FAST FACTS

Center Based Child Care During the COVID -19 Pandemic: Challenges and Supports for Working Parents

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February 2025

What is center based child care?

- **Fact 1:** "Licensed, center-based child care (hereafter centers) describes care provided in facilities other than homes, that serve dozens of children." (Wallace et al., 2024: 218).

How many children are served by child care centers?

- **Fact 1:** "Centers are one of the most common types of child care programs, accounting for 83% of child care for preschool-aged children, and more than a third of children under age three in the U.S attend child care centers (NCES, 2021)."

- **Fact 2:** "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 a relative (relative care) and 20 percent were cared for in a private home by someone not related to them (non-relative care)" (Cui & Natzke, 2021:3).

What benefits do child care centers provide?

- **Fact 1:** "For working parents, child care centers provide reliable supervision and physical care of children—including feeding, playing, and hygienic maintenance—throughout the workday" (Lee & Parolin, 2021:2).

- **Fact 2:** "For young children, child care can be an essential part of development. In particular, the cognitive, linguistic, and social development of young children has shown to be positively correlated with the quality of child care received, independent of the demographic characteristics of children" (Lee & Parolin, 2021:2).

- **Fact 3:** “In line with the capabilities and developmental frameworks our results show that parents and staff perceived child care as safe environments providing children with opportunities to acquire new skills, develop, and grow their capabilities that will be necessary over their entire lifespan” (Yamoah et al., 2023: 118).

- **Fact 4:** “Parents expressed that the ability to make a living, or work, is highly dependent on having reliable and trusted child care for their children, with one parent (P2) stating, ‘I trust the facility my child was in. I trusted them before the pandemic. I will trust them after the pandemic’” (Yamoah et al., 2023: 116).

What issues arose during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to accessing child care?

- **Fact 1:** "An estimated 70 percent of child care centers were closed or reduced capacity by at least half in April 2020. This rate declined to 59 percent in May and subsequently dropped to 38.5 percent in June, 30.5 percent in August, 34.4 percent in September, and 33.1 percent in October. In November, however, the rate increased to 38.5 percent and climbed further to 43.5 percent in December 2020, perhaps in part because of a new wave of COVID-19 cases in the United States in the same month.” (Lee & Parolin 2021:5).

- **Fact 2:** “Among children whose parents reported difficulty finding childcare [during the COVID-19 pandemic], 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” (Cui & Natzke, 2021:3).

- **Fact 3:** “Between January 2020 and September 2024, the price of day care and preschool rose about 22%, according to data from the Bureau of Labor statistics’ Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U)” (Leppert, 2024).

- **Fact 4:** “As a result of disrupted child care due to the COVID-19 pandemic, adults in households with children reported several employment-related impacts: supervised one or more children while working 27.2% (95% CI: 23.9%, 30.5%); cut work hours 26.9% (95% CI: 23.8%, 30.1%); took unpaid leave 23.5% (95% CI: 20.6%, 26.3%); and used vacation, sick days, or paid leave 22.4% (95% CI: 19.7%, 25.2%) in order to care for children. Adults in these households also left a job 15.9% (95% CI: 13.2%, 18.5%) and did not look for a job 16.2% (95% CI: 13.7%, 18.7%) in order to care for children” (Sappenfield et al., 2023:4).

What impact did child care center closures during the COVID-19 pandemic have on working parents?

- **Fact 1:** “Childcare instability can also cause problems for parental employment and vice versa. The COVID-19 pandemic made this point dramatically clear to the nation; when childcare issues such as sudden closures and restricted hours

arise, parents, predominantly mothers, are often forced to cut hours, change jobs, or leave the workforce" (Pilarz et al., 2022: 122).

- Fact 2: "Prior to the pandemic, young children spent 13.5 h per week in nonparental care, on average. During the pandemic, almost all of this time was lost (12.3 h of nonparental care lost on average)" (Petts et al. 2021:524).

- Fact 3: "Overall, as expected, mothers are at a greater risk of losing their job during the early pandemic when they lose a substantial number of nonparental care hours and when they are involved in homeschooling activity." (Petts et al. 2021: 524).

What resources helped families navigate challenges related to child care during the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Fact 1: "Federal and state governments responded to COVID-19 pandemic disruptions by offering unprecedented financial support for childcare. Starting from late March 2020, the federal government provided financial support to businesses and directly to individuals through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)" (Wallace et al., 2024: 220).

- Fact 2: "For example the American Rescue plan Act passed in March 2021 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and earlier pandemic relief funds infused nearly 50 billion into the childcare system aimed at stabilizing and strengthening childcare providers and supporting families with low incomes impacted by lost jobs and income" (Pilarz et al., 2022: 139).

- Fact 3: "Although loss of childcare and homeschooling participation are associated with a greater risk of unemployment among mothers, we also find that fathers' participation in childcare may have provided a buffer against labor market exits for mothers of young children during the early months of the pandemic." (Petts et al. 2021: 529).

What resources could help employed parents navigate similar challenges in the future?

- Fact 1: "Support is required for policies that address child care deserts by increasing options for families with young children who are balancing caregiving and financial needs. One potential strategy to fill this gap in care options is expansion of paid family leave, which could provide parents the opportunity to take temporary leave from the workforce to care for young children" (Sipple et al., 2020: 175).

- Fact 2: Policies that provide greater access to high-quality, affordable childcare could additionally make it easier for low-wage parents to arrange childcare for their children" (Luhr et al., 2022: 41).

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(Last updated February 2025).