

**Parental Employment and Childcare Use:  
Department of Labour Paper to the NACEW Childcare,  
Families and Work Seminar, December 1999**

## **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to highlight some of the important Childcare Survey findings in relation to parental employment, work arrangements, and use of childcare arrangements<sup>1</sup> by employed and non-employed parents.

The questions I hope to shed some light on in this paper are:

- What does the Childcare Survey tell us about mother's employment and hours of work patterns?
- How do patterns of employment and hours worked differ between mothers and fathers?
- What types of childcare arrangements do employed parents have for their children and how satisfied are they with these arrangements?
- What are some of the ways that parents work is arranged?

The data presented in this paper is primarily based on analysis of the 1998 New Zealand Childcare Survey results, although some data from the 1996 Census is also included. The Childcare Survey was conducted by Statistics New Zealand as a supplement to the Household Labour Force Survey (HLFS) during July, August and September 1998. It used a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews, and consisted of two questionnaires - one about children and one about parents. Parents were asked about the education and care arrangements used by each child over a one-week reference period. The response rate to the Childcare Survey was high, with 95% of those who were eligible responding to the survey. A total of 3,800 families, made up of 6,500 parents<sup>2</sup> (including 1,100 Maori parents), and 7,200 children<sup>3</sup> (including 1,800 Maori Children) participated in the survey. The survey data has been weighted to give estimates for all families, parents and children in New Zealand.

Some of the results presented in this paper have relatively high sample errors (that is, between 30%-50%). Where figures are marked with a \* the data needs to be treated with caution.

The first section of the paper will provide an overview of parental employment patterns for both mothers and fathers. I will also consider some of the work arrangements parents have. I will then look at the types of childcare arrangements employed and non-employed parents have, and parental satisfaction with these arrangements. Finally I will examine the extent to which problems accessing childcare are a barrier to participation in employment, and education/ training for parents.

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<sup>1</sup> Childcare arrangements are defined as when the child attends an early childhood education service, a before or after school care service, or was being looked after by someone other than a parent living in the household.

<sup>2</sup> In the childcare survey, the term parent means a parent living with a child aged between 0-13 years. The parent 'role' may have been filled by birth or adoptive parents, or by step, foster, or grandparents of the child.

<sup>3</sup> A child is defined as being aged between 0-13 years.

## 2. Parental Employment Patterns

### 2.1 Mothers Employment

Changes in the structure of the economy, and in societal expectations, together with demographic adjustments have contributed to significant shifts in the labour force participation of women. Although in all age groups men are still more likely to be in the labour force than women, women's participation, and in particular participation by mothers has grown considerably in recent years.<sup>4</sup>

The Childcare survey data indicate, as do other data sources, that women's employment patterns are affected by motherhood in a number of ways.

Table 1 shows that 54% of all mothers are employed, but that this varies considerably by the age of their youngest child, with 42% of mothers with a youngest child under 5 years being employed, compared with 67% of mothers with a youngest child over 5 years employed.

**Table 1: Mothers Labour Force Status<sup>5</sup> by Age of Youngest Child**

	<i>Youngest child under 5 years</i>	<i>Youngest child over 5 years</i>	<i>Total Mothers</i>
<b>employed</b>	42%	67%	54%
<b>not in the labour force (NILF)</b>	54%	28%	41%
<b>unemployed</b>	4%	5%	5%
<b>total</b>	100%	100%	100%
	n=211291	n=207934	n=419225

Mothers tend to increase involvement in employment as children grow older as evidenced by the data on employment rates for mothers with pre-school children by the actual age of the youngest child (shown table two). The data in this table suggest that there is a marked increase in employment among women after the first year of a child's life, and then employment rates increase much more gradually with the age of their youngest child after that.

