Credit is low in this group. A further recommendation is that the development of the Universal Credit is an opportunity to design a system which is responsive to varying childcare costs among parents who move in and out of work.

For most families being able to turn to relatives and friends to provide informal childcare is a positive condition, enabling them to work. For them, informal childcare has no detrimental effects as long as three and four year olds use some high quality early childhood education. We do not need interventions to substitute informal childcare with formal provision, as long as their informal childcare arrangements are safe, stable, reliable and meet parents' needs. However, a small number of families use multiple, unstable and unreliable forms of informal childcare and no high quality formal provision, with children passed between friends, relatives and babysitters. We need to target this group of families and ensure that they have access to affordable, flexible and safe formal childcare.

Our research also showed significant evidence of unregistered childminding. While there are many arguments for the better regulation of nanny and babysitting agencies, families who use unregistered childminders or very young babysitters are often from low income groups that do not use agencies. Arguably, we need to understand better the demand for unregistered childminding and babysitting and ensure that there is enough affordable formal childcare available at times of the day when parents need it. A further recommendation is that improved parenting education in schools could also cover babysitting and first aid, to ensure that young babysitters are better equipped to deal with emergencies.

The qualititive research we did suggests that there is much room for improvement in the way that we treat informal carers. Previous research undertaken by Daycare Trust indicates that there is little appetite among grandparents for a registration system to enable their services to be paid through Tax Credit support. However, grandparents who are willing to register as childminders and care for non-related children as well as their own grandchildren should not be barred from doing so. A better way of support grandparent carers might be through flexible work opportunities. We recommend that grandparents and other relatives who provide regular informal childcare be given the right to request flexible working as soon as possible. The Government might also consider greater transferability of parental leave for working relative carers. We would also like to see the greater involvement of informal carers in the activities of Sure Start children's centres and feel that much more could be done to include informal carers in existing activities.

Ultimately, we are unlikely to achieve any of these policy changes unless there is greater recognition by central and local government of the role and importance of informal childcare. Perhaps our biggest policy demand is for a greater understanding of this very diverse practice by local and central government and a greater public recognition of the valuable role of informal childcare in the lives of families.

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Appendices

Further notes on the focus groups

Location One – Inner South London

This was a group of four young single mothers. They were disadvantaged group with few educational qualifications and had been selected from a young mother's support group running in South London. Three of the group had been put into welfare-to-work programmes. One very young mother also had a social worker – she had been in care. The group comprised:

- A working mother with two children under five.
- A student mother with limited fluency in English and one child.
- A mother studying part-time and also looking for part-time work. She has one child.
- An economically inactive mother of one child who had been in care.

The two students had received help with childcare costs through the Care to Learn[28] scheme which helps under 20s with childcare costs while studying, paying up to 85 per cent of costs. All members of the group had troubled relationships with their families which impacted on their ability to use them to provide informal childcare. A major theme that emerged from this group is how informal childcare smoothes the transition into the labour market for women with least money and least labour market bargaining power. Those that have stable informal childcare are much more likely to be able to enter the labour market than those who do not.

Location Two – Inner North London

This was a mixed group of three parents, all users of a local authority children's centres. This is an older group and not as disadvantaged as Group One, with all the participants having a higher level of education higher level of education than Group One. However, no-one in this group could be described as having a high income and two participants are in families that receive Working Tax Credits. The group comprised:

- A single parent working part-time, with a four year old child and two older children in their 20s. This parent received a loan from one of the Childcare Affordability Pilots, to enable her to pay a deposit for a nursery place.
- A coupled parent with two children, presently not working, but recently worked when she had just one child.
- A single parent presently not working with a eight year old child. She has previously worked and is about to start a course.

All the participants were job ready, and all had previously worked. All members of this group used friends to provide informal childcare and one person used older siblings. All the group members also provide informal childcare for friends. Only one of the group has grandparents who live nearby.

The inflexibility of formal childcare emerged as a major theme of this focus group, including the inflexibility of the free early education offer for three and four year olds, which parents did not see as being responsive to the needs of working parents.

28. It is one of a number of schemes that also include the Childcare Grant (for students in higher education) the NHS Childcare Allowance (for NHS students) and the Parents learning Allowance (pays childcare as well as other costs). Some college discretionary learning funds also pay childcare.

