



THE ABC'S OF CHILD CARE: ACCESS, BARRIERS, CONCERNS

Introduction

High-quality child care plays an important role in promoting social and educational opportunities for children, fostering early learning and cognitive growth.¹ Studies have found that children from disadvantaged backgrounds who attend quality preschool programs perform better in school, are more likely to graduate from high school, and are less likely to later engage in crime.^{2,3} Several long-term studies have also suggested that participation in high-quality child care improves children's future economic opportunities, decreasing their future dependency on welfare and increasing their earned income in adulthood.^{4,5}

The demand for child care in Los Angeles County has increased over the past several decades, due in part to a rising number of single parent households and families in which both parents work outside the home. Despite growth in the number of higher quality child care options for families in the county, availability has not kept pace with need, leaving many families without options for finding quality, affordable child care.

Results from the 2005 Los Angeles County Health Survey (LACHS) show that 32% of children (an estimated 288,000 children) from birth through age five years were in child care in Los Angeles County (Table 1). Child care was defined as any type of arrangement where someone other than the child's parents cared for the child more than 10 hours per week on a regular basis. This definition included early care and education programs, such as Head Start or State Preschool, as well as center-based and family child care settings. Family child care providers included licensed, as well as license-

TABLE 1 Percent of Children (0 to 5 Years) in Child Care by Selected Demographics, 2005

	Percent	95% CI	Estimated Numbers
Los Angeles County	32.1%	29.6-34.5	288,000
Child's Age			
<12 Months	22.0%	16.4-27.6	28,000
1 Year	27.3%	21.9-32.7	45,000
2 Years	31.8%	26.1-37.4	54,000
3 Years	37.4%	30.9-43.8	55,000
4 Years	37.7%	31.6-43.8	56,000
5 Years	35.5%	29.0-42.0	49,000
Child's Race/Ethnicity			
Latino	24.4%	21.6-27.2	138,000
White	47.9%	41.9-53.8	78,000
African American	46.4%	36.2-56.6	33,000
Asian/Pacific Islander	40.1%	32.2-48.0	38,000
Federal Poverty Level^{\$}			
0-99% FPL	18.2%	14.7-21.7	52,000
100%-199% FPL	25.5%	21.0-30.0	57,000
200%-299% FPL	37.7%	30.2-45.2	44,000
300% or above FPL	49.4%	44.8-54.0	135,000
Service Planning Area			
Antelope Valley	38.0%	28.2-47.8	10,000
San Fernando	31.8%	26.5-37.0	56,000
San Gabriel	30.1%	24.3-35.9	49,000
Metro	28.4%	22.0-34.9	29,000
West	47.8%	35.9-59.7	18,000
South	27.7%	20.9-34.4	32,000
East	31.6%	24.6-38.5	44,000
South Bay	36.1%	29.6-42.5	50,000

^{\$} Based on U.S. Census 2003 Federal Poverty Level (FPL) thresholds which for a family of four (2 adults, 2 dependents) correspond to annual incomes of \$18,700 (100% FPL), \$37,300 (200% FPL) and \$56,500 (300% FPL).

1. Currie J., *Early childhood education programs. Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol.15, No.2:213-238, 2001.

2. Reynolds, A.J., Temple, J.A., Robertson, D.L. & Mann E.A. Long-term Effects of an Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest. *Journal of American Medical Association*, vol. 285(18), 2339-2380, 2001.

3. Peisner-Feinberg, E., Burchinal, M., Clifford, R., Yazejian, N., Culkin, M., Zelazo, J., Howes,

C., Byler, P., Kagan, S., & Rustici, J. *The Children of the Cost, Quality and Outcomes Study Go to School. Technical Report.* Chapel Hill: Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, 1999.

4. Parks, G., *The HighScope Perry Preschool Project. Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, October 2000.

5. Reynolds, A.J., Temple, J.A., Robertson, D.L. & Mann, E.A., *Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers. Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 24 (4), 267-303, 2002.

exempt providers.

The percentage of children in child care was higher (49%) among households with income levels at or above 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) than in households with incomes less than 100% FPL (18%). Participation in child care increased with age from birth to age three years, and then leveled off. More than half (64%) of the children attending child care had a mother who was employed full-time, and use of child care increased with higher levels of maternal education. Eleven percent of children were in child care for 11 to 29 hours per week, 6% for 30 to 39 hours per week, and 15% for 40 or more hours per week.