**Table 2: Mothers labour force status by actual age of youngest child (pre-school children)**

	<i>Under 1 year</i>	<i>One year</i>	<i>Two years</i>	<i>Three years</i>	<i>Four years</i>
<b>Employed</b>	25%	43%	42%	50%	54%
<b>NILF</b>	70%	53%	54%	45%	41%
<b>Unemployed</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	N=47902	N=52138	N=44005	N=36197	N=31049

<sup>4</sup> *Childcare Families and Work The New Zealand Childcare Survey 1998: A Survey of Early Childhood Education and Care Arrangements for Children*, Department of Labour, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Labour force participants are all those within the working age population who are either employed or unemployed. Those not in the labour force are those who do not fall into the above two groups (employed or unemployed), for example, people in education or training, or caring full-time for others).

Mothers' involvement in employment is also affected by the number of children they have. Mothers with fewer children are more likely than mothers' with more children to be employed - 56% of mothers with one or two children are employed compared with 40%\* of mothers with more than 4 children.

The childcare survey data also show that while there is a similar pattern of employment for sole and partnered mothers in relation to age of youngest child, sole mothers are much less likely to be employed than partnered mothers (35% and 60% respectively). This data is consistent with 1996 Census data which indicates that 36% of sole mothers, and 65% of partnered mothers were employed in 1996.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 3: Labour force status of sole and partnered mothers by age of youngest child**

	<i>Sole Mothers</i>			<i>Partnered Mothers</i>		
	under 5 years	over 5 years	total	under 5 years	over 5 years	total
<b>employed</b>	25%	44%	35%	47%	74%	60%
<b>NILF</b>	67%	47%	57%	50%	23%	37%
<b>unemployed</b>	8%	9%	9%	3%	4%	3%
<b>total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
	n = 47804	n = 48313	n=97117	n=163487	n=159621	n=323108

Another factor associated with mother's involvement in employment is ethnicity. The differences between Maori and Pacific Islands and European mothers reflect wider employment patterns, with Maori (37%) and Pacific Islands (43%) mothers being generally less likely than European mothers (60%) to be employed. Census data also shows variations in employment by ethnicity, with Maori women having lower levels of employment than non-Maori women, particularly in their 20's. Census data also shows that during the late 1980's Maori women suffered full time and part-time employment losses, and that while the proportions in full time employment increased between 1991 and 1996, there was still a lower proportion of Maori women employed in 1996 (31%) than in 1986 (40%).<sup>7</sup> This is common across the Maori working age population as a whole.

Census data also shows marked differences in the employment of sole mothers by ethnicity. Only 25% of Maori and 28% of Pacific Islands sole mothers were employed in 1996 compared with 44% of European sole mothers. This probably reflects the fact that Maori and Pacific Island mothers are less likely than European mothers to have educational qualifications, are more likely to be young, to have young children, and larger families, and in the case of Maori, to live outside an urban area.<sup>8</sup>

Mothers with lower educational qualifications are also less likely than mothers with higher qualifications to be employed. Employment rates of mothers by highest qualification level are:

- 36% of mothers with no formal qualification

<sup>6</sup> *Social and Environmental Scan*, Social Policy Agency, June 1999.

<sup>7</sup> *Maori Women in Focus Titiro Hangai, Ka Marama*, Te Puni Kokiri, Ministry of Women's Affairs, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> *Social and Environmental Scan*, Social Policy Agency, June 1999.

- 55% of mothers with a school qualification
- 62% of mothers with a vocational or trade qualification
- 65% of mothers with a degree or higher qualification.

## 2.2 Mothers Hours of Work

Fifty four per cent of mothers are employed, with 26% working full time and 28% working part-time. However, as with participation in employment, the actual hours that mothers work varies greatly with the age of their youngest child.

Table 4 shows that mothers with a youngest child under 5 years were more than twice as likely as mothers with a youngest child over 5 years to work between 1-10 hours per week (23% and 10% respectively). Mothers with children under 5 years are less likely to work over 20 hours per week than those with a youngest child over 5 years (50% and 67% respectively).

