



families commission
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> Giving New Zealand families a voice *Te reo o te whānau*

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juggling acts

HOW PARENTS WORKING NON-STANDARD HOURS ARRANGE CARE FOR THEIR PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

A FAMILIES COMMISSION REPORT

The Families Commission was established under the Families Commission Act 2003 and commenced operations on 1 July 2004. Under the Crown Entities Act 2004, the Commission is designated as an autonomous Crown entity.

Our main role is to act as an advocate for the interests of families generally (rather than individual families).

Our specific functions under the Families Commission Act 2003 are to:

- > encourage and facilitate informed debate about families
- > increase public awareness and promote better understanding of matters affecting families
- > encourage and facilitate the development and provision of government policies that promote and serve the interests of families
- > consider any matter relating to the interests of families referred to us by any Minister of the Crown
- > stimulate and promote research into families, for example by funding and undertaking research
- > consult with, or refer matters to, other official bodies or statutory agencies.

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This research report was written by Janine Moss, Families Commission, Roberta Hill and Ken Wilson, WEB Research, with the assistance of the research team: Karen Stewart, Helen Moore, Karen Wong and Anne Broome from the Families Commission.

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A FAMILIES COMMISSION REPORT

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PREFACE

Many parents today are working long hours in both paid and unpaid work and there are more mothers in the workforce than ever before.

Almost all children live in a family where at least one parent works in full-time paid work. More parents are also likely to be working in jobs that offer flexible, part-time or shift-work options.

Trying to match work hours with childcare can however be challenging. Many families describe balancing work and family life as a major issue in their lives, and it is important that parents have choice and support to find the best balance they can.

Early childhood education (ECE) is a critical service for families with young children in New Zealand. The provision of quality ECE enables parents to participate in paid work and contributes to good outcomes for children.

This study focuses on how parents working outside the normal Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 5.00pm working week, manage the care of their pre-school-aged children.

Most parents have to juggle their time so they can fulfil their family responsibilities and commitments outside their home, especially their work. The parents we interviewed in this study highlighted that working non-standard hours adds another level of complexity to this juggling act. The type of work they did meant they were sometimes sleep-deprived, had less predictability in their week and were working anti-social hours. It also sometimes meant they were able to spend more time with their children during the week, have their children cared for by family members and, sometimes, have access to better-paying jobs.

We interviewed 22 parents and three grandparents working non-standard hours in six different workplaces to find out about the childcare arrangements they made for their pre-school-aged children while they worked. We also interviewed employers in seven workplaces to find out what they did to accommodate their employees' childcare needs.

These parents used various types of care, including formal ECE services as well as informal care provided by family and friends. The support provided by the parent's partner and by grandparents was crucial to keeping the parent's non-standard work sustainable. Some children were spending long hours in ECE and some caregivers were working very long hours. These issues raise concerns and need further investigation.

The findings from this study will be of interest to policymakers and researchers in the ECE and labour-market sectors. The study should also provide useful insights for ECE providers and for employers whose staff are working non-standard hours. It may also be interesting for other parents to hear how some families find a balance between their work and family commitments.

Our thanks to all the parents, grandparents and employers who gave up their time to share their experiences with our researchers.



Sharron Cole
Deputy Chief Commissioner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Finding a balance between work and family commitments is a challenge faced by all working parents with dependent children. Where parents have pre-school-aged children and are working non-standard hours, the challenge is more complex.

The objective of this study was to find out how parents who work non-standard hours (outside the 'normal' working hours of Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 5.00pm) made care arrangements for their pre-school-aged children.

Twenty-two parents, three grandparents and employers in seven workplaces were interviewed in the following 'non-standard' workplaces:

- > freezing industry and recruitment centre – non-standard work with regular hours
- > rest home carers and airport quarantine officers – non-standard work with irregular hours
- > midwives and horticultural seasonal workers – non-standard work with unpredictable hours.

Since little is known about the childcare arrangements of New Zealand parents in non-standard work, an exploratory case study approach was used to allow an in-depth consideration of the parents' lives and experiences. The small size of the study does not, however, allow for the findings from the study to be generalised to the wider population of New Zealand parents who are engaged in work with non-standard hours. It was also not possible to make comparisons across the parents included in the study on the basis of their age, gender or ethnicity, or the number of children they had. Parents who could not find a balance between their childcare needs and their non-standard work were not interviewed.

The form of non-standard work that presented the most challenge to parents in the study was shifts that started early in the morning, went overnight or were during the weekend. Some forms of non-standard work, particularly on-call and seasonal work, meant parents were significantly less able to plan ahead and make childcare arrangements.

Parents in the study used various types of informal care and Early Childhood Education (ECE) services, and often a mixture of both. Informal care included grandparents, other family members, step-children, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Informal care was usually, though not always, unpaid. The availability and willingness of their partner and their own parents to be active parts of the childcare arrangements was significant to the parents interviewed in this study. Parents worked together as a unit to support each other's work commitments and complemented each other's care of the children. Many partners had flexibility in their work to allow them to start later, finish earlier or work from home. Some parents chose to work mirror shifts so their pre-schooler could be cared for predominantly at home.

Many pre-schoolers were cared for at some time by their grandparents. Some grandparents lived in the same household as the pre-schooler. Others were involved in the transition between an ECE service and the child's home before a parent returned home from work. Parents in the study were conscious, however, of not overburdening grandparents, for such reasons as health issues, work commitments and the other social activities they were involved in.