Location Three – Government agency, south east England

This was a group of six educated parents, including one father. This agency has a family-friendly work policy encompassing opportunities for flexible and part-time work. Most people who worked for this government agency had moved to the area to work so were less likely to have family nearby who can provide informal childcare. All of the group had children under five. Unlike the London groups, the majority of these parents (five out of six) were using private nursery provision. Five of the six parents worked part-time. Four of the parents used regular informal childcare provided by relatives, which sometimes involved grandparents travelling large distances. A major theme emerging from this group were parental strategies combining formal and informal childcare in order to ensure that overall childcare costs are affordable.

Location Four – Rural eastern England

This was a group of four low income working parents in rural eastern England. All of the families in this group received financial help through Working Tax Credits, despite all of their partners also working. The group comprised three mothers and one father who was also a single parent with responsibility for childcare. The three mothers lived with their partners. All of the group combined formal and informal childcare, for example, combining nursery and relative care. One member of the group was part of the two year old pilot for the 15 hour early education offer. The group comprised:

- A student mother of a three year old who works 16 hours a week in the evening and at weekends
- A mother of three children, one of whom is under five. This mother works full-time as a district nurse
- A mother of two children, one under five and the other at primary school. This mother works full time.
- A father of one child under five who works part-time and is hoping to study next year.

Originally, two eastern European women also planned to attend this group, but they withdrew after coming to the venue because they were concerned they would be prosecuted for providing illegal childminding.

The challenges of finding childcare for atypical hours work emerged as a major theme of this group. In all cases, childcare outside normal 8am to 6pm hours was provided by relatives.

Location Five – North London, welfare-to-work programme participants

This was a group of five mothers who were enrolled on a welfare-to-work programme run by a private company which provides a childcare brokerage service to those on its programmes. The group comprised:

- A single mother of a four year old
- A mother of two boys aged nine and 13
- A single mother of a two year old
- A single mother of a seven year old child
- A mother of two children aged one and five who has found some evening work

Four of the parents were from minority ethnic groups, including one mother who was new to the UK. The parents of two participants had retired to the Caribbean, so could not provide informal childcare. The interviewees were also young and three of the parents were single mothers. Another characteristic of the participants in this focus group was their lack of qualifications.

Four of the parents had previously worked, but their employment was often of a low-paid and temporary nature. Moving in and out of work was a feature of these mothers. The challenges of finding childcare for atypical hours work was a major feature of this focus group, alongside the often chaotic childcare arrangements of parents who moved in and out of work and training. For participants in this group the availability of informal childcare enabled them to work and its absence prevented work.

Location Six – Doncaster

This group comprised four mothers of young children (all of the parents had children who were under 30 months). They were a low income group living in a deprived area, however, all of them possessed higher level qualifications. Of the four participants, two were working, albeit in low paid and part-time jobs (both in the hospitality sector involving evening work). One participant was self-employed and worked part-time and another participant had given up work prior to going to university. The self-employed mother was the only parent who used formal childcare, with the three other parents using their partners, relatives and friends. The costs of formal childcare and the lack of availability for parents who worked outside office hours were the two reasons that three of the parents relied on informal childcare.

The expense of formal childcare was a major theme in this focus group and parents used both forms of provision to minimise childcare costs. A further theme that emerged was the chaotic nature of childcare arrangements for parents who worked atypical hours and how such arrangements had the capacity to make children feel unsettled.

Location Seven – Parents of disabled children, non-urban West Midlands

This group comprised six mothers of disabled children and was organised by Parents for Inclusion, a group that support families with disabled children. All the parents were articulate and well-educated and all of the mothers had well-established careers before having children. All but one of the families children had moderate and severe disabilities and five of the six families had children who attended special schools. Three of the families had more than one disabled child, including one family where all three boys were affected by a chromosomal disorder. The average age of children was older than in the other focus groups –as childcare for disabled children is something that often extends into teenage years. Four of the mothers were working, the remaining two mothers are not working because they could not find work and childcare that fitted in with the needs of their children. In particular the absence of suitable breakfast and after-school clubs prevented these two mothers from working.

A major theme of this workshop was the absence of affordable and appropriate formal childcare. There was no evidence that parents of disabled children used less grandparent childcare. However, the focus group findings did suggest that parents of disabled children are less likely turn to friends and more distant relatives to provide informal childcare.

Location Eight – Parents of disabled children, London

The focus group took place in an economically mixed and multi-ethnic part of south London. All of the mothers lived in London, apart from one mother who had travelled from Bristol. The group comprised eight mothers of disabled children. Again the children were older than in many of the other focus groups. Unlike the other focus group of parents of disabled children, there were no families with more than one disabled child. Only three of the children attended special schools, although all of the children had moderate or severe disabilities.