**Table 4: Mothers hours worked by age of youngest child**

<i>Hours Worked (employed mothers)</i>	<i>Youngest child under 5 years</i>	<i>Youngest child over 5 years</i>	<i>Total Employed Mothers</i>
<b>1-10 hours</b>	23%	10%	15%
<b>11-20 hours</b>	20%	20%	20%
<b>21-30 hours</b>	15%	23%	20%
<b>31-40 hours</b>	22%	27%	25%
<b>More than 40 hours</b>	13%	17%	15%
<b>N/A</b>	7%*	3%*	4%
<b>total</b>	100%	100%	100%
	n= 87928	n= 138962	n= 226900

While there were differences in employment rates between sole and partnered mothers, there were few differences between these groups in terms of hours worked. The only difference was that sole mothers who were employed were slightly more likely to work 1-10 hours than partnered mothers if their youngest child was under 5 years. However, this difference between sole and partnered mothers is not statistically significant and therefore needs to be treated as indicative only.

The Childcare Survey data indicates that Maori mothers are more likely to be working over 20 hours per week than European mothers (65%, and 58% respectively). Pacific Island mothers were even more likely than European mothers to be working more than 20 hours (68%).

Fifteen per cent of mothers worked more than 40 hours per week. Interestingly, the difference between mothers with younger children and mothers with older children working more than 40 hours per week is small, and is not statistically significant. Mothers with a degree or post graduate qualification were much more likely than those with lower qualifications to work more than 40 hours per week (23%\* and 13%\* respectively).

## 2.3 Fathers' Employment

Father's employment patterns are markedly different to mothers, with fathers being much more likely to be employed than mothers (85% of fathers compared with 54% of mothers) and with little variation according to the age of their youngest child, as shown below in table 5.

**Table 5: Father's labour force participation by age of youngest child**

<i>Fathers LFS</i>	<i>Youngest child under 5 years</i>	<i>Youngest child over 5 years</i>	<i>Total Fathers</i>
<b>employed</b>	83%	86%	85%
<b>NILF</b>	9%	10%	9%
<b>unemployed</b>	7%	4%*	6%
<b>total</b>	100%	100%	100%
	n=166836	n=169473	n=336309

While fathers are generally more likely to be employed than mothers, similar patterns are evident in relation to educational qualifications and ethnicity for fathers as for mothers. Fathers with higher educational qualifications were more likely than fathers with lower educational qualifications to be employed (90% of those with a vocational, trade qualification or a degree and 71% of those with no formal qualification).

Maori and Pacific Island fathers were much less likely (67%) to be employed than European fathers (91%). Notably, Maori fathers were more likely to be not in the labour force than European fathers (17%\* and 6% respectively). The difference is even greater if the youngest child is over 5 years, with 25%\* of Maori fathers with a youngest child who is over 5 years being not in the labour force, compared with 5% of European fathers with a youngest child over 5 years.

Further investigation is required to find out more about why these fathers are not in the labour force. For instance, they may be caring for their children, or they might be participating in education and training.

Consistent with the childcare survey data, analysis of 1996 HLFS data undertaken by Dixon,<sup>9</sup> shows that prime age adults who are not in the labour force are disproportionately non-Pakeha and less well qualified. Further analysis of the HLFS data is required to investigate this issue further. Whatever the case, it appears that the decline in labour force participation rates for Maori males that occurred between 1987 and 1996 has had a lasting impact.

## 2.4 Fathers Hours of Work

Again, the patterns in relation to fathers hours of work are very different to that of mothers. There is little variation in fathers' hours of work by the age of their youngest child, and most fathers work full-time. By far the majority of fathers work more than 30 hours per week (89%), and over just 50% of fathers' work more than 40 hours per week. As with mothers, fathers with a degree or post graduate qualification

<sup>9</sup> Dixon (1996) *Labour Force Participation Over the Last Ten Years*, article in the Labour Market Bulletin, 1996:2.

(63%) are more likely than fathers with lower qualifications (52%) to work more than 40 hours per week.

### 3. Work Arrangements Parents Use

The Survey data clearly indicates that mothers involvement in employment, and the nature of that involvement, is affected by the presence of dependent children. While many mothers may set up and organise childcare arrangements in order to accommodate their paid work commitments, there are interesting questions around the extent to which parents organise and alter some of the ways in which they work, in order meet the demands of raising children.