ECE services used included Kindergarten, education and care services, home-based services and Kōhanga Reo. All but one ECE service was offering 20 hours Free ECE to three- and four-year-olds. Most ECE services were situated in the parent's home neighbourhood. Some children attended multiple childcare services (up to four in a day) or were in care for long periods (up to 57½ hours a week for one child), and some home-based caregivers were working very long hours. Several parents expressed a wish for childcare facilities that were open on the weekend and had more flexible hours. With just one exception, the parents in the study seemed to be receiving their entitlements for Free ECE, the Childcare Subsidy and Working for Families. Many expressed gratitude for this funding and it seemed to ease some of the pressures on them and their family.

Parents in the study reported making decisions about the care of their pre-schooler with their partner, and sometimes with grandparents who were going to be involved in the care. However, more often than not one parent had a greater role to play in decision making, and this was usually the mother. Parents' beliefs about the value of their work and their role as a parent, including the relationship they wanted to have with their child, played an important role in shaping their childcare arrangements. Some parents had chosen to work non-standard hours because it allowed them to spend more time with their child or because their child could spend more time being cared for by a family member.

Most parents in the study reported satisfaction with their childcare arrangements and benefits for their child. Some parents, however, also noted downsides to having their child in care while they worked, especially a lack of family time. Parents in the study tended to have fairly stable childcare arrangements. Most also had back-up plans, although these were limited where parents did not have support available from their wider family, including grandparents.

When asked what their 'ideal' childcare arrangements would be, parents had varying answers. Some would have preferred to not work and to be at home caring for their child; others would have liked reduced working hours. Some parents felt pressure to work because of their financial situation. Some parents expressed a preference for their child to be cared for by family members, while others wished for more flexibility in ECE services. Most said they would like to pay less for childcare. In contrast, a few parents also said they already had their ideal childcare arrangements.

Working non-standard hours placed significant pressures on the parents in the study. Their pattern of work affected the parent's relationship with their child: for example, they were not always present when the child woke in the morning, or at mealtimes, bathtime or bedtime. They talked about being tired, and how precious and limited quality family time could be. Some parents in the study noted the negative effects of working non-standard hours on their couple relationship. Others talked about the stress associated with organising childcare arrangements and working unpredictable and unusual hours.

Parents in the study reported varying levels of flexibility in their workplace to accommodate their childcare needs. Some parents could alter their shifts or take leave to pick up their pre-schooler from an ECE service. The employers interviewed in the study generally expressed a willingness to consider and accommodate the childcare needs of their employees. The extent to which they could be flexible was influenced by factors such as local labour-market dynamics, and the flow and type of work and workers required.

Several findings from the study point to areas where further research could be undertaken:

- > Having different care options is important. Parents make active choices, and mix-and-match care services to fit their individual circumstances.
- > Partners often work together as a team to make decisions about childcare for the overall benefit of their family.
- > The development of ECE services within neighbourhoods, close to the child's home, should be encouraged. Further consideration should be given to the viability of locating ECE services as part of workplaces.
- > Some pre-school-aged children are in ECE services for long hours and some caregivers are working long hours. The impacts of this should be considered further.
- > Recognition should be given to the key role that is played by grandparents in the care of pre-school-aged children.
- > Free ECE and financial support provided by the Government for working parents seemed to be easing pressures on the parents in this study.
- > The pressure to work (usually due to financial pressures) significantly compromises some parents, who would rather be at home caring for their children. Nonetheless, the intrinsic value of working was also important to many parents in the study.
- > Employers should continue to be helped to offer flexibility to their parent-employees.

The study did not include parents of pre-school-aged children who were unable to find a balance between their caregiving responsibilities and working non-standard hours. Further research could consider the barriers these parents faced.





1. INTRODUCTION

The economic circumstances of a family affect its ability to meet the needs of its members and to participate fully in community life. Families need to be strong and resilient to care for and nurture their members and to contribute to and participate in society. Parents and caregivers need to be well supported so they are able to make good choices to balance family responsibilities and paid work.

Work-life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and the other activities that are important to people. It's not about saying that work is wrong or bad, but that work shouldn't completely crowd out the other things that matter to people like time with family, participation in community activities, voluntary work, personal development, leisure and recreation (Department of Labour, <http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/whatis.asp>).

ECE services for children before they start school play an important role in enabling parents and caregivers to balance their family responsibilities and paid work. Access to suitable ECE enables a family to make choices about its lifestyle, workforce participation and other activities. ECE also has positive outcomes for children.

The accessibility, availability and affordability of childcare are issues that families have raised in previous Families Commission consultations. Families raised their concerns about access to ECE services in both *Focus on Families* (Families Commission, 2005) and *What Makes Your Family Tick?* (Families Commission, 2005). They also mentioned that opening hours do not always suit working parents, particularly those working long or irregular hours.

The Families Commission was interested in exploring why some families face barriers to accessing and participating in ECE. We identified five groups who have difficulty accessing ECE: Māori and Pacific Island families; families in rural areas; families with children with disabilities and special needs; families who have recently migrated to New Zealand; and families whose parents do shift-work or work irregular hours. The Ministry of Education has projects planned or underway focusing on participation and accessibility for Māori and Pacific families, and for families in rural locations. Consequently, the Families Commission decided to undertake research into the ECE needs of families whose parents work non-standard hours (the subject of this report), and refugee and migrant families (currently being researched).