This group of parents use ‘play-dates’ for their non-disabled children where a rota of parents pick up children after school and give them tea, looking after a group of friends until about six o’clock.

All of the parents wanted to work. However the challenges finding formal children, for pre-school and older children prevented most parents from working and emerged as a major theme of this focus group.

Location Nine – Central Manchester

This group took place in a deprived part of central Manchester, just south of the city centre. The area was a site of manufacturing industry which has now closed. National data suggests that 59 per of children in this ward were living in poverty in 2010. The area also has a high proportion of both privately rented and socially rented housing. Levels of educational achievement are also low in this part of Manchester. Despite investment in two children's centres in the area, there is a long waiting list for services in these children's centres, particularly the sessional crèche provision.

The focus group was recruited from users of a Sure Start children's centre in the area. The group of seven women all lived in the area. The group comprised seven women, all of whom were migrants or from longer established minority ethnic communities. Four of the women had no family in the UK. Many of the women were attending ESOL courses at the children's centre and none of the women in the group were presently working. Five of the women were a long way from being job ready.

The group included an Afghan woman, a French woman married to a Somali, a Moroccan, an Iraqi, a newly-arrived Indian mother, as well as two long established mothers of Pakistani and mixed Black African and white ethnicity. As the focus group progressed it emerged that one woman was an irregular migrant. The group was super-diverse in relation to its ethnic and national origins, as well as immigration pathways. However, none of the mothers had higher level qualifications (the equivalent of A-Levels and above) and some had limited fluency in English. Three of the mothers were single parents while the remaining four have husbands or partners. Most of the children are under five, although one mother had two school-aged children. One mother also looked after grandchildren.

Concerns about the low quality of formal provision emerged as a major them in this group. Many of the women preferred informal childcare because they felt it was of better quality and children would be cared for in a loving environment. However, migration had severed the support networks of these women, who were now forced to use formal childcare.

Location Ten - Manchester City Council staff

This group comprised five parents, all of whom worked for Manchester City Council, in elementary and semi-skilled occupations. Four of the parents worked full-time, the other parents worked part-time, as did her husband. The group was made up of four women and one man. Four of the parents had children aged 10 or over; just one parent had a child who was under five.

All of the five parents used considerable amounts of informal childcare. Three of the parents have older children who were able to provide childcare and this focus group enabled us to explore the use of older siblings as informal carers.

A major theme aired by participants in this group was their concern about the quality of formal childcare, both for under-fives and school age children. The participants felt that children's emotional needs were neglected in nurseries and that nurseries were also unhygienic. In this group the participants felt that informal childcare was of higher quality than formal provision.

Parents' Survey Questions

Omnibus profiling questions included

- Gender
- Marital status
- Age band (15-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, over 65)
- Ethnicity (16+ 1 classification)
- Children in household by five year age band
- Number in household
- Chief income earner
- Social grade (National Readership Survey classification: A, B, C1, C2, D, E)
- Economic activity
- Level of qualifications (none, to Level 2, to Level 4, Level 6 and above)
- Access to internet
- Area characteristics (rural, sub-urban, urban, metropolitan)
- Region of residence in Great Britain
- Housing tenure

Additional profiling questions for Daycare Trust

- Industry sector of respondent's job (agriculture & fishing, energy & water, manufacturing, construction, distribution, hotels & restaurants, transport & communication, banking, finance & insurance, public admin, education & health, other services)
- Industry sector of partner's job
- Country of birth
- Length of residence in UK for non-UK born

Screening questions

01 Do you have children under 16 years old?

- Yes
- No

If yes, proceed to question 02

02 You mentioned that you have children aged under 16 years. Who is responsible for decisions about your childcare?

- My partner or ex-partner
- Me
- Joint decision

If me or joint decision, proceed with survey

Main questions

03 During the last month who has cared for your youngest child who lives with you during the day on Monday to Friday?

Largely me, the child's other parent or step parent

- A mixture of the child's parents and other carers
- Largely other carers such as childminders or nursery workers

04 Who cares for your children during the school holidays or when your normal childcare is not available? Please mention all that apply.

- School holiday project
- Registered childminder
- Emergency child minder service
- Older brothers or sisters
- Child's paternal grandparents
- Child's maternal grandparents
- Other adult relatives of mother
- Other adult relatives of father
- Neighbours
- Friends
- Nanny in own home
- Nanny share at friend's home
- Babysitter
- Au pair, mother's help or other domestic worker
- Grandparents or other adult relatives who normally live outside UK
- No care given by anyone else

05 For your youngest child, what childcare, if any, have you used for your child in the last six months (including school holidays), apart from yourself and the child's other parent. Please mention all that apply.