Types of Child Care

Among those in child care, 21% (82,000 children) were in Head Start or a State Preschool program, 40% (158,000 children) were in another type of center-based program, 51% (201,000 children) were cared for in someone else's home, and 35% (138,000 children) were cared for in their own home. (Note: Children could be in more than one type of care.)

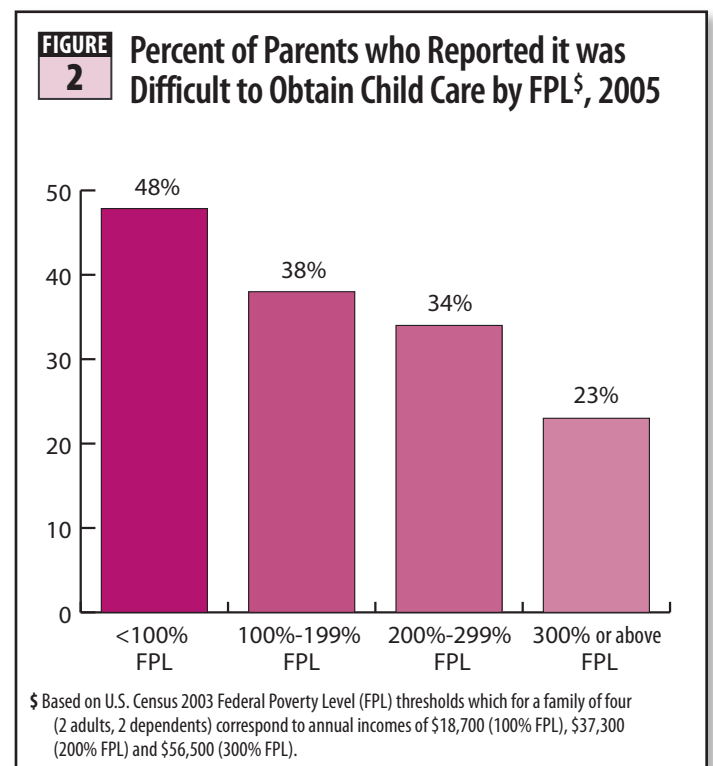
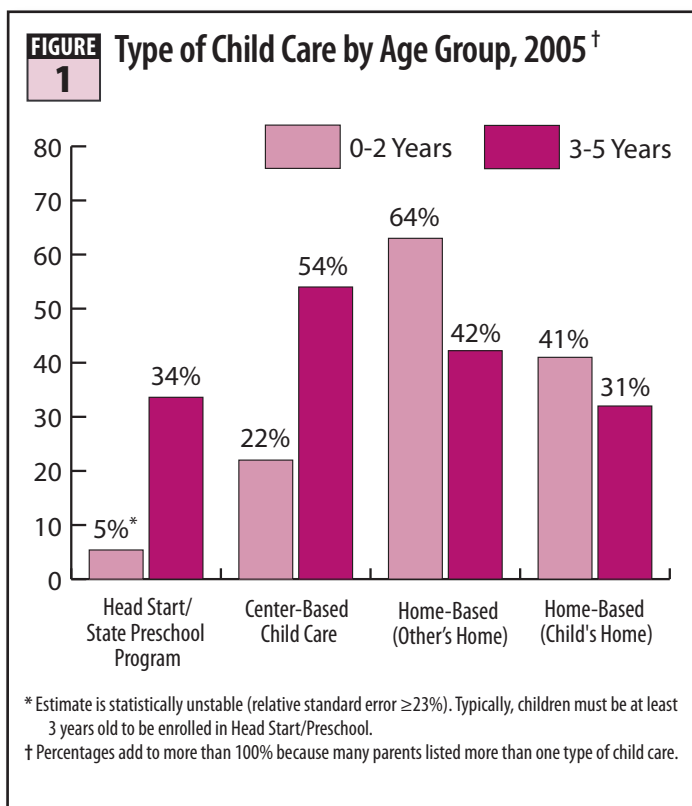
Child care arrangements varied depending on the child's age. Children ages 2 years and younger were more often cared for in their own or someone

else's home, whereas children ages 3 to 5 years were more often enrolled in center-based care (Figure 1). Many families in the county relied on care provided by relatives, either in the child's home (21%) or in someone else's home (32%).