This report describes an exploratory study of how parents working non-standard hours make care arrangements for their pre-school-aged children. The purpose of the research was to provide the Families Commission, and other researchers and policymakers, with a better understanding of the issues parents who work non-standard hours face when they try to access ECE. The project relates to other work from the Families Commission's 'Even Up' work programme on paid parental leave, out-of-school services and flexible work.

1.1 HOW THE REPORT IS STRUCTURED

The next section provides a brief overview of non-standard work and early childhood education in New Zealand. This is followed by a description of the research approach used in the study, and then a description of each of the six non-standard workplaces we interviewed parents from and what the parents' childcare arrangements were. Next is a discussion of the factors that influenced parents' decisions about childcare, including their satisfaction with the care and its impact, the accessibility and stability of childcare, what parents' ideal childcare arrangements were, the role played by partners and grandparents and what impact the work environment had on parenting. Following this discussion is a description of parents' experiences of employer support, and feedback from employers themselves. The final section summarises the findings and insights that emerged from the study, and offers suggestions for further research.





2. NON-STANDARD WORK AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This section describes what is already known about people who do non-standard work, and how ECE services are provided in New Zealand; it briefly discusses 'informal' care arrangements and parental decision-making.

2.1 NON-STANDARD WORK

For the purposes of this study, 'non-standard work' means paid work where either hours are regular but are outside standard working hours (8.00am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday) or where hours are irregular (for example, rotational shift-work) and may be unpredictable.

Parents may work non-standard hours because the nature of their work requires them to, because it is the only work available to them or because they choose to. Working non-standard hours is frequently viewed as something to be avoided: it may reduce time spent with family and friends, while night-work and shift-work carry the risk of adverse health effects including sleeping difficulties, heart disease and diabetes (Phillips, 2005). However, working non-standard hours can also provide the flexibility to combine work with other responsibilities and pursuits, such as childcare, education and leisure. For example, couples may choose for one of them to work non-standard hours (or for both to work 'mirror' shifts) so that the other is available to look after the children. This may be especially attractive where childcare costs are high relative to potential incomes from work, or where parents have a preference for parental care. For sole parents without a partner to look after the children, working non-standard hours may be more difficult, as formal childcare is less likely to be available at the times they need to work.

The Department of Labour's 2004 work-life balance consultation raised long working hours, multiple job-holding and working unsociable hours as key issues affecting New Zealand workers, with stress the main manifestation of imbalance. Research commissioned at the same time on 'precarious' non-standard work (in the call-centre, cleaning, labour-hire and fish-processing industries) found that the main negative effect of working non-standard hours was on having a family or social life (WEB Research, 2004). The research (and submissions) confirmed, however, that some employees *choose* casual or precarious positions and positions with non-standard hours because of the flexibility these offer in balancing home and work, especially when caring for children. Submissions highlighted the difficulty shift-workers have in planning their lives when they have little control over or notice of working hours. They also called for cheaper childcare, extended opening hours for childcare centres and centres located at or near workplaces as measures that would improve work-life balance.

Many studies of non-standard work focus on the total number of hours worked and on other conditions of employment (permanency and location, for example) rather than *when* hours are worked (Butcher, 2002; McPherson, 2006). Statistics New Zealand's Time Use Survey, which used 'time diaries' to measure not just the total volume of work but also the timing of work, can provide estimates of how many people work non-standard hours, as well as information about the working patterns of parents of pre-school-aged children (Murphy & Satherley, 2000). The last Time Use Survey was carried out in 1998–99; the next is scheduled for 2008–09.

The 1998–99 Time Use Survey found that although three-quarters of all paid working hours were carried out between 8.00am and 6.00pm from Monday to Friday, only 29 percent of men and 51 percent of women who worked on a particular day carried out *all* of their paid work for that day between those hours (Callister & Dixon, 2001). Working before and after the standard working day was common – with 53 percent of men and 29 percent of women who were at work on that day also did some work between 6.00am and 8.00am, and nearly a quarter of those who were at work on that day also did some work between 7.00pm and midnight. Night-work (between midnight and 5.00am) was relatively uncommon: just under five percent of employed people did some work in this time slot on an average day of the week.

In their analysis of the 1998–99 Time Use Survey, Callister and Dixon (2001) examined mothers' working hours by the age of their youngest child. They found that for women with a child under the age of five (both in two-parent and sole-parent families), a greater proportion of weekday working hours were in the evening or at night than for women with children aged over five or women without children. Hours worked between 6.00pm and 4.00am accounted for nearly 14 percent of hours worked by partnered women and sole mothers with children under five. Although the Time Use Survey only provides information about patterns of average working hours, and not about the extent to which some individuals are *persistently* working at non-standard times, these findings suggest that a sizeable proportion of people with pre-school-aged children work non-standard hours.

A Department of Labour survey (Fursman, 2006) of 1,100 employers and 2,000 employees found that of the workers in the survey:

- > 40 percent had variable hours
- > 18 percent worked shifts, with two-thirds working rotating shifts
- > 22 percent worked at least some of their hours between 10.00pm and 6.00am.

Of all employees in the survey, 27 percent routinely worked at least some of their hours at night, with some working rotating shifts (Fursman, 2006).

