

14/12/99

# **The early childhood education and care arrangements of pre-school children of work-rich and work-poor couples**

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## **Introduction**

In the last two decades across all OECD countries two important, and not entirely unconnected, changes have taken place in childrearing families. First, there has been a significant rise in the number of children being raised in sole parent, and mainly sole mother, families. Secondly, in two-parent families there has been a shift away from the “mixed-work, separate-sphere” model of childrearing, that is the father in full-time paid work and the mother at home full-time looking after the children. One of the strongest growing alternative arrangements when children are under five years of age has been that of one full-time worker, usually the father, and one part-time worker, usually the mother. However, two other emerging arrangements for two-parent families have been “work-rich” and “work-poor” couples. The work-rich couples can have two full-time jobs or, at times, two full-time careers. At the other end of the spectrum, in the work-poor couples neither partner has paid work. While there was strong growth in the number and proportion of work-poor couples in the 1980s in most OECD countries, international research has also shown that recently even in times of economic growth and overall employment growth the proportion of work-poor couples will often stay relatively stable or fall only slightly (e.g. Gregg and Wadsworth 1996).

While work-poor sole parent and two-parent families share some common characteristics work-poor couples are different in an important way.<sup>1</sup> In sole-parent families, generally out-of-home childcare is vital if that parent is to participate in paid work (or education). In two-parent work-poor families, one parent can enter paid work without using any out-of-home childcare.<sup>2</sup> A further important difference is that while there is national and international research on childcare arrangements of sole-parents, the childcare arrangements of work-poor couples have attracted little attention from researchers.

In this paper, I firstly examine broad changes in work and family patterns. In doing so I mainly use data from the 1986, 1991 and 1996 censuses of population and dwellings. I do this because the far larger sample size allows more detailed analysis than is possible from the childcare survey. I then use the same data source to outline the broad characteristics of work-rich and work-poor couples. In doing so, I focus mainly on couples where both partners were aged 25-59. This analysis covers couples with and without children. Ideally, just couples with a child under five would have been analysed but both the time and funding needed for this additional research was not available. There are some important differences in women’s

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<sup>1</sup> Through couple separation and repartnering of sole parents to form blended two-parent families there is movement between these two family types.

<sup>2</sup> In addition, a parent in a work-poor couple can potentially have a non-work (or non-study) break from looking after a child without seeking childcare outside of the household unit. However, it is likely that some non-custodial parents play an important role in childcare. Unfortunately, this care by non-custodial parents is not identified in official surveys including the Childcare Survey.

participation in paid work and hours worked in couples without children, couples with children over five, and couples with pre-school children. There are also likely to be some small ethnic differences. Yet some characteristics, such as whether people with similar educational qualifications of similar ethnic backgrounds tend to form couples, vary little. The differences between couples with pre-school children and all couples are partly tested by comparing some of the census data with the childcare data. In this first part of the analysis I focus on a count of families who were work-rich or work-poor rather than the number of children in such families.

The second part of the paper utilises unit record data from the childcare survey to analyse the early childhood education and care (ECE) arrangements of pre-school children living in work-rich and work-poor couples. This part of the analysis is based on children with a particular focus on children in work-poor couples. It is important to note that this research is based on a small sample so in much of the data presented there is a relatively high level of potential error in estimates. Some of the results therefore need to be treated as indicative only. In the tables presented where data needs to be treated with caution this is marked with a \*.<sup>3</sup>

In the final section some of the potential implications of non-use ECE use by children living in work-rich and work-poor couples are explored.

Details of the survey can be found in other papers. However, it is worth noting that the data presented from the Childcare Survey and other official surveys drawn on in this paper provide only a snapshot. Childcare arrangements, work arrangements, as well as family types change over-time. For example, a 2 year child living in work-rich two parent family and cared for in a childcare centre at the time of the survey could be, through the couple separating, be a year later living in work-poor sole parent family and attending a kindergarten.

## Broad changes in employment and family patterns

Table 1 shows the strong loss of jobs between 1986 and 1996, particularly for men, but the strong growth in employment between 1991 and 1996, particularly for women. When population change is taken into account, 61 percent of people aged 15 and over were in paid work in 1986, this declined to 54 percent in 1991 and rose to 59 percent in 1996. The decline in male participation and increase in female participation is part of a much longer trend (Chapple, 1994). Changes in work can have some impact on couple formation and separation, decisions to have children, as well as decisions about childcare arrangements within families. For example, men not in paid work are far less likely to be in childrearing couples than men who are employed full-time (Callister, 1999). There are many complex reasons for the change in employment. However, a wide range of New Zealand studies show that for both men and women education has been an increasingly critical factor in both participation in paid work and earnings.