- State nursery school
- Nursery or reception class in primary school
- Private or voluntary sector day nursery
- Nursery in children's centre
- Breakfast or after-school club run by school
- Breakfast or after-school club run by another organisation
- School holiday project
- Registered childminder
- Older brothers or sisters
- Child's Paternal grandparents
- Child's Maternal grandparents
- Other adult relatives of mother
- Other adult relatives of father
- Neighbours
- Friends
- Nanny in own home
- Nanny share at friends home
- Babysitter
- Au pair, mother's help or other domestic worker
- Grandparents or other adult relatives who normally live outside UK

06 Does your youngest child have a disability, health problem, special educational need or other characteristic that affects their childcare?

- Yes (specify)
- No
- Refused

07 When you came to chose childcare for your youngest child what information did you use to find out about childcare options? Please mention all that apply.

- Word of mouth advice from friends or relatives
- Information from a school attended by my other children
- Information from Family Information Services
- Information from a Sure Start Children's Centre
- Information from health visitor, clinic or other NHS sources
- Information from social worker
- Newspaper or other local advertisement
- Online information from Ofsted inspections
- Online information from DirectGov or ChildcareLink
- Other online information
- Relied on past experiences with older children
- Other (specify)
- Did not use any information

08 What were the two most useful sources of information about childcare when you came to chose childcare for your youngest child?

- Word of mouth advice from friends or relatives
- Information from a school attended by my other children
- Information from Family Information Services
- Information from a Sure Start Children's Centre
- Information from health visitor, clinic or other NHS sources
- Information from social worker
- Newspaper or other local advertisement
- Online information from Ofsted inspections
- Online information from DirectGov or ChildcareLink
- Other online information
- Relied on past experiences with older children
- Other (specify)

10 What have been the FIVE main forms of childcare – in terms of hours of care – for your youngest child during your normal working week?

Please mention first the form of childcare that you have used for the greatest number of hours. And which next? And which next?

- State nursery school
- Nursery or reception class in primary school
- Private or voluntary sector day nursery
- Nursery in children's centre
- Breakfast or after-school club run by school
- Breakfast or after-school club run by another organisation
- School holiday project
- Registered childminder
- Older brothers or sisters
- Child's paternal grandparents
- Child's maternal grandparents
- Other adult relatives of child's mother
- Other adult relatives of child's father
- Neighbours
- Friends
- Nanny in own home
- Nanny share at friends home
- Babysitter
- Au pair, mothers help or other domestic worker
- Grandparents or other adult relatives outside UK
- Other informal (NOT specified)

11 What have been the FIVE main forms of childcare – in terms of hours of care – for your youngest child during school or nursery holidays. Please mention first the form of childcare that you have used for the greatest number of hours. And which next? And which next?

- State nursery school
- Nursery or reception class in primary school
- Private or voluntary sector day nursery
- Nursery in children's centre
- Breakfast or after-school club run by school
- Breakfast or after-school club run by another organisation
- School holiday project
- Registered childminder
- Older brothers or sisters
- Child's paternal grandparents
- Child's maternal grandparents
- Other adult relatives of child's mother
- Other adult relatives of child's father
- Neighbours
- Friends
- Nanny in own home
- Nanny share at friends home
- Babysitter
- Au pair, mothers help or other domestic worker
- Grandparents or other adult relatives outside UK
- Other informal (not specified)

12 We want to ask some questions about informal care for your youngest child. Informal care is care provided by any of the types of providers listed on this card (computer-generated show card). Why did you use this type of informal care over formal care offered by a nursery, club or registered child minder?

- My child is too young to attend nursery
- I cannot not afford formal childcare offered by a nursery, club or registered childminder
- I need to save money and formal childcare is too expensive
- Informal childcare is free
- I could not find other childcare that suited the hours I work or when I needed it
- I could not find a suitable nursery, club or childminder
- I wanted my child to be cared for by a relative or friend
- I trust relatives to look after my children over strangers
- I wanted my child to be cared for in his/her own home
- Formal care (in nurseries or by a registered childminder) on offer is not of high quality
- Other (specify)

13 When do you use your main forms of informal care?

- During the working day
- Before or after school
- Before or after a full-time day nursery
- Before or after a part-time nursery
- Before or after the childmind
- Before or after formal childcare
- In the evening or at night
- At weekends
- During school holidays
- When my child is ill or can't attend formal childcare for another reason
- At various times when I need a break

14 In a typical week (outside the school holidays) which of these providers do you use for informal childcare for your youngest child?