Of the employees surveyed, those working at night and working shifts experienced greater work-life conflict than those working standard hours. Employees reported that long working hours, varied hours and rotating shift-work had a negative effect on their work-life balance. The difficulties they experienced included finding childcare, maintaining relationships with friends and partners and taking care of household business (such as banking). Māori respondents recorded the highest levels of shift-working (27 percent, compared with 17 percent for the total population) and of usually having to work between 10.00pm and 6.00am (38 percent, compared with 16 percent for the total population). They were more likely than other respondents to report that they would like to choose their own rosters and shifts as a way of managing their work-life balance.

Fursman found those with caring responsibilities were more likely to report work-life conflict than others: 38 percent of employees in the survey were caring for a child or children. Employees caring for pre-schoolers were the most likely to report a range of effects that their caring responsibilities had on their work, including difficulty concentrating, low energy, inability to take up development and career opportunities and problems getting to work on time. It is not clear from the survey what proportion of those caring for pre-schoolers also work non-standard hours, but it seems likely that achieving and maintaining work-life balance would be particularly difficult for this group.

The Families Commission study *When School's Out* (Bellett & Dickson, 2007) noted a significant majority of parents preferred formal out-of-school services to home-based services because they eased complicated childcare requirements. Many of this group worked irregular or non-standard hours and found arranging childcare a constant source of stress. The study focused on parents of school-aged children.

2.2 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

There is a strong ECE sector in New Zealand, offering a diverse range of services. The Government's 10-year (2002–2012) strategic plan *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002) describes the following as the main providers of ECE in New Zealand:

- > Education and care centres – provide either sessional, all-day or flexible-hours programmes for children from birth to school age. They may be privately owned, non-profit making or community-based services, or operated as an adjunct to the main purpose of a business or organisation (such as a crèche at a university or polytechnic). These centres include a small but increasing number of specific Māori immersion education and care centres, and Pacific Island education and care centres.
- > Home-based services – comprise a network of home-based caregivers operating under the supervision of a co-ordinator (such as Barnardos) who places children with caregivers in approved homes for an agreed number of hours per week.
- > Kindergartens – generally operate sessional ECE for children between the ages of three and five.
- > Kōhanga Reo – provide programmes totally in te reo and tikanga Māori for mokopuna and their whānau from birth to school age.
- > Licence-exempt playgroups – community-based groups of parents and children who meet for one to three sessions per week.
- > Parent support and development programmes – aim to improve health, social and educational outcomes by building parenting capability (examples include PAFT and HIPPY).
- > Playcentres – collectively supervised and managed by parents for children up to the age of five.
- > The Correspondence School – provides distance ECE for children aged between three and five who are unable to attend an ECE service because of isolation, illness or other special needs.

In 2007 there were 4,479 services providing ECE, of which 3,750 were licensed. Education and care centres were the most common type of service (1,932), followed by Kindergartens (618). There were 190,907 enrolments of children in an ECE service at 1 July 2007; 171,138 were at licensed services, with just over half at education and care centres and just over a quarter at Kindergartens (Ministry of Education, 2007). Of all Year 1 students attending schools in July 2006, 95 percent had previously participated in some form of ECE (Ministry of Social Development, 2007).

Participation rates do not indicate the number of hours children participate in an ECE service ('intensity' of participation).

While there is high participation in ECE in New Zealand, the Government's vision for ECE, *Pathways to the Future: Ngā Huarahi Arataki* (Ministry of Education, 2002), includes increased participation in high-quality ECE services as one of three core goals.

Some families are not enrolled in an ECE service. There are various potential barriers to participation (National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women and Department of Labour, 1999), including:

- > cost
- > a lack of available services which meet children's and parents' needs (in terms of cultural appropriateness, opening hours or ability to cater to children's special educational needs or disabilities)
- > the inability to access services which are available (for example, because there are too few childcare places or because of a lack of public transport).

The 1998 New Zealand Childcare Survey (National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women and Department of Labour, 1999), found that 22 percent of mothers whose participation in employment was affected by access to ECE said that "lack of suitable/flexible hours" was the reason they were not able to use ECE. This was the third most common reason, after "cost" (47 percent) and "lack of informal care by someone known and trusted" (30 percent).

There is a growing body of evidence showing that participation in high-quality ECE is beneficial to children's cognitive, social and emotional development; school readiness; and school performance (see Kamerman, Neuman, Waldfogel, & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2008).

A recent report from the Competent Children, Competent Learners longitudinal study on ECE concluded that "high-quality ECE can have a positive, long-lasting effect on a range of both cognitive ... and attitudinal ... competencies, traces of which are still discernible at age 16" and that "children from low-income homes benefited more than others if they had experienced the highest quality in terms of staff guidance in their final ECE experience" (Hodgen, 2007 p 32 & p 2).

Longitudinal studies of the effects of ECE on children's outcomes in later life stress the importance of high-quality ECE for achieving positive effects. Factors relating to quality include: staff to child ratios; group size; staff training and qualifications; stability of children's experiences (staff turnover as well as changes to childcare used); staff-child interactions; and physical facilities (Callister & Podmore, 1995).

ECE can also help adults in families with young children to participate fully in the labour market, earning income for their families now and safeguarding their income in the future by staying in contact with the labour market and making the most of their skills and experience.

2.3 GOVERNMENT POLICY AND SUBSIDIES FOR ECE

From 1 July 2007 the Government began to fund the cost of children aged three and four to attend ECE for up to 20 hours a week (Free ECE). The funding is provided for each child to attend any teacher-led ECE service¹ (including some Kōhanga Reo) which has a place available for them, for up to six hours a day. The funding aims to reduce the cost of ECE to families to enable parents to increase children's participation in high-quality ECE.