Among parents who reported using child care in someone else's home, only one-third reported that the care provided was licensed. While some parents may not accurately report licensure, these findings are consistent with assessments of the shortage of licensed care in LA County, in particular for infants and toddlers. According to the 2004 Child Care Needs Assessment, there were 130,182 children 0 to 2 years of age in the county with working parents and only 7,871 slots in licensed child care centers for that age group.⁶ Due to the insufficient supply of infant-toddler care, many families may resort to lower-quality, less expensive child care services.

Difficulties Accessing Child Care

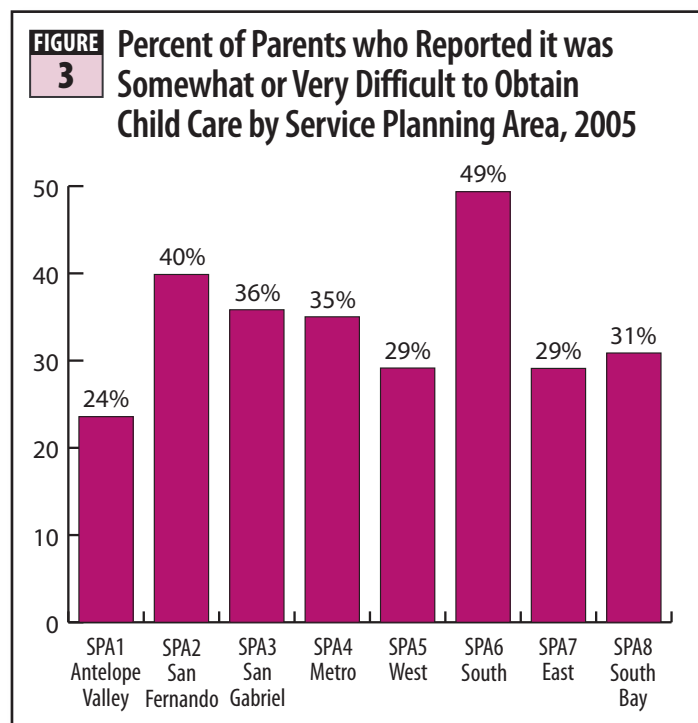
Although Los Angeles County gained 82 center-based programs between 1996 and 2000, resulting in an additional 5 slots per 1,000 children under age 5, this expansion has not kept pace with the county's overall child population growth.⁷ The 2005 LACHS found that among parents who stated a



need for child care, 36% reported it was somewhat or very difficult to get child care on a regular basis. Families living below 100% FPL were more likely than families living at or above 300% FPL to report difficulty finding child care (Figure 2).

Reported access to child care programs varied by race and ethnicity. Latino parents more frequently reported difficulty obtaining needed child care (43%) compared to African Americans (29%), Asians/Pacific Islanders (25%), and Whites (24%). A lack of child care centers in ethnic communities and language barriers may contribute to these differences. A previous study found that among Latino parents, a bilingual environment factored importantly in the decision to enroll their child in a licensed child care center.⁸

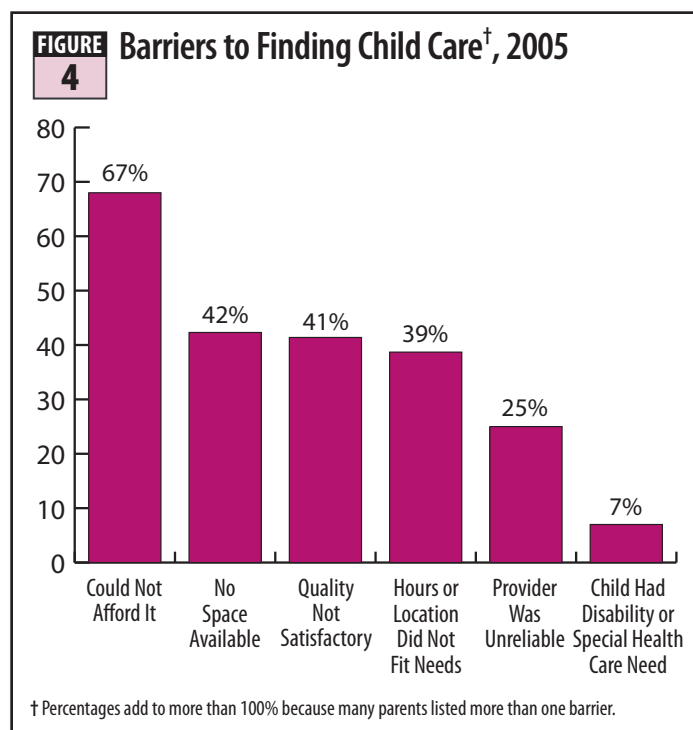
The percent of parents who reported difficulty obtaining child care varied by Service Planning Area (SPA), ranging from a high of 49% in the South SPA to a low of 24% in Antelope Valley (Figure 3).