- Older brothers or sisters
- Child's paternal grandparents
- Child's maternal grandparent
- Other adult relatives of mother
- Other adult relatives of father
- Neighbours
- Friends
- Nanny in own home
- Nanny share at friends home
- Babysitter
- Au pair or mother's help or other domestic help
- Grandparents or other adult relatives outside UK
- Other

15 And in a typical working week outside the school holidays, how many hours of informal childcare does (insert name of carer from question 14) provide?

16 Again, for your youngest child what do you use informal childcare for? You may mention up to three reasons.

- It enables me or my partner to work during my normal hours
- The childcare enables me to work outside my normal working hours
- The childcare provides a wrap-around service before and after school
- The childcare provides a wrap-around service before and after formal childcare
- The childcare enables me to attend education or training courses
- The childcare enables me to do chores such as shopping
- The childcare enables me to go out or participate in leisure activities
- The childcare provides a break for me and/or other members of my family
- The childcare helps me when my child is ill or in other emergencies
- Other (specify)

17 In a typical week, excluding school or nursery holidays, what is the total amount that you pay for informal childcare from any of these providers? Please give your best estimate to the nearest five pounds.

18 Do any of the people who provide informal care for your youngest child live in your home?

- Yes
- No

19 Think about the main form of informal care for your youngest child. How reliable is your main form of informal care?

- Very reliable
- Usually reliable
- Mixed, sometimes reliable and sometimes unreliable
- Neither reliable or unreliable
- Usually unreliable
- Very unreliable

20 How satisfied are you with your MAIN form of informal childcare for your youngest child?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

If dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, ask question 21.

21 What are the reasons for that you are dissatisfied with the main type of informal care for your youngest child? Please mention all reasons that apply.

- It is too expensive
- The carer is unreliable
- The care offered is no longer what I need for my work or study
- The carer is not good at meeting my children's learning needs
- The carer does not speak good English
- My child is not getting to meet other children
- I sometimes worry about my child's safety
- I don't get feedback from the carer about my child
- My child does not like the carer
- The carer is no longer so willing to offer care
- We disagree about how to care for the child
- I feel guilty about asking them
- The carer is unwell/disabled
- I feel obliged to do the carer favours in return
- The childminder is not registered
- Other (specify)

22 If you ever use a nanny or nanny share, do you know if your nanny is paying taxes?

- Yes she is paying taxes
- No, she is not paying taxes
- Don't know
- Doesn't apply / don't use a nanny

23 In your local area have you ever heard of unregistered child minders offering to care for children?

- Yes
- No

24 If money was no object, would you choose a different type of childcare for your youngest child, or care for the child yourself?

- Yes
- No

If yes, ask question 25

25 What childcare change would you make for your youngest child? Please mention all changes that apply.

- I would enroll my child at a nursery full-time
- I would enroll my child at a nursery part time
- I would give up work to be with my children
- My partner would give up work to be with my children
- I would work fewer hours to be with my children
- My partner would work fewer hours to be with the children
- I would employ a highly qualified nanny to be at home with my children
- Other (specify)

26 What childcare have you used in the last six months (including the summer holidays) for your oldest child?

- State nursery school
- Nursery or reception class in primary school
- Private or voluntary sector day nursery
- Nursery in children's centre
- Breakfast or after-school club run by school
- Breakfast or after-school club run by another organisation
- School holiday project
- Registered child minder
- Older brothers or sisters
- Child's paternal grandparents
- Child's maternal grandparent
- Other adult relatives of child's mother
- Other adult relatives of child's father
- Neighbours
- Friends
- Nanny in own home
- Nanny share at friends home
- Babysitter
- Au pair, mothers help or other domestic servant
- Grandparents or other adult relatives outside UK
- Other informal (specify)

27 Thinking of the child(ren)'s grandparents (if alive) or closest adult relatives that provide childcare for you, how close do the nearest of these live to you?

- Within 5 miles
- Between 6 - 30 miles away
- Between 31 – 150 miles away
- Over 150 miles away
- Outside the UK

28 Finally we would like ask you a few more questions about yourself and your family. Do your children aged under 16 live with you all the time?

- Yes
- No

If no, ask question 29

29 Apart from living with you, where else do your children live?

- With me but also but also staying with other parent in UK
- With friend or other family in UK
- At boarding school
- With other parent outside UK
- With friend or family outside UK
- Other outside UK

30 In the last six months have you or your partner worked outside of the hours 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday?