Financial assistance is also delivered by the Ministry of Social Development through the Childcare Subsidy as part of the Working for Families package. The Childcare Subsidy is intended to enable parents to recover part of the costs of childcare. It is available for up to 50 hours a week where the primary caregiver is engaged in employment or training, or is ill or disabled. The Childcare Subsidy is income-tested. If families qualify, it is available for the hours not covered by Free ECE up to a maximum amount of \$3.40 per hour for up to 30 hours a week. People whose hours of childcare change regularly are required to advise Work and Income of the fee that they have been charged each week.



¹ In teacher-led ECE services, 50 percent of regulated staff are registered teachers. By 2012, all regulated staff will be required to be registered teachers. All teacher-led services are licensed and/or chartered.

2.4 'INFORMAL' CARE ARRANGEMENTS

Alongside ECE, many parents use 'informal' care for their pre-school-aged children.

A national survey of 1,128 parents undertaken in 2004 (Ministry of Social Development, 2006) found that:

- > 51 percent of households with children under five years old used ECE
- > in 60 percent of households with children under five years old a grandparent cared for the child
- > 57 percent of households with children under five years old used another family member, neighbour or friend to provide childcare.

The New Zealand Childcare Survey (National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women and Department of Labour, 1999) found that the type of ECE or informal care used by parents varied by the age of the child. Informal care provided by family was the most commonly used form of care for children aged under one year old.

2.5 PARENTAL DECISION-MAKING

To manage the balance between work and family life, people need to make decisions about how to effectively use their time and resources.

In 2005, the Families Commission held 43 focus groups around New Zealand with the objective of improving understanding of successful outcomes for families with dependent children. Participants were asked about family decision-making. The study found that major decisions are almost always shared in two-parent families. In most cases, mothers were responsible for other, more minor decisions concerning the children. Participants considered ECE an important service for supporting strong families. Childcare and time off were most often mentioned as areas where improvements could be made to help New Zealand families' work-life balance.

Research by the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women and the Department of Labour (2006) interviewed 50 parents to explore how and why people with caring responsibilities make decisions related to paid work. The study found that parents' decisions about paid work were especially influenced by beliefs about parental and family care of children, and attitudes towards ECE and informal childcare; and factors such as money, personal satisfaction, intellectual stimulation and feeling valued.

When making decisions, parents discussed issues with their partner (if they had one), and sometimes, but less frequently, with other family members. Parents in the study generally held the view that very young children should be cared for by parents or family, and that they did not want pre-school-aged children, especially under two years, in full-day ECE.

Overall, the National Advisory Council on the Employment of Women and the Department of Labour study, found that "people are influenced in their choices by many factors, and that different situations suit different people" (p 55).

In his 2007 report on parental decision-making about ECE services, Robertson concluded that a range of high-quality services needs to be available to parents in order to increase participation rates in ECE. He found that parents look for a service that matches their child's age, needs and abilities. Parents on lower incomes said that cost and the availability of subsidies were important when making decisions. For Māori families, the availability of culturally appropriate services was important. For working parents, practical considerations such as opening hours, flexibility and location were important.



3. THE RESEARCH APPROACH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As little is known about how parents who work non-standard hours access childcare for their pre-school-aged children, this study was exploratory in nature. People undertake non-standard work in many workplaces and industries. It was not our intention to describe the experiences and childcare arrangements made by all parents who work all different types of non-standard hours. Rather, we were interested to hear more fully from a smaller number of parents in similar types of non-standard workplaces. For this reason, a case-study approach was used.

This section summarises the methodology used in this study. First, the definition of non-standard work that is used in the study and the various types of care are outlined. The section then gives an overview of how the study was undertaken, including the criteria for recruiting parents, ethical approval and techniques used to gather and analyse the data. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the study are noted.

3.2 DEFINITION AND CATEGORIES OF NON-STANDARD WORK

For the purpose of this study, non-standard work was defined as paid work outside Monday to Friday and/or 8.00am to 5.00pm. Non-standard work includes work during the weekend, work that begins early in the morning and work that ends late at night.

People who work non-standard hours tend to have a different rhythm or routine to their days and week from people who work standard hours. Their sleep patterns may be different – they may sleep during the day, have shorter or interrupted sleeps or go to bed earlier in the evening. Their access to services may be more limited; they may be working or sleeping when banks, shops and childcare services are open. The hours they work may also be ‘antisocial’ – they may be working or sleeping when family and friends socialise. Their days of work may be constantly changing, so it is more difficult to establish a routine in their household.

There are also advantages to non-standard work. Some people chose to work non-standard hours so they can be at home with their pre-school-aged children during the day, or when their children return home from school. Some couples chose to work ‘mirror’ shifts for this reason. Pay rates can be better for jobs requiring non-standard hours. Seasonal work can provide work opportunities for people living in rural communities. Non-standard work often includes days off during the ‘normal’ working week.

The study tried to make a distinction between people who work non-standard hours and people who work long or flexible hours.² Many people work long hours; many people take advantage of the flexible hours their employer might offer (for example, starting early to avoid peak traffic); many people work over the weekend. Whether or not they have children, people often negotiate work hours with their employer so they can find a good work-life balance.

Employees with dependent children have yet another dimension in their work-life balance adding richness and complexity to their life.

In our definition of non-standard work we recognised different categories, which were largely influenced by the type of work required for particular industries or services.