**Table 1 – Total employment in 1986, 1991 and 1996**

(000s)	1986	1991	1996	Change 86-91	Change 91-96
Male employment	890.3	795.1	890.0	-10.7	11.9
Female employment	609.1	605.3	740.8	-0.6	22.4

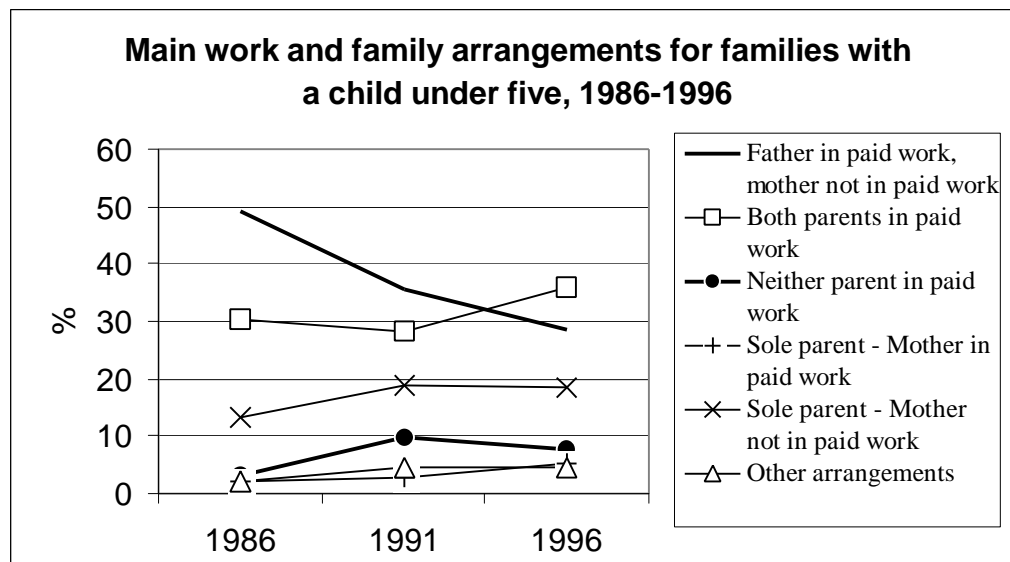
<sup>3</sup> As a broad guide where the size of the estimate was less than 2,600 the data was not presented (although it is sometimes discussed) and where the size was 2,600 to 7,900 the estimates are treated with caution. In addition, all data has been randomly rounded to a count of 10.

Total employment	1499.4	1400.4	1630.8	-6.6	16.5
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Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

Figure 1 shows the changes in the main work and living arrangements for families with a child under five between 1986 and 1996. Contributing to these changes was a shift away from two-parent to sole parent families. In 1986 83 percent of childrearing families were two-parent. This declined to 76 percent in 1991 and was marginally lower at 74 percent in 1996.

**Figure 1**



Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand.

The number of (sole and two-parent) families with pre-school children, but no parent in paid work increased dramatically from just over 29,600 in 1986 to around 58,000 in 1991. While this number declined to approximately 54,000 in 1996, it was still significantly higher than the 1986 position. In each year by far the highest proportion of work-poor childrearing families were sole parent families. For example, in 1986 81 percent of work-poor families with a child under five were sole parent families. However, this proportion declined strongly to 68 percent in 1991 but grew again slightly to reach 72 percent in 1996. Overall, in 1996 the census indicated that there were just over 70,000 couples with a pre-school child where both parents were in paid work, and just under 27,000 where both worked full-time. In this year there were 15,000 work-poor couples with a child under five.

When compared with data from the 1998 childcare survey there was very little change in the subsequent two years in proportion of all families with a child under five that had two parents. But there was some change in the proportion of couples that had both parents in paid work (Table 2). The childcare Survey indicates that in 1998 there were over 67,000 couples with a child under five where both parents were in paid work, with just over 24,000 where both worked full-time. This is a decline in both absolute and proportional terms since 1996. At the other extreme there were nearly 17,000 couples where neither parent was in paid work, an absolute increase but steady on a proportional basis. The reasons for the change in the proportion of work-rich families is unclear.

**Table 2 – Percentage of couples with a child under five by work arrangements of both parents.**

	Census 1991	Census 1996	Childcare Survey 1998
Two parents both full-time	15	18	15
Two parents at least one part-time	23	30	26
Two parents only one employed	50	42	48
Two parents neither employed	13	10	10
N=	146,208	146,862	163,580

Sources: Statistics New Zealand, Childcare Survey and Census

This small decline in the proportion of work-rich couples between 1996 and 1998 also shows up in a time series from the Household Labour Force Survey although in Table 3 there is no restriction on the age of the child. The data also takes into account the workstatus of adult children. In contrast, this same data series shows a slight rise between 1996 and 1998 in the proportion of work-poor couples with children.