The Survey collected information on some of the ways in which employed parents work was arranged. Employed parents were asked whether they did things such as use flexible working hours, work mainly from home, work in the weekend and work mainly at night. It should be noted that the data presented in this section on work arrangements does not necessarily refer to arrangements parents made specifically because of their childcare responsibilities. While it is possible, and in some cases probable that parents organised their work in these ways in order to help them manage their childcare responsibilities, it may also be that these arrangements were related to the nature of the job or occupation in which they are employed. Further analysis which compares parents and non-parents use of particular work arrangements would be necessary to examine this further.

Tables 6 and 7 show that just over one third of mothers (38%) and just under one third (32%) of fathers use flexible working hours during the reference week. There is not a great deal of variation in the use of work arrangements for either mothers or fathers according to the age of their youngest child. However, mothers with younger children are more likely to work mainly at home, and work mainly at night than mothers with a youngest child who was over 5 years. Mothers with younger children are also slightly more likely than those with older children to use flexible working hours although this difference is not statistically significant.

**Table 6: Use of work arrangements by employed mothers and age of youngest child**

	<i>Youngest child under 5 years</i>	<i>Youngest child over 5 years</i>	<i>Total employed mothers</i>
<b>Flexible hours</b>	43%	38%	39%
<b>Worked on call</b>	11%	10%	10%
<b>Shift work</b>	9%	9%	9%
<b>Worked in the weekend</b>	19%	17%	18%
<b>Worked mainly at home</b>	17%	11%	14%
<b>Worked mainly at night</b>	12%	6%	8%
<b>Total</b>	N= 87928	N=138972	N= 226900

**Table 7: Use of work arrangements by employed fathers and age of youngest child**

	<i>Youngest child under 5 years</i>	<i>Youngest child over 5 years</i>	<i>Total Fathers</i>
<b>Flexible hours</b>	29%	32%	31%
<b>Worked on call</b>	10%	9%	10%
<b>Shift work</b>	10%	8%	9%
<b>Worked in the weekend</b>	26%	26%	26%
<b>Worked mainly at home</b>	5%*	9%	7%
<b>Worked mainly at night</b>	7%	5%*	6%
<b>Total</b>	N= 166836	N= 169473	N= 336309

The data on work arrangements for sole parents indicates that there are few differences between sole and partnered parents. Sole parents are slightly less likely to use flexible working hours (35% compared with 40% of partnered parents), and to work in the weekend (15% compared with 19% of partnered parents), although these differences are not statistically significant, and must be seen as indicative only.

Work arrangements also vary according to the hours worked, particularly for mothers. As shown below in Table 8, mothers working one to ten hours were more likely than other mothers to use flexible working hours (54% and 36% respectively), and were more likely to work mainly at home (25% and 12% respectively). These patterns are to be expected. However if reduced hours are the primary source of flexibility for mothers, there are long term implications in terms of financial independence, and the types of jobs women take up.

**Table 8: Proportion of employed mothers who used particular work arrangements by hours of work**

	<i>1-10 hours per week</i>	<i>11-30 hours per week</i>	<i>31-40 hours per week</i>	<i>+ 40 hours per week</i>	<i>Total employed mothers</i>
<b>Flexible hours</b>	54%	42%	28%	39%	39%
<b>Worked on call</b>	16%*	11%	7%*	-	10%
<b>Shift work</b>	-	10%	12%*	8%*	9%
<b>Worked in the weekend</b>	12%*	15%	16%	40%	18%
<b>Worked mainly at home</b>	25%	15%	5%*	15%*	14%
<b>Worked mainly at night</b>	14%*	10%	5%*	7%*	8%
<b>Total</b>	N= 34435	N= 90289	N= 57278	N= 34915	N= 226900

## 4. Childcare Use and Mothers Employment

This section of paper will focus on the types of care used by children with employed and non-employed mothers. It is important to note that the Childcare Survey data refers to any early childhood education (ECE) or care arrangements used by the child in the reference week. The arrangements may not necessarily have been used to enable a parent to work, as ECE also fulfils education and socialisation needs of children, and may provide respite care for parents and families for other purposes.

Because of the differences in the types of care arrangements used by pre-school and school aged children, these two groups will be discussed separately.