- Yes
- No

If yes, ask question 31

31 What is the reason for your/your partner's unusual working hours?

- Shift worker
- Planned and paid overtime
- Unplanned paid overtime
- Planned unpaid overtime
- Unplanned unpaid overtime
- Transport difficulties
- Other (specify)

32 Do you or your partner have flexible or family friendly working patterns (e.g. flexible hours, annual hours contract, term-time working, job-share, nine day 4.5 day fortnight or week)?

- Both me and my partner do
- Only one person does
- Neither me nor my partner does

33 What benefits, if any, are you and your family claiming?

- Unemployment related benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance, NI credits
- Income support (not as unemployed person)
- Sickness or disability benefits
- State pension
- Carer's Allowance
- Child benefit
- Working tax credit
- Childcare credit within working tax credit
- Child tax credit
- Housing/Council tax benefit (GB), Rent/rate rebate (NI)
- Other (specify)
- Refused

Carers' Survey Questions

Omnibus profiling questions
As parents' survey

Additional profiling questions for Daycare Trust

As parents' survey, plus question on economic activity of resident partner.

Screening questions

01 In the last six months (including the summer holidays) have you worked as a babysitter, unregistered nanny, au pair, douala, mother's help, unregistered foster carer or unregistered childminder?

- Yes
- No

If yes, proceed with question 02 and survey

02 In the last six months (including the summer holidays) have you looked after a relative's or friend's child on more than five occasions or for more than 24 hours in total over the six month period?

- Yes
- No

If yes, proceed with survey

03 Which of the options on this card best describes who the child or children are that you looked after? Please mention all that apply.

- Grandchild – child or stepchild of your son
- Grandchild – child or stepchild of your daughter
- Niece, nephew
- Brother or sister
- Other relative's child
- Neighbour's child
- Friend's child
- Employer's child
- Child allocated through a babysitting, nanny or other type of agency
- Other (specify)

04 And how old are the child or children that you looked after? Please mention the ages of all of the children that you looked after.

- Less than a year old
- 1 – 2
- 3 – 4
- 5 – 6
- 7 – 8
- 9 – 10
- 11 – 12
- 13 – 14
- 15 – 16
- Over 16

05 In the last year how many different children have you cared for?

06 Are any of the children you care for disabled, or have health problems, special educational needs or other characteristic that affects their childcare? If yes, please specify what their problems are.

- No
- Yes (specify)

07 In a typical week, how many hours in total do you spend looking after these children?

08 Thinking about any children that look after, at what times of the day do you usually look after these children? (If respondent looks after different children at different times, please enter all the times that apply to children).

- During the weekday working day
- Before or after school
- Before or after nursery or childminder
- In the evening
- At weekends
- During school holidays
- Overnight
- Other (specify)

09 In the last year have you ended up doing more childcare than you first expected to when you started looking after these children?

- Yes
- No
- About the same
- Don't know

10 Would you like to spend more time or less time caring for these children?

- More time
- About the same amount of time
- Less time
- Don't know

11 At what place do you usually look after these children?

- At my home
- At the child's home
- The child and I live in the same home
- Other place (specify)

12 For the youngest child you care for, how did these care arrangements come about?

- I offered to care for the child/children
- The parents asked me
- The parents assumed I would look after the children
- I look after other children
- It is a reciprocal arrangement – the parents help me out too
- It is a reciprocal arrangement through a babysitting circle or similar
- I was allocated the work through an agency
- I advertised my services in local paper/internet/ shop window
- Through word of mouth
- Other (specify)

13 For the oldest child you care for, how did these care arrangements come about?

- I offered to care for the child/children
- The parents asked me
- The parents assumed I would look after the children
- I look after other children
- It is a reciprocal arrangement – the parents help me out too
- It is a reciprocal arrangement through a babysitting circle or similar
- I was allocated the work through an agency
- I advertised my services in local paper/internet/ shop window
- Through word of mouth
- Other (specify)

14 Are you paid for looking after these children?

- Yes, for all of the children I look after
- Yes, for some, but not all of the children I look after
- No, for none of the children
- It is a mutual arrangement and the parents help me too

If yes, proceed to question 15

15 What are you paid for?

- My work and labour (proceed to question 16)
- For the refreshments I provide
- For trips and outings
- Other (specify)

16 If you are paid for looking after children how much are you paid per hour?

- Up to 3 pounds
- 4 to 5 pounds
- 6 to 7 pounds
- 8 to 9 pounds
- 10 pounds or more