**Table 3 – Percentage of each household type in which all adults aged 15-64 were in paid work**

Household	Sep 96	Dec 96	Mar 97	Jun 97	Sep 97	Dec 97	Mar 98	Jun 98	Sep 98	Dec 98
Couple with one child	70	68	68	69	70	68	67	67	64	67
Couple with two children	69	69	68	68	67	68	68	65	67	65
Couple with three or more children	67	64	64	64	65	63	64	63	60	63

Source: Statistics New Zealand, HLFS

**Table 4 - Percentage of each household type in which no adults aged 15-64 were in paid work**

Household	Sep 96	Dec 96	Mar 97	Jun 97	Sep 97	Dec 97	Mar 98	Jun 98	Sep 98	Dec 98
Couple with one child	6	6	6	7	7	5	6	7	8	7
Couple with two children	5	4	4	4	5	5	6	7	6	7
Couple with three or more children	7	6	8	7	7	7	8	9	8	8

Source: Statistics New Zealand, HLFS

As in this paper I am focussing on two-parent families, it is important to note that around half the Maori children, are excluded from the subsequent analysis (Table 5). The sample size was too small to assess accurately how many “other” and Pacific Island children are excluded. However, census data does show that the proportion of Asian children in two parent families is higher than that of European children while the proportion of Pacific Island children living in sole parent families is higher than for European but lower than for Maori (Statistics New Zealand, 1998). Table 5 also shows that when sole parent families are included 15 percent of European children and half of Maori children lived in work-poor families in 1998. Overall, according to this survey, 26 percent of children under five and 22 percent of 5-13 year olds had no parent (sole or two-parent) in paid work. The under five figure shows no change from the 1996 census data (Callister, 1998a).

**Table 5 – Proportion of children under five living in one and two-parent families and the work status of parents, 1998**

	European	Maori	Total
One parent family	15	50	24
Two parent family	85	50	76
No parent employed (sole and two-parents)	15	50	26

Source: Childcare Survey, Statistics New Zealand.

Table 6 shows a comparison of the number of families with pre-school children and number of such children in each family type. As has been demonstrated in many other studies the number of children and the age of the children have an impact on work-decisions / opportunities, just as work decisions can have an impact on fertility decisions. However, also embedded in the data are cultural /ethnic differences.

**Table 6 – Number of two-parent families with a child under five by work status and the average number of children under five per family type, 1998**

	Families	Children	No of children per family
Two parents both full-time employed	24,190	28,638	1.18
Two parents at least one part-time	43,228	54,977	1.27
Two parents only one employed	79,282	111,793	1.41
Two parent neither employed	16,880	22,459	1.33

Source: Childcare Survey, Statistics New Zealand.

Table 7 shows an ethnic breakdown of children in couple families by workstatus of both parents.

**Table 7 – Proportion of children under five living in work-rich and work-poor families, 1998**

	European	Maori	Total
Two parents both full-time employed	<b>14</b>	<b>*13</b>	<b>15</b>
Two parents at least one part-time	31	*17	26
Two parents only one employed	50	50	48
Two parent neither employed	<b>*4</b>	<b>*20</b>	<b>11</b>
	100	100	100
N=	113,679	23,810	164,037

Source: Childcare Survey, Statistics New Zealand.

A number of patterns show up in Table 7. First, Maori children under five who lived in a two parent family were much more likely than European children to have neither parent in paid work. While not shown due to potential errors in estimates, the Childcare Survey data suggests that Pacific Island children were not only highly likely to be in a work-poor family they were also the ethnic group most likely to have both parents work full-time. This finding is consistent with census data (Callister, 1995). Census data also shows that the majority of Pacific Island families working full-time were in low-income jobs. Many Pacific Island parents also worked in more than one job to make up the full-time hours, and the type of occupations they were over-represented in would suggest that many worked non-standard hours. Working non-standard hours can have a major impact on use of ECE. If cost of childcare is a barrier couples may work non-overlapping shifts to minimise the use of paid childcare. This pattern appears to be relatively common in the U.S. (Presser, 1995). However, a significant proportion of Pacific Island couples live in extended families and

this will potentially have an impact on childcare arrangements. Some Pacific Island families will also be new immigrants and this may also influence both their employment patterns and use of childcare.

The “other” ethnic group is not included in Table 7 because of the small sample size, but the data does suggest that an even higher proportion of children from this ethnic group than from Maori or Pacific Island groups lived in work-poor couples in 1998. As will be subsequently discussed, although the data in the Childcare Survey cannot identify the ethnic groups within the “other” category, based on census data a significant proportion of the “other” group were likely to be Asian children. Some of these Asian children (and their parents) may have been new immigrants, although it is unclear how many would be picked up in a survey such as the HLFS. However, comments made in this paper do assume some new immigrants were part of the sample.