### 4.1 Pre-school children

As expected pre-school children with employed mothers are more likely to use formal arrangements and informal care arrangements, than are children whose mothers were not employed.

Table 9 shows that children with sole mothers are more likely than children with partnered mothers to use both formal and informal care arrangements,<sup>10</sup> and are less likely to have no care arrangements. This greater use of care arrangements among children with employed sole mothers probably reflects the lack of assistance from partners for this group.

**Table 9: Care use by pre-school children with employed/non employed mothers**

	<i>Pre-school children with employed mothers</i>			<i>Pre-school children with non employed mothers</i>		
	sole mothers	partnered mothers	total employed	sole mothers	Partnered mothers	total not employed
<b>Formal care</b>	68%	62%	63%	46%	44%	44%
<b>Informal care</b>	35%*	27%	28%	10%*	7%	8%
<b>No arrangements</b>	-	24%	23%	49%	52%	51%
<b>Total</b>	n=13318	N= 94073	N= 107391	N=45962	N= 123810	N=169772

Table 10 shows that the most common types of services used by all children with employed mothers (other than no arrangements) are childcare centres, kindergartens and unpaid relatives. This varies between children with employed sole mothers and employed partnered mothers. Although the differences are not statistically significant, children of sole mothers are slightly more likely to attend childcare centres, and to be cared for by unpaid relatives, than children with partnered mothers.

<sup>10</sup> Formal care arrangements for pre-school children include public kindergartens, playcentres, Kohanga Reo, Pacific Island early childhood centres, childcare centres, organised home based care programmes, and playgroups. Informal care includes care by relatives (paid and unpaid), and care by other people (paid and unpaid) and includes nannies, friends, and neighbours.

**Table 10: Most common types of arrangements used by pre-school children with employed/non-employed mothers**

	<i>Pre-school children with employed mothers</i>			<i>Pre-school children with non employed mothers</i>		
	Sole mothers	Partnered mothers	Total employed mothers	Sole mothers	Partnered mothers	Total non-emp mothers
<b>Childcare centre</b>	32%*	26%	27%	11%*	12%	12%
<b>Kindergarten</b>	20%*	22%	22%	15%*	18%	18%
<b>Relatives - unpaid</b>	24%*	16%	17%	9%*	5%*	5%
<b>Other person - paid</b>	-	9%	8%	-	-	-
<b>Playcentre</b>	-	7%*	7%*	6%*	8%	8%
<b>Playgroup</b>	-	6%*	6%*	-	6%*	6%
<b>Home based care</b>	-	4%*	4%*	-	-	-
<b>Kohanga Reo</b>	-	-	3%*	7%*	-	-
<b>No arrangements</b>	-	24%	23%	49%	52%	52%
<b>Total</b>	n= 13318	n=94073	n= 107391	n= 45962	n123810	n 169772

Interestingly, there are few differences in the use of kindergartens, playcentres, and playgroups between the children with employed mothers and those with non-employed mothers. It has often been thought that these services do not meet the needs of working parents. However, these data indicate that for whatever reason, employed parents are using these services for their children. It may be that these children have mothers working fewer hours and that they are able to meet their childcare needs by using these services. It may also be that two parent families are managing between the two parents work schedules. For others, it may be that parents prefer this type of service and may be managing their work arrangements around this preference.

Table 11 suggests some evidence of this as it indicates that children with mothers who work between 11-20 hours per week are more likely (33%) than those with mothers working more than 20 hours (16%), and those who were working less than 11 hours (21%) to attend kindergarten.

**Table 11: Most common types of care used by pre-school children with employed mothers by mothers' hours of work (\* applies to almost all of the figures in this table)**

	<i>1-10 hours</i>	<i>11-20 hours</i>	<i>21- 40 hours</i>	<i>More than 40 hours</i>
<b>Kindergarten</b>	21%	33%	16%	22%
<b>Childcare centre</b>	20%	25%	38%	23%
<b>Relative unpaid</b>	18%	17%	16%	-
<b>No arrangements</b>	31%	18%	17%	23%
<b>Total</b>	N= 24099	N= 23074	N= 38491	N= 14268

It is notable that 40% of the children with employed mothers who go to kindergarten have more than one childcare arrangement (compared with an overall 26% of pre-school children with employed mothers who have more than one care arrangement

Children using informal arrangements were also more likely than children using other types of arrangements to have multiple arrangements. Just over half of the children with employed mothers who were cared for by someone else who was paid, and who

were cared for by an unpaid relative had more than one care arrangement (56%\* and 53% respectively).

