

Millennium Cohort Study

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Taken from Chapter 11 of *Millennium Cohort Study Second Survey: A User's Guide to Initial Findings*

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The Survey

The Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) offers groundbreaking large-scale information about children born into the new century and the families who are bringing them up in all four countries of the United Kingdom. It lays the foundation for a major new research resource.

For the first survey, conducted in 2001-2002, we interviewed the families of nearly 19,000 children aged nine months. A disproportionate number of these children came from families living in areas of high child poverty, and, in England, from areas with relatively high minority-ethnic populations¹. This survey looked at the circumstances of pregnancy and birth, as well as the social and economic background of the families into which these children were born.

The second survey marks the beginning of a series of follow-up surveys. Conducted in 2003-2005, it records how nearly 16,000 cohort children are developing at the age of three. For the first time, researchers have been able to chart the changing circumstances of families and relate children's outcomes at age three to earlier circumstances and experiences.

Introduction

The involvement in the care of children by people other than their mothers has increased over time, and the majority of pre-school infants now experience some non-maternal care. Childcare provision outside the family takes a range of forms. It is no longer solely a 'custodial' service for working mothers. Just as early education has come to be seen as a form of non-maternal care, so too have many childcare services begun to offer education as well as 'care'.

This analysis looks at childcare arrangements detailed at the age three interview, by those families reporting any care arrangement. The data gathered refer not only to mothers who were working but those who were not employed. Information on childcare arrangements was also collected at sweep 1, when the child was about nine months old. Where individuals had changed their childcare, or stopped or started a new arrangement, this was recorded. Around six out of ten families had some childcare arrangement to report. The focus is on the main type of arrangement reported.

Main childcare arrangement at age three

Approximately 30 per cent of MCS mothers using childcare had chosen some formal group arrangement as their main form of care. A further 28 per cent of the children with any care arrangement were primarily looked after by their grandparents and 22

per cent were looked after either by their father, or mother's partner or the mother herself while she was working (mainly where she was self-employed or worked from home).

- About 1,600 non-working mothers also reported using 'childcare'. The majority of these non-working mothers making a childcare arrangement reported using formal group care; 54 per cent had chosen a nursery, crèche, nursery school or playgroup. By contrast, only 29 per cent of full-time working mothers and 24 per cent of part-timers had chosen these types of care.
- Working mothers, either full- or part-time, were more likely than non-working mothers to make their main care arrangement with grandparents. This may indicate that grandparent care is more flexible and accommodates parental work schedules more easily. Of course, it may also be because grandparent care is much cheaper than any alternative.
- Children receiving some type of childcare who had at least one parent in the top education, occupation and family income groups were more likely to attend formal care settings, in particular the formal group care in nurseries, crèches, nursery schools and playgroups.
- Thirty-eight per cent of the main care

¹ Percentages reported here have been re-weighted to represent the population as a whole.

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arrangements for children with at least one parent educated to degree level or higher (NVQ 4 and 5) involved a nursery, crèche, nursery school or playgroup. A further 15 per cent were with a childminder, nanny, au pair or other non-relative carer. Thirty-five per cent of children with at least one parent in a professional or managerial position, and 42 per cent of children from families in the highest income band, were in a nursery, crèche, nursery school or playgroup.

- More advantaged groups used informal care less frequently than average. For example, only 24 per cent of families with at least one parent educated to degree level or higher used grandparent care as their main care arrangement, compared to 30 to 36 per cent of those with less educated parents.
- The interesting exception to this was that parents in the lowest education, occupation and income categories who used any childcare were actually more likely to make a formal arrangement than intermediate groups. For example, a nursery, crèche, nursery school or playgroup was the main source of care used by 25 per cent of less-educated families and 30 per cent of those in the lowest income group (under £181 per week). This compares to 19 per

cent of families where at least one parent had NVQ 2 equivalent and 24 per cent of those with at least one A-level-educated parent (NVQ 3).

- The quality of formal care for poor children is generally at least as good as that provided for more advantaged infants.

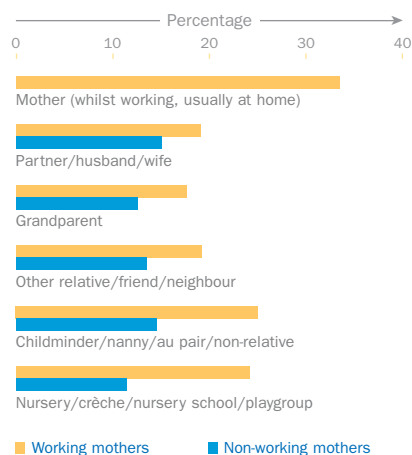
Hours of care

- If their mothers did not work, children who attended care did so for 12 hours per week, on average, compared to 21 hours for children of working mothers. The hours varied for both groups depending on the type of care but the variation was fairly small for children with non-working mothers. They spent the most time being cared for by their father or mother's partner and the shortest period in nurseries, crèches, nursery schools and playgroups.

- On average, children with working mothers, whose main source of childcare was provided by nurseries, crèches, nursery schools and playgroups, spent 24 hours a week in that type of care. Those with a childminder, nanny, au pair or other non-relative carer spent 25 hours a week with them and children cared for by their mother while she was working spent 32 hours a week with her.

Interestingly, whether the mother was working or not did little to affect the amount of time fathers cared for the children. If mothers did not work, children spent 16 hours a week with their fathers, but even when mothers worked this figure increased only to 19 hours.

Time spent in different types of care



Price

Mothers using childcare at MCS2 were asked how much it cost. On average, nursery and crèche provision was most costly (£3.77 per hour). Care provided by a childminder, nanny, au pair and other non-relative averaged £3.54 an hour while playgroups were the cheapest source of childcare (£2.67 per hour) other than relatives.

Conclusion

The results showed childcare use varied by parental education, occupation and income. Of the families using care, the children with the most advantaged parents were more likely to use formal care. This may be an indicator of early intergenerational transmission of social advantage. However, the fact that relatively high percentages of children from the most disadvantaged groups were using formal care suggests that government policies in this area, such as the

National Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative, may be achieving their aims of enhancing the early years of the poorest children. These descriptive findings have generated some material on which future research can elaborate, using additional data. For example, MCS2 also contains histories of childcare arrangements made between the ages of nine months and three years, supplementary arrangements beyond the main one considered here and nursery

observation data. Along with follow-up data from future sweeps, and analysis in greater depth, such information may be able to reveal how far different forms of childcare do indeed lead to different outcomes.

Millennium Cohort Study Second Survey: A User's Guide to Initial Findings is available at www.cls.ioe.ac.uk

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