Finally, Childcare Survey data for pre-schoolers was compared with children in the 5-13 age group. It showed that while the proportion in work-poor two-parent families stayed stable the proportion of two-parent families where both worked full-time doubled. That is, couples were no less likely to be work-poor with older children, but were far more likely to be work-rich.<sup>4</sup> This general pattern is in line with patterns found using 1991 census data and reflects the increasing participation of women in paid work, and particularly full-time work, as the age of youngest child increases (Callister, 1995). The fact that the proportion of work-poor couples does not decline when children reach school age provides a first indication that a lack of childcare may not be the primary reason for these couples being work-poor

### **Some characteristics of work-rich and work-poor couples**

“Marriage market” theory and data indicate that couples tend to have some similar characteristics. In particular, people with similar levels of formal education tend to form couples. However, further complicating this pattern both men and women with no formal qualifications are slightly less likely than well qualified people to be in couples (Callister, 1998b). So in New Zealand, we have tendency towards having education-rich and education-poor couples. In education-rich couples, and particularly where both have degrees or higher qualifications, both partners have greater options in terms of paid work participation and are also likely to be able to earn higher incomes. Therefore, many of them may have more choice in ECE services. This greater choice includes the potential for one partner to work part-time or not be in paid work or for both parents to work in relatively high-income occupations and be able to purchase private and informal childcare.<sup>5</sup> As an example of having wider options, one recent United States study found that married women with a child under six who could command higher hourly wages (generally through being better educated) had greater options to work part-time (Lehrer, 1999). However, other education-rich couples, but who are potentially middle-income earners, may be constrained in their choices. These constraints could be the cost or availability of suitable ECE services.

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<sup>4</sup> Given that couples were more likely to be work-rich with older children and that children were also more likely to use ECE services when they were older, this will be one reason why work-rich couples, on average, were more likely to use childcare than mixed work couples. Many of the mixed-work couples will have had one partner, usually the mother, on parental leave in the first year of their child’s life.

<sup>5</sup> The number of “dual-career” couples in New Zealand appears to be still relatively low. Again using data for work-rich couples with and without children, the following are a range of estimates of the proportion of couples that might be considered dual-career. Both in managerial, professional or technical occupations and working any hours 23.2 percent, both in managerial, professional or technical occupations and working full-time 15.6 percent, both earning more than \$40,000 8.1 percent, both earning more than \$40,000 and working full-time 6.6 percent and both earning more than \$70,000 and both partners working full-time 1.1 percent. While the numbers of dual-career couples are small, in the popular media there is much attention given to the work-family “juggling” efforts of such families.

Reflecting overall education and work patterns, prime-aged couples (with and without children) where both had no formal qualifications were far less likely to be in paid work. In 1996, census data shows one third of couples where both had no formal qualification were work-poor, whereas only five percent of couples where both had a university qualification were in this category. In addition, based on duration of unemployment for individuals, it is likely that many of the education-rich couples will be only out of the labour market for short periods. While it was not possible to analyse the educational characteristics of both partners using the childcare data, Table 8 shows the highest level of formal qualifications held by parents within work-rich and work-poor couples. While it does show that work-poor couples were far less likely to have a formal qualification, there still were unqualified work-rich couples and well-qualified work-poor couples. It is possible that some of the well-qualified work-poor couples were new immigrants whose qualifications were not recognised in New Zealand.

**Table 8 – Percentage of children whose parents were work-rich and work-poor and held a formal qualification, 1998**

	Work-rich	Work-poor
No formal qualifications	*17	35
School	26	26
Other tertiary	41	28
Degree or higher	*16	*11
	100.0	100.0

Source: Childcare Survey, Statistics New Zealand.

However, while some “stylised” characteristics of work-poor and work-rich couples can be identified, there is also some diversity amongst each group of couples. For example, in terms of income while work-rich couples, on average, earned far more than work-poor couples, there were still a significant group of low-income work-rich couples. Examples include couples where both worked in low paid occupations, and potentially worked non-standard hours such as evenings or weekends when formal childcare tends not to be available. Such couples may also have had two or three part-time jobs rather than a full-time one. Equally couples may have been work-poor for a variety of reasons. They could be relatively well qualified but be undertaking further study, one partner could have been sick and the other caring for them, or both could have a low level of skills and have found difficulty in finding work. For example, 1996 census data showed that in a significant proportion of work-poor couples, and particularly couples who were both work-poor and education-poor, one or both partners stated they had some health problem. In a third of work and education-poor prime-aged couples the male stated he had a health problem and in 20 percent of the couples the female had a health problem. This may significantly reduce one or both parent’s ability to provide high quality education and care at home. There could also have been some work-poor couples where the female partner had more options in terms of paid work, but through a lack of flexibility in gender roles within the couple, or within wider society, they felt they could not “reverse” traditional provider / childcare roles.<sup>6</sup> It could also be that when balancing possible income the female partner could earn against total benefit income it is not a wise financial choice for the female partner to enter paid work.

In term of ethnicity some clear patterns, but also some complexity, can be seen. Not only is there a problem in defining the ethnicity of individuals but in couples one partner, or both, can be from particular ethnic groups. However, there is some tendency for people of the same ethnic background to form couples (Callister, 1998). This tendency then often reinforces the concentration of education within couples. For

<sup>6</sup> More research is needed on ways to support “egalitarian” parenting. In undertaking such research, appropriate research methodologies need to be used (see <http://www.fatherandchild.org.nz/research/fwc-review.html> )

example, in 1996 couples where both partners were Maori were significantly less likely to hold formal educational qualifications than couples where one partner was Maori (ibid). Maori and Pacific Island couples, and particularly where both were Maori or both from Pacific Island groups, were highly over-represented amongst work-poor couples in 1996. Asian couples were also an important group amongst work-poor couples. In 1996, 18 percent of work-poor couples had both partners classified as Asian. Some of these work-poor couples will have been new immigrants with young children. But there were still many European work-poor couples, partly because of the larger size of the population. As discussed earlier, there were also work-rich Maori and Pacific Island families.