To further understand this issue, information is needed on whether parents are happy with using multiple care arrangements and why they use particular care arrangements. Unfortunately the numbers of children who go to kindergarten and who have at least one other care arrangement is too small to analyse in relation to parental satisfaction with these arrangements. Information on factors influencing why parents choose, or if in fact they have much choice over the services they use would be best collected via qualitative research, and this was outside of the scope of the Survey.

### **Satisfaction with ECE and Care Arrangements**

The Survey collected data on demand for different childcare arrangements. This includes demand for a different type of care, demand for more hours of care, and demand for hours at a different time. Overall, changes to care arrangements are wanted for 31% of pre-school children. It appears that employed mothers are just as satisfied with their childcare arrangements as non-employed mothers, as there is no difference in relation to overall demand for changes to childcare arrangements between children with employed mothers, and those with non-employed mothers. However when this is broken down into the types of changes that are wanted, more hours of care and hours at a different time, are more likely to be wanted for children with employed mothers, and for those with non-employed mothers. The majority of this is demand for more or different hours of formal care.

### **Children with no care arrangements**

The Survey data indicate that 23% of pre-school children with employed mothers have no care arrangements. This does not mean that these children are not cared for at all while their parents are at work. There are indications from the Survey data that there are other ways these parents are managing to combine paid work and the need to have their children cared for. For example, of those children with employed mothers who had no care arrangements:

- almost one quarter (24%\*) had mothers who worked mainly from home
- 16%\* had mothers who worked mainly at night (and therefore these children are likely to have been at home with another parent)
- 16%\* of those with mothers who were waged or salaried were taken to work with their mother
- 65%\* of those with mothers who were self-employed were taken to work with their mothers.

## **4.2 School Aged Children**

As is the case with pre-school children, children aged 5 and over with employed mothers are more likely to have both formal and informal care arrangements, than are children with non-employed mothers. Again, children aged 5 and over with employed sole mothers are more likely than those with partnered mothers to have care arrangements (both formal and informal).

The data set out in table 12 below indicates that, other than ‘no care arrangements’, the most common type of care used for children aged 5 and over with employed mothers is unpaid care by relatives. Similar to the data for pre-school children, this type of care is more likely to be used for children aged 5 and over with employed sole mothers than those with employed partnered mothers. Formal OSCAR services are used for 4% of children with employed mothers, with this type of care being more common for children with employed sole mothers than for those with employed partnered mothers.

**Table 12: Type of arrangements used by children aged 5 and over with employed/non-employed mothers**

	<i>Children aged 5 and over with employed mothers</i>			<i>Children aged 5 and over with non employed mothers</i>	<i>Total Children aged 5 and over</i>
	Sole mothers	Partnered mothers	Total emp mothers	Total with non-emp mothers	
<b>Relatives - unpaid</b>	17%*	9%	10%	6%*	8%
<b>Other person - paid</b>	-	6%	6%	2%*	4%
<b>Other person - unpaid</b>	-	4%	4%	3%	4%
<b>OSCAR</b>	10%*	4%	4%	2%*	4%
<b>No arrangements</b>	64%	76%	74%	89%	80%
<b>Total</b>	n= 37852	n=264237	n=302089	n= 203547	n= 505704

It appears that employed sole parents are being supported to participate in employment by relatives who are caring for children on an unpaid basis. As noted previously the Survey data does not provide information on the reasons why parents are using particular types of care for their children. It would be very useful for policy purposes to get a better understanding of the reasons sole parents in particular are using unpaid relatives to care for their children. Is this a preference for relatives to provide care? Or is it that sole parents have difficulty accessing, and paying for formal OSCAR care?