17 For the youngest child you care for, why have you ended up caring for that child?

- To help parents work
- To help parents financially
- So parents can have some time for themselves
- Because parents are not coping because of health or other difficulties
- To build a relationship with the child
- Because no-one else was available to care for the child
- So that the child would end up speaking my language
- Because I am paid for the work
- Because the childcare provides a useful experience
- Because the job enables me to live in the UK
- Other (specify)

18 For the oldest child you care for, why have you ended up caring for that child?

- To help parents work
- To help parents financially
- So parents can have some time for themselves
- Because parents are not coping because of health or other difficulties
- To build a relationship with the child
- Because no-one else was available to care for the child
- So that the child would end up speaking my language
- Because I am paid for the work
- Because the childcare provides a useful experience
- Because the job enables me to live in the UK
- Other (specify)

18 Are you happy providing childcare for these children?

- Yes
- Mixed feelings
- No

If mixed feelings or no, go to question 19

19 Why are you unhappy providing childcare for these children?

- I am not being paid enough
- I feel I am being taken advantage of or not valued by the parents
- I am having to look after these children for too many hours
- I have been forced to give up my main job or cut down my work hours
- I am getting too old to provide childcare
- I have health problems
- I find it tiring
- I would like to be doing other things
- I do not like the parents
- I do not like the child/children
- I do not enjoy caring for children
- I would like to spend more time with my own children
- Other (specifiy)

20 Has this childcare had a positive or negative impact on you or your life?

- Strongly positive
- Positive
- Neither negative or positive
- Mixed negative and positive
- Negative
- Strongly negative

If positive or mixed, go to question 21.

21 What type of positive impact?

- I enjoy being with the children
- My own children enjoy spending time with the children I care for
- I have been able to develop a close relationship with the children
- I have experienced new things
- The experience is useful for my career
- I have been able to travel/learn English
- The money I am paid is useful
- Other (specify)

22 Do you have any contact with the children's school, nursery or playgroup?

- Yes, I collect or take the children to school/ nursery/playgroup
- Yes, I get to meet the teachers or nursery workers
- No

23 Do you do any of following activities with the children you care for?

Activities:
Help them with or supervise homework
Listen to them read or show them picture books
Do painting or cooking with them
Take them on local walks or local outings

Precode list:
Yes
No
Not applicable to age group

24 Finally we would like to ask you a few more questions about yourself and your family. Do you have any childcare, youthwork or teaching qualifications?

- No
- Yes

If yes, go to question 25

25 What are these childcare, youthwork or teaching qualifications?

- Level 2 – NVQ/SVQ, CACHE, Montessori, Playwork, BTEC, City and Guilds
- Level 3 – NVQ/SVQ, CACHE, Montessori, Playwork, BTEC, City and Guilds
- Level 4 – NVQ
- Level 5 – Early Years Foundation Degree, Diploma in Playwork or Youthwork, Level 5 NVQ
- Level 6 – BEd, BA Early Childhood Studies
- Level 7 – PGCE
- Overseas qualifications (specify)
- Other (specify)

26. What benefits, if any, are you and your family claiming?

- Unemployment related benefits such as Job Seekers Allowance, NI credits
- Income support (not as unemployed person)
- Sickness or disability benefits
- State pension
- Carer's Allowance
- Child benefit
- Working tax credit
- Childcare credit within working tax credit
- Child tax credit
- Housing/Council tax benefit (GB), Rent/rate rebate (NI)
- Other (specify)

27 Do you have a disability or health problem? If yes, please could you tell me what it is.

- No
- Yes (specify)

Further information on logistic regression analysis

Methods of entry

There are several ways a logistic regression can be performed using SPSS, known as methods of entry. Each method of entry fits the model in a different way and there are justifications for using one over another, as indicated below:

Forward stepwise method: SPSS begins with the most basic model (that is a model with no predictor variables included) and searches for the predictor variable that best predicts the outcome variable. If the relationship between the two variables is statistically significant, the predictor variable is added to the model. The next variable added to the model is the remaining predictor that explains the largest chunk of the unexplained variance in the outcome. If the relationship between the new predictor and the outcome variable is statistically significant, it is added to the model.

Backward stepwise method: This method is similar to the forward method. However, rather than starting with the most basic model, SPSS starts with the full model – including all predictors – and systematically removes non-significant predictors from the model.