² For further information on flexible work, refer to the Families Commission (2008) report “Give and Take: Families’ perceptions and experiences of flexible work in New Zealand”.

For example, some workplaces require production to continue 24 hours a day, seven days a week; and some workplaces have more predictable workflows than others.

We distinguished three categories of non-standard work, which ranged from work with fixed shifts, to work with variable or rotating shifts, through to work which has an on-call component or is seasonal or casual. The three categories of non-standard work were:

- > non-standard work with regular hours
- > non-standard work with irregular hours
- > non-standard work with unpredictable hours.

Defining non-standard work is not straightforward.³ Consequently, recruiting workplaces and parents for the study was challenging at times. Our intention was to interview five parents and one employer at each workplace, and to have a total of six workplaces represented. We wanted to ensure that there was a spread of large and small workplaces, urban and rural locations and high- and low-wage occupations. We also wanted to ensure that there was a variation in the ethnicity and gender of the parents interviewed. Our preference was to interview parents who were working; by default, then, we excluded from the study those parents who were unable to continue in non-standard work because they could not access satisfactory childcare.



³ For a discussion of definition and conceptual difficulties surrounding non-standard work, refer to the Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme, and particularly Dupuis and de Bruin (2004).

3.3 PARENTS WITH PRE-SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN

The focus of this study was on workplaces whose regular hours of work were not aligned with 'normal' hours for childcare services. We wanted to find out how parents with pre-school-aged children who worked non-standard hours managed the care of their children while they worked.

We recruited parents with pre-school-aged children:

- > who worked non-standard hours or days
- > who needed childcare outside standard hours and days of work (Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 5.00pm)
- > whose children were cared for while they worked by someone other than a primary caregiver or parent of the child, which could include an extended family member (such as a grandparent)
- > who made, or jointly made, the decision about how the child would be cared for.

3.4 TYPES OF CARE ARRANGEMENTS

As indicated in the criteria we used for recruiting parents, we were interested in interviewing parents whose pre-school-aged children were cared for while they worked by someone "who is not a primary caregiver or parent of the child, but can include an extended family member (such as a grandparent)". While the primary purpose of the study was to explore what type of ECE parents working non-standard hours used, we were also aware that other types of care were likely to be used. We categorised these two types of care as 'formal' care (ECE) and 'informal':

- > Formal care or ECE includes: education and care centres; home-based services; Kindergartens; Kōhanga Reo; licence-exempt playgroups; parent support and development programmes; playcentres; and The Correspondence School.
- > Informal care includes: care provided by a family member such as a grandparent, aunt or uncle, older sibling or step-child; baby-sitter; neighbour; friend; or work colleague.

3.5 ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the Families Commission Ethics Committee. All participants were given information sheets outlining the aims of the study, what their participation would involve, that information would be confidential and that recordings of interviews would be destroyed at the conclusion of the research. All participants signed consent forms.

3.6 SELECTION OF CASES AND NEGOTIATING ACCESS

We selected a range of industries, occupations and workplaces matching our three categories of non-standard work. Approaches were made by letter, followed up by phone calls to management and human resources staff at each workplace. Once the employer consented to participating in the study, they facilitated access to employees who were parents. Interviews were then arranged between each parent and the researchers at a time and place convenient to the parent and the employer.

The workplaces, parents and employer representatives⁴ that participated in the study were:

- > non-standard work with regular hours – freezing industry (2 parents, 2 employers), recruitment centre (2 parents, 1 employer)
- > non-standard work with irregular hours – rest home carers (2 parents, 3 grandparents, 2 employers), airport quarantine officers (6 parents, 1 employer)
- > non-standard work with unpredictable hours – midwives (5 parents), horticultural seasonal workers (5 parents, 1 employer).

3.7 TECHNIQUES USED TO GATHER AND ANALYSE THE INTERVIEW DATA

Two semi-structured interview schedules were developed, one for parents and one for employers (Appendix 1).

Alongside descriptive information about the parent's family, their job and demographic details, the interview with parents sought answers to the following types of questions:

- > Who looks after your pre-school-aged child when you are at work?
- > What would your ideal childcare arrangements be? What prevents you from having your ideal arrangements? What trade-offs do you have to make?
- > How do you make decisions about the care of your child? Who is involved in the decision-making?
- > What other support do you have? Do you have back-up or contingency plans?

Interviews with employers sought to answer the following kinds of questions:

- > What is the nature of your business or role, and what is the profile of your workforce?
- > As an employer or manager, what do you do to help employees with their childcare needs? What are their needs?
- > What else would help you manage the challenges of employees' childcare needs?

Six interviewers (from WEB Research and the Families Commission) were used; two interviewers attended each interview. One interviewer led the interview and the other took detailed notes. All those interviewed were asked if they had any preference for interviewers of a specific sex or ethnicity. All interviews were audio-taped with the participants' consent.

⁴ Throughout the report the term 'employer' has been used when referring to the interview undertaken with the workplace representative.

We used two main steps to analyse the data. Firstly, notes were written up for each interview, which were cross-checked by the other interviewer; then, summaries of the key insights and themes were recorded for each case.

Secondly, cross-case analysis of the interview data compared variations in experiences depending on parents' industries and occupations, particular types of non-standard work, wage levels, household composition and demographic attributes such as gender and ethnicity.

This comparative analysis was carried out in small project meetings, a structured analytical workshop and an iterative process of report writing. The intention was to integrate the interview data, and the multiple perspectives and knowledge of research team members.