Barriers to Finding Quality Child Care

The survey identified several major barriers to finding and keeping child care for families in Los Angeles County. Among parents who reported difficulty obtaining child care, 67% reported they could not afford it, 42% reported they could not find a provider with space available, 41% reported

the quality of child care was not satisfactory, 39% reported the hours or locations did not fit their needs, and 25% reported they could not find a reliable provider. In addition, 7% reported they could not find care because their child had a disability or special health care need (Figure 4).



Discussion

Nearly one third of children ages 0 to 5 years in LA County spend time each day in some type of child care setting. Results from the 2005 LACHS show that parents face many barriers in finding child care, including the high cost of care, concerns about quality and reliability of care, and a lack of available space, flexible hours, and services for children with special needs.

The supply of licensed child care is inadequate in many communities in the county, particularly in low income and Latino neighborhoods. Despite being eligible for public child care subsidies through federal Head Start programs or the State Preschool program, many parents encounter long waiting lists for care. The LA County Office of Child Care reports that as of March 2007, there were 33,061 children ages 0 to 5 years waiting for subsidized care and development services. More than 90% of these children needed child care because their parents or guardians were working.⁹

8. *Working Latino Families Struggle to Find Child Care Study Shatters Stereotypes* (Press Release). Tomas Rivera Institute, September 1998.

9. *Centralized Eligibility List*, Los Angeles County Office of Child Care, 2006.

Our finding that 41% of parents reported dissatisfaction with quality as a barrier to care is consistent with other studies indicating that concerns about quality may keep parents from utilizing existing child care services.¹⁰ While children's cognitive, social, and emotional development can be significantly improved by increasing program quality (see **SIDEBAR**), high-quality early childhood programs are expensive and often financially out of reach for LA County families.

Low income families, in particular, encounter challenges in finding high-quality, affordable child care. In 2004, the average cost of full-time center-based care for infants in LA County was \$210 per week, and for pre-schoolers (ages 2 to 5 years) was \$150 per week. It is estimated that low-income families in California spend approximately 24% of their earnings on child care.¹¹

Almost half the young children in child care in the county are being cared for in someone else's home. Our results show that compared to White children, more Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, and African American children are cared for in someone else's home. It is possible that the parents of these children choose family-based child care due to their social or cultural preferences. However, the reliance on family child care among these groups could also be due to the increased availability, flexibility and lower cost of family child care. Compared to center-based care providers, family child care providers are more likely to be available during non-traditional work hours. However, many of these service providers are license-exempt or not licensed and may lack sufficient training or resources to provide children high-quality care.¹²



on the web



The **First 5 LA** initiative is designed to promote, support, and optimize the early development of children from the prenatal stage until their fifth birthday.

<http://www.first5.org>

First 5 LA Connect helps Los Angeles parents of children ages 0-5 years find answers to their parenting questions. The 1-888-FIRST5-LA (1-888-347-7855) number and First 5 LA Connect website provide assistance on a wide range of topics to parents.

<http://www.first5laconnect.org>

Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), funded by First 5 LA, is a groundbreaking initiative in early childhood education. LAUP's goal is to make high-quality voluntary preschool available to every four-year-old in Los Angeles, regardless of family income. LAUP utilizes the existing early care and education system, including Head Start and publicly subsidized preschools, private preschools, Family Child Care homes and faith-based programs, to expand access to high quality preschool across LA County.

