

Early Childhood Program Participation: 2019

First Look—Summary

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National Household Education Surveys Program

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Introduction

This report (NCES 2020-075REV) is revised from an earlier version of the report (NCES 2020-075) that was released in July 2020. The columns in table 1 that show types of weekly nonparental care arrangements excluded children who spent equal hours in two or more types of care. This revised report includes those children in the analysis for Table 1. The corresponding selected finding for table 1 has been revised with the corrected estimates. The revised report also corrects the estimates related to “labor force status of parents/guardians, two-parents/guardian family” and “household income” for all tables. Specifically, the “other” category for the rows showing “labor force status of parents/guardians, two-parents/guardian family” excluded children with nonparent guardians, and the household income “\$100,001 or more” excluded children from households with annual income “\$200,001 or higher.” This revised report includes those children in the analysis for all tables. Lastly, a few of the special symbols in table 7 and C-7 have been corrected. All other estimates and findings presented in the report remain unchanged.

This report presents data on the early childhood care and education arrangements for children in the United States from birth through the age of 5 who were not yet enrolled in kindergarten by 2019. The report also presents data on selected family activities. Results are reported by child, parent, and family characteristics. Tabular findings are in appendix A. These data represent circumstances before the implementation of coronavirus pandemic restrictions.

The data for this report come from the Early Childhood Program Participation (ECP) Survey, administered as part of the 2019 National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES:2019). The ECP survey collects data about children from birth through age 6 who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten. The ECP asks detailed questions about children’s participation in relative care, nonrelative care, and center-based care arrangements. It also asks about the main reason for choosing care; what factors were important to parents when choosing a care arrangement; the primary barriers to finding satisfactory care; what activities the family does with the child, such as reading, singing, and arts and crafts; and what the child is learning, such as counting, recognizing the letters of the alphabet, and reading. The ECP questionnaires were completed by a parent or guardian who knew about the sampled child.

The ECP questionnaire asks parents to report about their children’s participation in relative care, nonrelative care, and center-based care arrangements in three distinct sections of the questionnaire. If the child participates in a regularly scheduled, weekly arrangement for a given type of care, parents answer detailed questions about that care arrangement (e.g., information about the care provider, location of the care, and cost of the care). Since children could have more than one regularly scheduled care arrangement within a particular care type (e.g., two relative care arrangements), the questionnaire asked parents to focus on the person or center that provides the most care of that type. This report refers to these arrangements as the “primary care arrangement” for each particular type of care.

Children can have multiple primary care arrangements if they participate in more than one type of care. For example, if the child has a regularly scheduled arrangement with a relative and another regularly scheduled arrangement at a center, then the child is considered to have two primary care arrangements. In this report, the term “multiple primary arrangements” refers to children who have more than one regularly scheduled type of care arrangement. The questionnaire does not ask parents to identify which type of care serves as the child’s overall primary care arrangement.

The NHES:2019 used a nationally representative address-based sample covering the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The survey was conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau from January through August 2019. The 2019 administration of NHES included a screener survey and two topical surveys: the Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey and the ECPP. The screener survey asked for an enumeration of household members and was used to select an eligible child to be the focus of a topical survey. For more information about the NHES:2019 methodology, please reference the forthcoming National Household Education Surveys Program of 2019: Data File User’s Manual (Jackson et al. 2021).

Although the NHES is a repeating cross-sectional survey, changes in the sample frame, data collection methods, and wording of some items have occurred over time. Because of these changes, caution should be used in comparing results in this report to those from prior NHES collections. When weighted, the ECPP data in this report are nationally representative of children between birth and the age of 5 not yet enrolled in kindergarten. The total number of cases used in this report is 7,076 children, representing 21.2 million children from birth through age 5 and not yet in kindergarten.¹

ECPP questionnaires were completed for 7,092 children from birth through age 6 and not yet enrolled in kindergarten, for a weighted ECPP unit response rate of 85.5 percent and an overall estimated weighted unit response rate (the screener weighted unit response rate multiplied by the ECPP unit weighted response rate) of 54.0 percent. An analysis of bias in the NHES:2019 data, described further in appendix B, detected some measurable bias in certain demographic characteristics and survey responses. The level of potential bias detected is considered to be low. Additional details about the survey methodology, response rates, and data reliability are provided in appendix B.

Results presented in this report are weighted. All statements of comparison have been tested for statistical significance using two-tailed *t*-tests and are significant at the 95 percent confidence level. No adjustments were made for multiple comparisons. Some estimates that appear different may not be measurably different in a statistical sense due to sampling error. Readers are directed to the Statistical Tests section of appendix B for information about how to compare estimates in the tables.

This *First Look* report presents selected descriptive information. Readers are cautioned not to draw causal inferences based on the results presented. Many of the variables examined in this report may be related to one another, but the complex interactions and relationships among them have not been explored. The variables examined here are just a few of the variables that can be examined in these data; they were selected to demonstrate the range of information available from the study. The release of this report is intended to encourage more in-depth analysis of the data using more sophisticated statistical methods.

For readers interested in appendixes with tables of estimates, definitions of terms used in the findings and tables, and additional information about the survey from which the findings are drawn, please see the “View full report” link at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020075REV>.

¹ The ECPP data file includes too few six-year-olds to support stable estimates; therefore, six-year-olds have been excluded from the estimates presented in this report.

Selected Findings

- Approximately 59 percent of children age 5 and younger and not enrolled in kindergarten were in at least one weekly nonparental care arrangement, as reported by their parents. Among children in a weekly nonparental care arrangement, 62 percent were attending a day care center, preschool, or prekindergarten (center-based care), 38 percent were cared for by a relative (relative care), and 20 percent were cared for in a private home by someone not related to them (nonrelative care) (table 1).
- For the majority of children in weekly care, their parents reported that the care arrangement where the child spends the most time covers the hours needed for work very well (64 percent), as opposed to covering work hours well (21 percent), somewhat well (11 percent), or not well (4 percent) (table 2).
- The mean length of time that children had been in their primary care arrangement was longest for children cared for by a relative (19 months) and shortest for children in a center-based care arrangement (14 months) (table 3).
- Among families with any out-of-pocket costs for their primary care arrangement, the per child hourly out-of-pocket costs were lower for children in relative care (\$6.05) than in nonrelative (\$7.75) and center-based care (\$8.22) (table 4).
- The most common location for children’s primary center-based care arrangement was a building of its own (42 percent). Other reported locations were a church, synagogue, or other place of worship (20 percent); a public school (19 percent), and other locations (19 percent) (table 5).
- In choosing a care arrangement, the reliability of the arrangement was rated “very important” by parents of 87 percent of children in at least one weekly nonparental care arrangement, a higher proportion than any other factor, followed by the availability of the care provider (75 percent) and qualifications of staff (72 percent) (table 6).
- Among children whose parents reported difficulty finding child care, cost was most often cited as the primary reason for the difficulty (37 percent of children). Lack of open slots was cited for 27 percent of children, quality for 18 percent, location for 7 percent; and 11 percent cited other reasons (table 7).
- Among children ages 3 to 5 and not yet in kindergarten, 85 percent were read to by a family member three or more times in the past week. Smaller percentages of children had family members sing to them (73 percent); teach them letters, words, or numbers (67 percent); work with them on arts and crafts (46 percent); or tell them a story (38 percent) (table 8).