### **Satisfaction with Care Arrangements**

While demand for changes to childcare arrangements is generally lower for children aged 5 and over than for pre-school children (14% compared with 31% for pre-school children), there is high demand for formal services – formal OSCAR services are wanted for 31,000 school aged children (6% of all school aged children). It is also notable that there is a demand for more formalised arrangements for school aged children in the form of extra tuition and extra curricula activities. This is wanted for 24,000 children, and may indicate an intersection of employment related issues for parents, and the desire to ensure that children are participating in extra activities.

## **5. Barriers to Employment and Study or training**

The focus of this paper so far has been primarily on employed parents. Parents may not participate in paid work, because of personal, societal and cultural values and beliefs, or labour market issues such as labour demand, rates of pay, ability to work

part-time or have flexible working hours, access to childcare and so on. As shown earlier, however, it is mainly mothers who take time out of the labour force to care for children.

The Survey data which indicate the childcare related barriers to employment, and to participation in education/training are discussed below. The information presented here is taken from the Childcare Families and Work report.

In total, 15% of parents (110,500) stated that problems accessing childcare had affected their ability to participate in employment. Higher proportions of sole parents (30%) were affected than parents from two parent families (12%). Parents earning \$20,000 or less (23%) and parents currently working part-time (25%) were also more affected than other parents.

Nine per cent of parents found that problems accessing childcare affected their participation in study/training. The main reasons that childcare were not accessed by those who wanted to participate in work and training were cost, lack of informal care by someone known and trusted, lack of suitable or flexible hours of childcare, and lack of local services.

Problems accessing childcare generally affected the participation of mothers more than fathers: 22% of mothers found that their participation in paid work was affected, compared with only 5% of fathers, with the main effect for mothers being that it stopped them looking for a job. In addition:

- the proportion whose employment was affected by problems accessing childcare was similar for both Maori and European mothers (26% and 23% respectively). However, the proportion of Pacific Islands mothers affected was lower (14%)
- 20% of Maori mothers were prevented from looking for a job due to problems accessing ECE and care, compared with 14% of European mothers
- 26% of mothers from lower income families found that access to childcare affected their participation in employment, compared with 18% of mothers from higher income families
- Those mothers working 1 to 19 hours per week were more likely (31%) than those working 20 hours per week or more (17%) to report that problems accessing childcare had affected their participation in employment in the past 12 months.

Problems accessing childcare were less of a barrier to participation in study/training. However, participation in study/training was again affected to a greater extent for mothers than for fathers. Fourteen per cent of all mothers were affected, compared with 3% of fathers.

Parents who wanted to participate in paid work and study or training, but who did not do so because of problems accessing childcare, were asked why arrangements could not be made for their children. While the cost of childcare is the single biggest factor preventing mothers from participating in employment, or in study/training, the proportions vary, and are much higher for some groups of mothers than for others. In particular, cost of childcare was more of a barrier to employment for:

- Māori mothers (54%), compared with European mothers (45%).
- mothers from lower income families (58%), compared with mothers from other families (37%).

- sole parent mothers (61%), compared with partnered mothers (40%).
- mothers working 1 to 19 hours per week (49%), compared with mothers working for longer hours (37%)
- mothers with no formal educational qualifications - 52% of those with no formal qualifications reported that the cost of childcare was a barrier to their participation in employment, compared with 37% of those with a degree or higher qualification.

The findings of the Survey and of other New Zealand studies outlined above are generally consistent with international studies indicating that although a number of factors influence women's labour market participation, access to childcare is a key issue.<sup>11</sup>

## 6. Implications and Key Issues

### Employment

Sole and partnered mothers participation in employment, and way they work is affected to a large degree by their responsibility for ensuring children's care needs are addressed. This is especially so for those with young children. While there are a wide range of issues affecting mothers involvement in employment, it is clear that access to childcare does have an impact on parents. This is more marked for some groups than others (for example, sole parents, lower income parents, Maori). I have set out what I think are some of the key issues below.