3.8 THE STUDY'S STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Little is known about the childcare arrangements and experiences of New Zealand parents in non-standard work. Semi-structured interviews allowed in-depth investigation of parents' lives and experiences. Our particular focus was on the interactions between these dimensions of their lives – their responsibility for their pre-school-aged children, and their commitments to their non-standard workplaces.

While this exploratory case study forms a sound basis for understanding how some parents manage their family and non-standard work commitments, inferences from the study cannot be generalised to the wider population of New Zealand parents in this type of work.

Undertaking interviews with parents, and then also their partners, their employers and those involved in the care of their children while the parents were in non-standard work, would have allowed triangulation of data and provided more extensive case studies.

With the exception of one parent, the study did not include parents who were not working because they were unable to source satisfactory ECE to cover their non-standard work.

As research participants were recruited, we wanted to ensure that there was a spread across ethnicity and gender. However, since the size of the study was small, it is not possible to report on the extent to which findings vary depending on these different factors.

4. PARENTS' NON-STANDARD WORKPLACES AND THEIR CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A key assumption underlying the study was that non-standard work hours will have an impact on the decisions parents make about the care of their pre-school-aged children. The purpose of the study was to better understand the dynamics of this impact.

In this section we profile each non-standard workplace represented in the study and then describe the arrangements that parents in each of these workplaces had made for the care of their pre-school children while they worked. The key themes and findings are summarised. The section then considers what influence the demographic characteristics of the parents participating in the study may also have had on their decision-making about childcare.

Table 1 provides an overview of the parents we interviewed, where they worked, their gender, age, the number and age of their children, what type of household they lived in and what type of childcare they used for their pre-school-aged children.

4.2 NON-STANDARD WORK WITH REGULAR HOURS

In the first category of non-standard work, parents worked fixed shifts outside standard regular hours and days of work. They worked in the freezing industry and in a city-based recruitment centre.

4.2.1 Freezing industry workers

We talked with two parents working in the freezing industry. We also talked with three senior managers at a freezing works and two managers at a meat processing plant.

During the season, which lasted from February to December, the parents both worked the day shift from 6.30am until 3.00pm, from Monday to Friday. The off-season usually lasted between two and three months. The processing plant was in a rural location which was at least 30 minutes' drive away from the parents' home. Work in this industry has low wages.

4.2.1.1 Their childcare arrangements

Both parents at the freezing works got themselves and their child up in time to leave home at 5.30am. The children were taken by car in their pyjamas to a local home-based service. Usually the children fell asleep at the caregiver's home. The parents then drove at least 30 minutes to get to work in time to start their shift at 6.30am. At the other end of the work day, the parents usually collected their children from the caregiver's home at 3.30pm. One of the parents said that she did not feel she could leave work until all the product was processed for the day, and that meant sometimes she left work after 3.00pm and could not guarantee being at the caregiver's home by 3.30pm.

Both the parents we interviewed were single parents. One parent had family living nearby; the other did not speak about having any support from family or friends.

These mothers used the same home-based service caregiver. Their early start, the fact that they did not have partners and, in one case, only had limited support from their wider family to assist with childcare arrangements, meant that a home-based service was the most practical option for them.

TABLE 1: OVERVIEW OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

WORKPLACE	PARENT	AGE	AGE OF CHILD/REN	HOUSEHOLD	CARE TYPE
NON-STANDARD REGULAR HOURS					
Freezing industry	Mother	29	2 years	Single parent	Home-based care
	Mother	39	5 years	Single parent	Home-based care
Recruitment centre	Mother	27	14 months	Two parents	Daycare
	Mother	–	2 years twins	Two parents	Kōhanga Reo
NON-STANDARD IRREGULAR HOURS					
Rest home	Mother	–	4, 6 years	Two parents	Kindy, grandparents
	Mother	–	2 years	Extended family	Family
	Grandmother	60	4 years twins, 9 years	Two parents ⁵	Daycare, home-based care, grandmothers
	Grandmother	43	2 years	Extended family	Daycare, grandmother
	Grandmother	60	three aged 7–15 years	Extended family	Grandmother
Airport quarantine	Mother ⁶	35	4 years	Two parents	Daycare, kindy
	Father	42			
	Mother	35	4, 8 years	Two parents	Kindy, grandmothers
	Father	–	4, 6 years	Two parents	Daycare, grandmother
	Mother	29	3, 6 years	Two parents	Kindy, grandmother
	Father	42	13 months	Extended family	Grandparents
NON-STANDARD UNPREDICTABLE HOURS					
Midwives	Mother	36	2, 5, 7 years	Two parents	Home-based care
	Mother	26	1, 6 years	Two parents	Daycare
	Mother	31	3, 6, 8 years	Two parents	Daycare, grandmother
	Mother	34	2, 9, 10 years	Two parents	Home-based care, sister
	Mother	32	3 months, 2 years	Two parents	N/A mother now not working
Horticultural seasonal work	Mother ⁷	16	1 year	Extended family	Home-based care
	Mother	34	five aged 3–16 years	Extended family	Home-based care, kindy
	Mother	31	4, 6 years	Two parents	Kindy, grandmother
	Mother	25	2 years	Two parents	Home-based care, daycare, kindy
	Mother	27	4, 8 years	Two parents	Grandmother is home-based carer

⁵ For participants who were grandmothers, this describes the household in which the children live (not the grandmother's household).

⁶ Mother and father worked at same workplace, both were interviewed, separately.