The diversity amongst work-rich couples is also illustrated by Table 9. Again this includes couples with and without children but can be a guide to the sort of occupational mixes that might occur in couples with young children. It shows the ten largest types of couples by occupation of both partners. It is significant that no single job combination stands out. However, the types of occupations will have some influence over the use of ECE services if the couples have young children. For example, some of the two manager and most of the two agricultural occupation couples will be self-employed. As shown in the initial analysis of the childcare survey data, self-employment can result in slightly difference approaches to the use of ECE services. Also in terms of income, the couples where both were in full-time professional occupations will generally have had higher income than those where, for example, the male worked in a plant and machinery job and occupation and his partner undertook clerical work. Again, the initial analysis of the Childcare Survey data showed that higher income couples were more likely to use ECE services (Department of Labour, 1999).

**Table 9 – Occupations of both partners in prime-aged work-rich couples with and without children, 1996**

Both working full-time			
Male	Female	(000s)	%
Manager	Manager	12.6	6.3
Agriculture	Agriculture	12.3	6.1
Manager	Clerical	10.3	5.2
Trades	Clerical	10.2	5.1
Professional	Professional	9.8	4.9
Technical	Clerical	6.7	3.3
Manager	Professional	6.4	3.2
Plant & machinery	Clerical	6.0	3.0
Technical	Professional	5.0	2.5
Technical	Technical	5.0	2.5

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand

It would be expected, given the patterns of work, education and ethnicity, that work-rich couples would earn much higher household incomes than work-poor couples. Table 10 draws on an unpublished study by Statistics New Zealand of couple households, to show real incomes from the early 1980s through to the mid 1990s. The data source is the Household Economic Survey. The data shows market income, there is no age restriction on the couples and the data includes couples with and without children. The table shows a major gap between the average incomes of work-poor and work-rich couples and that this gap increased between 1982 and 1996. However, averages do disguise some significant variation. Census data (total income not just market income and again for couples with and without children) show that there were low-income work-rich couples and, assuming the data is correct, a small number of relatively high-income work-poor couples. For example, in 1996 in 11 percent of prime-aged work-rich couples both partners earned less than \$20,000 per year and in 1.1 percent of work-poor couples both partners earned \$40,000 or more.

**Table 10 – Trends in average real household market income of couple households by employment status of both partners, March \$1996**

Family work status	Year			
	1981/82	1985/86	1990/91	1995/96
Work-poor	11,898	13,396	10,075	10,522
Female in work	40,174	35,532	41,408	32,352
Male in work	45,413	44,774	47,900	51,356
Work-rich	62,300	55,249	62,062	65,249
Total	47,399	44,046	44,625	48,816

Source: Statistics New Zealand, HES

The actual hours worked by work-rich couples can also be important. A couple can be classified as both working full-time if both worked 30 hours per week. Such a couple, particularly if they worked different shifts, may be able to schedule their work around the use of Kindergarten services. At the other extreme, in 1996 there were couples working full-time where both worked 50 or more hours per week. Such couples may utilise a mixture of both informal and formal ECE services, including using private paid childcare workers who also undertake other household duties. Table 11 provides some data to illustrate this variation in hours. For example, in 11 percent of work-rich couples with a child under five and where the mother worked full-time the male partner worked 70 or more hours per week.

**Table 11 - Hours of paid work of partnered fathers with a child under five by hours of paid work by labour force status of their partners, 1996**

*% in each group*

		Fathers hours of paid work					Total
		Under 10	10-29	30-49	50-69	70 +	
Mothers hours of paid work	Full-time	1.6	4.1	51.0	32.3	11.1	100.0
	Part-time	1.3	2.9	49.0	38.6	8.2	100.0
	Not in paid work	2.2	3.4	56.0	33.2	5.3	100.0

Source: Census of Population and Dwellings, Statistics New Zealand

Finally, not surprisingly, in 1996 work-poor couples were more likely than work-rich couples to be found in the work-poor areas (area units) of New Zealand (Callister, 1998c). These were not just in the well-known places such as South Auckland, Porirua or Northland but were to be found in many areas of New Zealand. In certain work-poor, and generally low-income, communities there may, for a variety of reasons, be less provision of the types of early childhood care and services which would allow one, or both, parents to participate in paid work.

## **The use of early childhood education and care by work-rich and work-poor couples**

One of the disturbing results of the initial analysis of the Childcare Survey data was that pre-school children in work-poor couples were the lowest overall users of ECE services. The highest users were employed sole parents, followed closely by couples where both parents worked full-time (work-rich). While relatively low users themselves, children in sole parent families where the parent was not in paid work were still more likely to have used ECE services.