Many have argued that mothers want to spend time with their children and therefore choose not to enter paid work, or work fewer hours in order to have a balanced lifestyle, and that this is desirable. In a recent publication by Joshi and Paci, *Unequal Pay for Women and Men*, the authors argue that while many women may choose to concentrate on being mothers, and that this should not be seen as a failure or the "wrong choice" – women's choices are constrained and distorted by wider societal and labour market issues (such as unequal pay).

Access to childcare is an issue for fathers too. However, fathers have tended to rely primarily on women to undertake or organise childcare arrangements. Joshi and Paci argue that a climate of genuine choice about sharing roles and ways in which parenthood and paid work may be combined is necessary. In reality there are many factors over which the individual has little control or 'choice,' including gendered expectations of who has responsibility for children, ability to undertake part-time or flexible work, as well as labour demand issues.

The Survey data show that women with younger children are working fewer hours, and that these women are most likely to use flexible hours. Literature on part-time work suggests that it is only available in a limited number of occupations, is often associated with low pay rates, poor employment conditions and little job security. There are also issues relating to intensification and under-employment.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Wylie, Podmore, Murrow, Meagher-Lundberg, 1997

<sup>12</sup> Women and Part-time Work in New Zealand, Davidson and Bray, 1994.

It is not entirely clear from the survey data whether parents organise their childcare arrangements around their paid work commitments or whether mothers may be 'fitting in' paid work around childcare responsibilities (that is, by working fewer hours, and using low cost services such as kindy and playcentre, or by working from home, or at night). It is likely to be a combination of both scenarios, and will be affected by the degree of choice parents have over factors such as the type of work they undertake, financial pressures and so on. It appears that many mothers are managing to meet paid work demands as well as raising children. Does this mean mothers end up trying to do it all or is it an effective way of having a balanced life?

### **Labour Market Disadvantage**

It is notable that parents who are reporting that access to childcare is a barrier to participation in employment, and those who are not satisfied with their childcare arrangements (or lack of), are among those who experience wider labour market disadvantage (including sole parents, Maori, lower income, mothers working part-time, and those with low educational qualifications).

This is important in terms of the opportunities available to children over their lifetimes, particularly those from families experiencing disadvantage. The benefits of participation in early childhood education have been well documented. Given the links between participation in employment by parents, and participation in early childhood education by children, providing better access to childcare for these groups is important.

### **Employment and Childcare Types**

The numbers of children with employed parents attending kindergarten, play centre and playgroups is interesting, given that it has often been thought that these services do not meet the needs of employed parents. While it appears that these tend to be children with mothers working fewer hours, or with more than one arrangement, further analysis is required to determine whether these parents are satisfied with their arrangements.

The demand for formal arrangements indicate that this is what parents want. However, many parents also reported a desire for longer hours and greater flexibility in terms of hours for kindergarten also arose in the survey. The Survey does not tell us why people want to use services such kindergarten. It may be because it is low cost, that the services are local and have been around long enough for parents to have trust in them, and/or because of the type of programme they offer.

The high use of unpaid family members to care for children (especially among sole parent families) indicates that support by relatives is facilitating many parents' involvement in paid work. Further analysis of the childcare survey data in relation to informal care, and possibly further qualitative research would be a valuable addition to the information available in the Childcare Survey on informal care. One particular issue for further investigation is that a lack of informal care was reported as a barrier to employment, despite the fact that those families with informal care arrangements were less satisfied than those with formal care arrangements.

## **Cost of Childcare**

There are indications from the survey that parents are opting for low/no cost arrangements, and/or are juggling work commitment and hours worked in order to enable their children to participate in early childhood education, and in order to participate in paid work. Again, it is not clear from the survey data whether this is an issue of choice – that parents prefer services such as kindergarten which have traditionally been low cost, or whether they are not able to pay for more expensive forms of care. However, cost is the single biggest reason given by those reporting problems accessing childcare that prevented them from participating in employment, education/training and voluntary work.

The findings of the Survey and of other New Zealand studies outlined above are generally consistent with international studies indicating that although a number of factors influence women's labour market participation, access to affordable, quality childcare is a key issue.

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