Enter method: This method forces all predictor variables into the model at the same time. Whereas the forward and backward methods of entry include and remove predictor variables from the model based on statistical criteria, the decision to include variables in an enter method model is based on human judgment informed by previous research.

Blockwise method: Blockwise entry is similar to the enter method in that predictor variables are chosen based on previous research. The known predictors are entered simultaneously into the first block of the model. Predictor variables of interest can then be added in subsequent blocks, thereby creating nested models.

We decided to use the enter method in order to avoid over-fitting the model.

Colinearity and multi-colinearity

Colinearity occurs when two predictor variables are highly correlated. Multi-colinearity occurs when more than two of the predictor variables are highly correlated. It is important to check for colinearity within a model as its presence can distort odds ratios, standard errors and, inturn, confidence intervals (Field, 2005).

We were concerned that multi-colinearity may have been an issue for our model due to our inclusion of measures of social grade, family income and family work status – all variables that have a logical link. Simple, bivariate measures of correlation (Pearson's R and Kendall's Tau) for these variables suggested they were significantly and highly correlated.

A more detailed investigation suggested there that multi-colinearity was not an issue however, as we found no Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) measures to be in excess of 10 and average VIF figure that was not substantially greater than one. We also found no tolerance statistics below 0.2. We therefore decided to keep all predictor variables in our model.

We also plotted leverage values against our Cook's distance values to identify any cases with high values for both measures. Taking the results from these tests we assume that no case is exerting undue influence over our model.

Tests on the model

Logistic regression models produce a number of statistics that give us an indication of how well our model predicts the data or, to put it another way, how well all of the variables included in our model combine to predict whether or not a family used informal childcare. The -2 Log Likelihood statistic demonstrates the amount of information left unexplained by the model that includes all of the predictor variables. This statistic is used to compare the full model to a basic model with no predictor variables. The -2LL statistic for our full model is 1094.4 compared with 1276.6 for a model with no predictors. This shows that our full model explains more information than the most basic model. In short, this tells us that our predictor variables combine to help improve the accuracy of prediction of informal childcare use.

The Cox and Snell R squared statistic and Nagelkerke R squared statistic give us an indication of how well our predictor variables explain whether or not someone will use informal childcare.[29] The Cox and Snell statistic suggests that our model accounts for around 17 per cent (.170 * 100) of the variation in families' use of informal childcare; the Nagelkerke statistic suggests a figure of around 23 per cent. Although these statistics are not 100 per cent accurate, they indicate that our model only explains a small proportion of variation in families' use of informal childcare. Table 17 further confirms this, showing that our model only predicted 68.7 per cent of cases correctly.

Table 15: Model Summary

-2 Log likelihood	Cox & Snell R Square	Nagelkerke R Square
1094.440	.170	.233

Table 16: Classification table (accuracy of model prediction)

	Predicted		
Observed	Did not use family carer	Used family carer	Percentage Correct
Did not use family carer	509	118	81.2
Used family carer	188	163	46.4
Overall Percentage			68.7

29. These are 'pseudo R squared' statistics and are not as accurate as the R squared statistic produced as part of a linear regression.

An additional we used to assess the validity of our model is the Hosmer and Lemeshow test. This tests the hypothesis that our model is not predicting real world data very well. Because the result of this test is not signficiant ($p>.05$), we know that our model is predicting the data fairly well and therefore know that it is worth analysing the relationship between informal childcare use and our predictor variables (Field, 2005).

Post-hoc tests

A number of post-hoc diagnostics were carried out to better inform our interpretations of the model. These tests enabled us to identify how well our model fitted the data and assess the extent to which individual cases influenced the model.

To examine how well the model fitted our data we checked standardized and studentized residuals. Our model met the assumptions that 95 per cent of cases should fall within ± 1.96 and 99 per cent should fall within $> \pm 2.58$. We were therefore satisfied that, generally speaking, our model was a satisfactory fit for the data. There were some 'extreme' outliers beyond these limits but they were kept in after further analysis showed they did not exert undue influence on the model.

To assess the influence of individual cases on the model, Cook's distance and DfBeta statistics were calculated. Our model met the assumption that no cases should have a Cook's or DfBeta value higher than 1. The scores achieved for these statistics suggest that the model would not be affected significantly if a particular case were removed.

Table 17: Hosmer and Lemeshow Test

Chi-square	df	Sig.
5.503	8	0.703

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Daycare Trust
2nd floor 73-81 Southwark Bridge Road
London SE1 0NQ
Tel: 0845 872 6260 or 020 7940 7510
www.daycaretrust.org.uk

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