Ideally, the analysis of the ECE arrangements of pre-school children should use yearly age groups rather than the whole under five-year age group. However, the sample size meant that such a detailed analysis

could not be undertaken. In addition, the Childcare Survey data are cross-sectional so they provide no idea of continuity of use, or non-use, of ECE services. It would especially be of interest to analyse in detail ECE use and non-use, both cross-sectionally and over time, for 3 and 4 year olds in both work-rich and work-poor families. However, Table 12 does provide a broad guide to ECE use at the ages of under 2, 3 and 4 by children living in work-rich and work-poor families. It indicates that age is a particularly important variable in non-use of ECE services by children living in work-poor couple families and this needs to be kept in mind in the subsequent analysis.

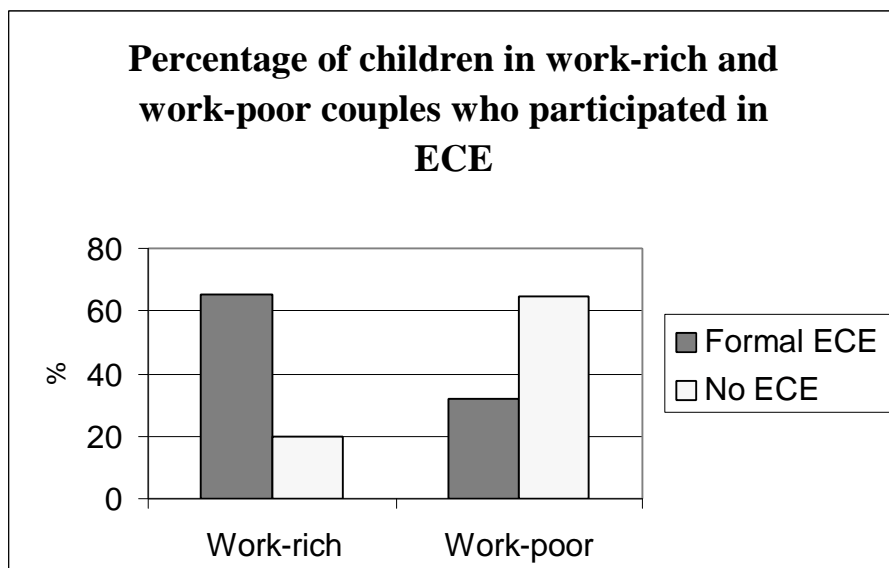
**Table 12 – Percentage of children living in work-rich and work-poor couple families who used ECE services**

Age of child	Work-rich	Work-poor
Under 2 years	72	18
3 years	*94	*56
4 years	*89	*83
Total	80	35

Source: Childcare Survey, Statistics New Zealand.  
 Note: This includes both formal and informal care

Figure 2 regroups the ages but provides a finer analysis of ECE use. It shows the percentage of pre-school children in work-rich and work-poor couples who used ECE services as well as the proportion who used formal ECE.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 2**



Source: Childcare Survey, Statistics New Zealand.

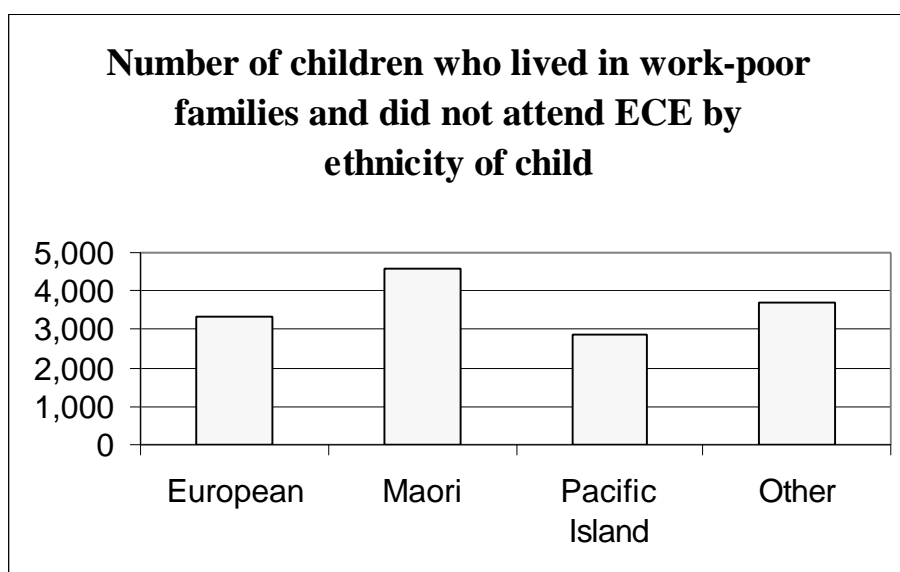
Of those children with work-rich parents who used ECE services around one fifth used public kindergartens and about two fifths childcare centres. For those children of work-poor parents who used ECE services these proportions reversed. While the size of sample was too small to analyse the cost of childcare, given

<sup>7</sup> In this analysis of formal childcare in figure 2, I exclude the following categories, family member paid or unpaid other person paid or unpaid. The data in figure 2 also indicates that a lower percentage of work-poor couples used informal care. However, given that the numbers were small this assumption should be treated with caution as should the exact percentages for formal care indicated in the figure.

these figures, and given that work-poor children are likely to be using fewer hour of ECE, it is then likely that, on average, work-poor couples will be paying lower fees than work-rich couples.

