

Study explores parents' struggle with child-care options

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Credit: Daniela Corno

(Medical Xpress)—Arizona parents tend to rely on a "patchwork" of child-care arrangements while many are looking for new options at any given time. In addition, many parents struggle to pay for child care – and many can't afford to pay for it at all, according to the Arizona Child Care Demand Study.

A statewide team of researchers from the University of Arizona, Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University released a set of reports with results from more than 1,400 interviews with parents of children from birth to 6 years old from across Arizona to determine what

they consider important factors when they choose [child care](#) for their children, how they find out about child-care options, and what is their demand for child care.

The Arizona Child Care Demand Study is the most comprehensive report on child-care demand that has been conducted in Arizona.

The lead researcher, Douglas Taren, associate dean for academic affairs and professor of public health at the UA Mel & Enid Zuckerman College of [Public Health](#), said the findings "are a valuable resource for child-care providers to determine what parents want when deciding who and where their children receive care."

The study was supported with funds from Arizona First Things First and several FTF Regional Partnership Councils. The study was conducted across Arizona and included parents living in areas served by 17 regional councils who were from urban and rural areas, border counties and on Tribal Nations. The 11-volume report provides statewide information on child care and 10 separate reports for targeted areas within the state.

Results indicated that when parents search for child care, their top priority is having a safe, secure and homelike setting, with a caring and experienced provider. As children get older, there is a greater emphasis on an educational curriculum, group experiences that help get children ready for kindergarten and a well-trained child-care provider.

According to Beth Blue Swadener, a co-director from ASU, "The results showed that the majority of families use a patchwork of child care, often including two or more different care arrangements, with the exception being those who use fulltime center-based care."

Findings showed that most families use more than one source of child care because of the diversity of family conditions such as having both

parents working either full or part time. A majority of parents interviewed in several regions of the state preferred friends, family and neighbor care, particularly for younger children. Grandmothers were the most frequent family member to provide care, and a number of families used unregulated care. Parents most frequently used friends and family to identify possible child-care providers, followed by using popular media including the Internet.

Most parents reported making sacrifices to afford child care, which results in having cost influencing their decisions about child care. The families who appear to be most impacted by the cost of care are single or separated and divorced parents. In many cases, families determined that it was more cost effective to have one parent stay home, at least part-time. According to Mary Jane McLellan from NAU, "Results indicate that families often stay home and out of the workforce because the cost of care makes work impractical."

Parents also voiced their desire for more affordable child-care options in their local communities. Only a small percentage of parents reported receiving scholarships or DES-subsidized child care. Some families reported no cost for care, including those participating in Head Start, a federal program serving low income families.

Although about 50 percent of parents with infants reported a demand for child care, this was the age group that had the least demand compared to older children. The greatest demand was for parents with children 3 to 4 years of age, in which 70 percent were seeking child care for their children.

One of the major findings of the study was that enhanced public information is needed for parents to find child care and learn about some of the indicators of quality care, including greater promotion of free services for parents looking for care. Also, many parents of children

with special needs were not aware of their child's right to diagnostic or early intervention services, particularly for children younger than age 3.

Overall, the Arizona Child Care Study found that there is a need to increase outreach and public awareness of services available for families who have concerns about their child's development or chronic health issues.

"This study shows that what parents want in child care is consistent across the state with the most important issues of safety and affordability being the primary reason children do not participate in early childhood education programs," said Taren. "I believe this indicates that we need to provide more financial support for parents so their children can access early childhood education programs. This will have an immediate return on investment by allowing [parents](#) to participate more in the workforce and long term returns by having [children](#) become more ready to enter school."

More information: www.azftf.gov/WhoWeAre/Board/D...-ChildCareReport.pdf

Provided by University of Arizona

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