<http://www.laup.net/>

Los Angeles County Child Care Directory provides parents with information and resources to help find the best possible care for their child. The child care directory provides names of licensed child care centers, as well as small and large family child care homes.

http://www.ladpss.org/dpss/child_care/default.cfm

California Child Care Resource and Referral Network (R&Rs) is a well-developed system that supports parents, providers, and local communities in finding, planning for, and providing affordable, quality child care. The R&Rs help providers to get licensed and to meet the urgent need for infant-toddler, bilingual, and special needs care. R&Rs also provide low-cost or free training in topics as diverse as health, safety, child development, and sound business practices.

<http://www.rrnetwork.org/welcome/index.html>

Los Angeles County Office of Child Care engages in a variety of activities aimed at improving the availability, affordability and quality of child care in the County of Los Angeles. The office also assists County departments in developing employee child care services and oversees an Internet-based system for registering income-eligible families seeking subsidized child care services. Information on local child care supply, demand for those services and related issues can be found on the Office web page, as can information on the Policy Roundtable for Child Care's Steps to Excellence Pilot Program (STEP).

<http://www.lacountychildcare.org>

10. Paulsell D., Nogables R., Cohen J., *Quality Child Care for Infants and Toddlers: Case Studies of Three Community Strategies*. Mathematica Policy Research, April 2003.

11. Public Policy Institute of California, "Child Care Arrangements in California", Research Brief No. 80, December 2003; available at http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/RB_1203MORB.pdf.

12. Fenichel, E., Griffen A., Lurie-Hurvitz, E., *Quality Care for Infants and Toddlers*. Washington, D.C., US Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Bureau, 1999.

What Can Be Done?

Quality Improvement

Lack of comprehensive standards, insufficient staff training, poor compensation, and high staff turnover all contribute to the inadequate supply of quality child care. High-quality early childhood programs have smaller class sizes, lower child-adult ratios, culturally and linguistically appropriate curricula, and opportunities for parental involvement and support. Current efforts to promote improvement in early care include increasing compensation for child care providers to reduce staff turnover, employing more developmentally appropriate practices that meet performance standards, enhancing professional development and education of child care providers, and expanding collaboration with community agencies and policymakers to increase awareness of early childhood needs.

Within Los Angeles County, efforts to improve the quality of child care include implementation of the Steps to Excellence Pilot Program (STEP), which will be rolled out in several communities. The program will provide licensed child care centers and family child care homes financial incentives to improve the quality of their services, and will provide parents and stakeholders reliable ratings of child care program quality. Other efforts to improve the quality of child care include the county's universal preschool initiative, a comprehensive program that will allow all families in the county to enroll their 4-year-olds in a publicly-funded, quality preschool program. Additional approaches include expanding the supply and improving quality of care for children with special needs, and encouraging non-licensed child care centers and providers to attend training workshops in child development and safety.

Child Care in the Workplace

With changing workforce demographics, many employers provide subsidies for employees' child care expenses, offer referral services for child care or have child care centers at the worksite. Los Angeles County provides 11 on-site child care centers for its employees. Also, various state agencies, hospitals, and studios (e.g., Sony, Disney, and Universal)

provide on-site child care. Amgen, a biotechnology company located in Thousand Oaks, California, has one of the largest workplace child care programs in the country, offering high-quality subsidized child care to children ages 6 weeks to 5 years, in 32 classrooms and 16 play yards.

Efforts to accommodate the child care needs of working parents may yield a number of positive outcomes, including lower worker absenteeism, reduced turnover, improved productivity and increased morale. Employers, community agencies, and state and local child care organizations can assist working parents by ensuring access to quality, affordable child care.

Key Features of Quality Child Care Programs

- Warm, sensitive, responsive caregivers who are committed to working with young children
- A planned set of experiences for children
- Low child to staff ratio and small groups
- Child care workers with formal education, primarily BA degrees, and secondarily, with early care and education units
- Adequate compensation for child care workers
- Low staff turnover
- Adequate facilities that are safe, provide ample space for learning, and provide appropriate materials and furnishings

(Source: Center for Improving Child Care Quality)



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The ABC's of Child Care: Access, Barriers, Concerns

The Los Angeles County Health Survey is a periodic, population-based telephone survey that collects information on sociodemographic characteristics, health status, health behaviors, and access to health services among adults and children in the county. The most recent survey was conducted in 2005 for the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services by Field Research Corporation and was supported by grants from First 5 LA, the California Department of Health Services, and the Public Health Response and Bioterrorism Preparedness federal grant.

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For additional information about the L.A. County
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