In 1998 there were about equal numbers of European and Maori children living in work-poor two-parent families (around 6,500), nearly 6000 Pacific Island children and just under 4,000 “other” children.<sup>8</sup> However, while just over a half of European children in work poor families did not attend ECE services, this rose to around 70 to 80 percent of Maori and Pacific Island groups. It also appeared that a significant proportion of children from the “other” group living in work-poor families did not use ECE services. The actual number of children not attending ECE services is shown in Figure 3. Maori children were the largest group but the “other” group was also very large. It is possible some of these “other” children were the children of new immigrants. However, the European group is also not insignificant.

**Figure 3**



Source: Childcare Survey, Statistics New Zealand.

Note: All the data in this graph should be seen as indicative only due to high estimation errors.

I then examined childcare use by both the education and employment status of the parents. The numbers were small so the actual data are not reported. But this analysis provides some indications that:

- For children in work-rich couples having education-rich parents only slightly increased the child’s chance of using childcare
- For children in work-poor couples having education-rich parents more strongly increased the child’s chance of using childcare
- However, children living with work-rich parents were much more likely to use childcare whether their parents were education-rich or education-poor.

However, to be certain of these patterns a larger survey would be needed.

<sup>8</sup> All these data are of a size that indicates that the estimates should be treated with caution.

Again, while the numbers were small, for work-rich couples there also did seem to be an increase in use of childcare by income. However, income tends to be linked to education so with the small numbers it is difficult to unpick cause of this possible relationship.<sup>9</sup> In addition, income may increase because of the use of childcare or it may be that more hours of ECE are used by higher income parents because these parents often work long hours. A final problem is that the income figure was not adjusted for the cost of childcare so the gains to higher income parents extensively using ECE services may not be as high as the gross figures suggest.

The use of ECE by work-rich couples varied little between Auckland, other urban areas and rural areas, from a low of 77 percent in other urban areas to a high of 86 percent in rural areas.<sup>10</sup> But while the numbers were too small to report the data, it did suggest that children in work-poor families in Auckland were the least likely to use ECE services. If this is in fact correct, this could reflect the higher concentration of Pacific Island groups and immigrants but may also reflect supply of ECE services.

Why did particular groups of work-rich and work-poor couples not use ECE services? Unfortunately, the number of responses to each possible choice was very low and beyond levels of acceptable error so the results must be seen simply as a guide to possible patterns. For many, but certainly not most, work-poor couples cost was seen as a barrier to the use of ECE services. The only other relatively large response was, unfortunately, the category “other”. Perhaps surprisingly, given the high number of Maori, Pacific Island, and “other” children in work-poor families, the category “lack of culturally appropriate services” did not register as being important. However, this reason for non-use barely registered as an issue for the whole population either. It may be that many work-poor families do not fully appreciate the educational value of ECE services for their children, particularly at a young age. Given the particularly low use of ECE services by Pacific Island families in all family and work arrangements, this may be a particular problem amongst this group. However, a 1995 study of barriers to participation in ECE by Maori children, many of whom would have been living in work-poor households, indicates that while parental attitudes were a factor this was just one of many barriers. The barriers identified included those which were “attitudinal, informational, cultural, financial, locational, structural, constitutional, philosophical, personnel, capital, educational (legacy), affiliational and intergenerational /cyclical, in character”(Clark and Garden, 1995: 4). A similarly complex set of barriers is likely to exist for other low users of ECE services such as Pacific Island groups.

For work-rich couples, the four barriers to use of ECE services that seemed to be of some importance were cost, lack of suitable hours or flexible hours, lack of informal care by some known and trusted and again “other”. A large proportion of work-poor couples did not want a change to current arrangements, while a similar proportion of work-rich couples also wanted no change. Given the small sample size, it is not possible to assess whether those who wanted no change were those who used, or did not use, ECE services.

Finally, was the lack of childcare a barrier to work for work-poor couples? Again, the small sample size mean results should only be treated as speculative. It appeared that a lack of childcare was not, in itself, seen a significant barrier to finding work for a parent (or parents) in work-poor couples. It is likely that other barriers, such as a lack of suitable jobs, or a lack of appropriate skills were of far greater importance. However, labour demand and skills were not specifically tested in the survey. That childcare was not seen as a significant problem is not surprising if only one parent wanted paid work as the Childcare Survey also showed that couples with only one parent in paid work were also relatively low users of ECE services.

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<sup>9</sup> A test across all couples using two income groups (under \$40,000 and \$40,000 or more) and two highest educational groups (school qualification or less and vocational and higher) showed that income seems to be the most important variable in the use of childcare.

<sup>10</sup> The sample size only allowed an Auckland/rural and other urban split.

## Implications

While recent research suggest that there are major benefits for children in attending quality ECE services (e.g. Karoly *et al*, 1998; Wylie *et al*, 1999) there still remains intense debate about the relative impact of family background, ECE and schooling, neighbourhoods, income and other influences on the wellbeing and outcomes for children (Boggess and Corcoran, forthcoming). Unfortunately, there are tradeoffs in many of the influencing factors. For example, while ideally all children would grow up in families where the parents can provide them the optimal amount of time, parenting skills and material resources for most parents', time and income are always an important trade-off. Ideally, all children should also have access to high quality ECE services. In terms of the parents' time and resources, while many childrearing couples with neither parent in paid work (work-poor) appear to have time, a very high proportion of such couples do not have adequate resources. Many couples with both parents in full-time work (work-rich) face a time squeeze and a significant sub-group appear to also have few resources. Therefore, for both work-rich and work-poor couples having access to flexible and well resourced, but also affordable, ECE services is particularly vital for their children's wellbeing. Given that a significant proportion of work-poor couples are also education poor, the low use of ECE for their children means that this disadvantage is being potentially passed on to their children.

This analysis confirms that across the whole 0-4 age group the majority of children from work-poor couple families were not attending ECE services at the time of the survey. It is, however, less clear whether the majority will not have attended any services by the time they move into primary school. There are certainly indications that non-use of ECE services is concentrated amongst the younger age groups, particularly under 2 years of age.

While the sample size is too small for definite conclusions to be reached, it seems that while cost is likely to be a barrier to use for a group of work-poor parents it is possible that there are also attitudinal and perhaps informational barriers. For example, there are some types of ECE which are relatively low cost such as Kohanga Reo, Pacific Island playgroups, Playcentre and Kindergarten. Some of these ECE options also have the advantage that they involve parents and often have an element of parental education.<sup>11</sup> For new immigrants of all ethnic groups, but particularly those where English is a second language, undertaking such voluntary work can often be a good way of developing stronger links into the community they live in. It also seems likely that a lack of childcare amongst work-poor couples is not the primary reason why at least one parent is not in paid work. Other reasons, such as lack of labour demand, and supply side issues, such as a lack of skills or poor health, are likely to be of greater importance. Therefore, while simply expanding the provision of affordable quality care may bring in some extra children from work-poor families this, on its own, is unlikely to lead to either the majority of these children attending ECE services or the majority of these parents entering paid work. Yet, is also highly likely that if both parents are to be encouraged to seek work or both to undertake further training and education to increase their work skills then the provision of quality affordable childcare for their children would become an issue. Further small-scale qualitative research may be needed to better determine the barriers to use of ECE services by work-poor families. Given that Maori, Pacific Island and, based on census data, Asian families were over-represented amongst work-poor couples a strong ethnic dimension to this research would be important. As discussed, some research has already been carried on the barriers to ECE use for Maori parents, but this needs to be extended to other ethnic groups.

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<sup>11</sup> There is some evidence that poor areas can develop a high rate of social cohesion through voluntary work and this will produce healthier neighbourhoods (e.g. Boyle, 1999).

The survey supports data from the census in that there is a considerable diversity amongst work-rich two-parent families. There is a small group of work-rich and high-income families who can purchase private, and flexible, ECE services. But a much bigger group are either work-rich middle-income or work-rich low-income families. While the Childcare Survey provides some guide to the possible barriers to the use of ECE services by non-users in these latter groups, further in-depth study is needed to determine the barriers for both middle and low-income families. It is likely that there will be some differences in barriers based on actual or potential income earning ability. There may also be barriers to the use of childcare by mixed work couples, and particularly low income couples, that prevent them becoming work-rich. Such barriers may include the structure and operation of current childcare subsidies. While this has not been explored in this paper it is an area that would be worth examining.

Finally, given the diversity amongst both work-rich and work-poor couples a wide variety of approaches are likely to be needed to lift the use of ECE services by children. Further consideration needs to be particularly given to increasing the use of ECE services by children from disadvantaged families. While it is clear that many children from sole parent families face barriers to the use of ECE services some of these barriers have been already been identified in the research literature. However, it is clear that a significant proportion of children from work-poor two-parent families, as well as many living with work-rich parents, are also missing out on important educational experiences in the early years of their lives and the barriers to their participation in ECE have been little researched and need further exploration.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Statistics New Zealand for access to census data through the use of the datalab, and both Victoria University and the Social Policy Agency for providing financial support for my initial research on work-rich and work-poor couples. NACEW and the Department of Labour financially supported the extraction of the Childcare Survey data and the writing of this paper, while both Kirsten Gendall and Lisa Burch provided a high level of day-to-day support for writing the paper. I would also like to thank Statistics New Zealand for providing access to the Childcare Survey data.

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