⁷ This mother (aged 16 years) was the daughter of the next mother (aged 34 years). They live in the same household with their partners and other children/siblings.

4.2.2 Recruitment centre employees

We talked with two parents who worked as account managers and a senior manager at a city-based recruitment centre. One parent worked a standard 40-hour week, Monday to Friday (with some home-based work on Sunday). The other parent could sometimes (perhaps once a month) work up to 60 hours a week, including sometimes on Sundays and until 8.00pm during the week. Both these employees were medium- to higher-paid workers.

The core business of the large recruitment centre was to recruit staff in various fields including business support, IT and finance. Managers and staff could work from home, and had remote access and sophisticated cellphone technologies that supported highly responsive relationships with clients in a high-performing work culture. Account managers travelled to a number of sites around the city, suburbs and further afield during each working day. Staff needed to be flexible in their work and able to cope with their client needs at very short notice.

Of all the workplaces included in the study, the recruitment centre probably matched our categories of non-standard work the least. These parents were perhaps more characteristic of people with long working hours.

4.2.2.1 Their childcare arrangements

These parents' children were cared for, while they worked, at an education and care service and a Kōhanga Reo. Both services were located near the parent's home.

One parent lived an hour's drive away from her workplace. She woke at 5.15am and was out of the door at 6.30am to get to work early so she could then, at the end of the day, pick up her daughter from the education and care service by 5.00pm. Her partner dropped their daughter at the education and care service in the morning. She tried to leave home in the morning without waking her daughter.

The other parent tried as much as possible to drop off and pick up her children at Kōhanga Reo with her husband. When she worked late or needed to travel, her partner would look after their pre-school-aged children, though his work was sometimes too intense to accommodate this, and those times created stress for the family.

In [husband's] industry there are peaks and troughs ... that's when the pressure comes on the family with regards to juggling both of us and the kids ... that's the time when I either have to make a sacrifice and walk out of a meeting, and I have done that, and go and pick the kids up, or we call on our whānau support, which is [husband's] family. They are very close to us, thank goodness, about 500m down the road. (Recruitment centre employee 2)

Unlike all the other ECE services used by parents in this study, this kōhanga was not offering Free ECE.

Both these parents noted a limited availability of family and friends to help them care for their pre-school-aged children.

4.3 NON-STANDARD WORK WITH IRREGULAR HOURS

In the second category of non-standard work, parents worked irregular, rotating shifts outside standard regular hours and days of work.

4.3.1 Rest home carers

We talked with five nurses and care-workers at two rest homes in a city. Two of the care-workers were parents of pre-schoolers; three were grandparents who played a major role in their pre-school grandchildren's care.⁸ We also interviewed senior managers at both of the rest homes.

Rest home carers' days and hours of work varied from one to six days a week. These participants were lower- to medium-paid workers.

Both of the rest homes in the study were run by non-profit charitable trusts, and offered residential care, a hospital and special care for the elderly. Shifts were structured around times of high need (such as waking residents in the morning, attending to their personal care needs, helping them with breakfast and administering routine medication). A registered nurse was required to be on duty at all times.

4.3.1.1 Their childcare arrangements

One parent worked from 2.30pm to 11.00pm, six days a week. She lived in an extended family household and her pre-school-aged child was predominantly cared for by her father, the child's grandfather, until he went to work at 5.00pm himself. This parent had her child on waiting lists for at least two education and care services and intended to enrol her at a Kindergarten when her daughter turned three. She said:

[My daughter starting Kindergarten] will give my dad a break because my dad looks after her the most during the day 'cause he doesn't go to work till 5.00pm. By then my sister is home from college and finished school, and my partner would have finished work and they're all home. (Rest home carer 2)

Another parent in this group worked a 9.00am to 2.00pm shift, which her employer had shortened to finish at 1.00pm to fit her childcare needs better. Even still, her shift finished after her child finished Kindergarten, so her parents picked him up from Kindergarten and took him to their home, where the mother picked him up at the end of her shift.

4.3.2 Airport quarantine officers

We talked with five airport quarantine officers who were parents of pre-schoolers, and a team manager. The team manager was also the husband of one of the quarantine officers we interviewed, and therefore himself a parent of a pre-school-aged child.

Employees at the airport worked four-days-on-four-days-off on one of four rotating shifts – 4.30am to 3.45pm, 5.30am to 5.00pm, 3.45pm to 3.15am and 5.10pm to 4.30am. Their days and hours of work varied from full-time to 0.5 FTE. Some of the part-time officers job-shared, or worked part-time on a two-days-on-six-days-off schedule. In two cases both parents had previously worked at the airport at the same job and worked mirror shifts. These employees were medium- to higher-paid workers.

⁸ We asked the grandparents we interviewed about the care they provided for their grandchildren. We also asked them about the working lives of their children, the parents of their grandchildren. These interviews provided an insight (albeit unintentional) into the motivations and expectations that these grandparents had about caring for their grandchildren. In some cases their experience of working non-standard hours and having care responsibilities for pre-school-aged children were also relevant.

At the time of the study, a recent shift review was bringing about changes in the shift structure that seemed likely to reduce some of the flexibility that parents had previously enjoyed.

4.3.2.1 Their childcare arrangements

The earliest these parents left for work was at 3.45am in time to start their 4.30am shift at the airport. When they left for work, their children remained sleeping in the house with the other parent.

Children of these parents either attended Kindergarten, education and care service and/or were cared for by their grandparents. Where the child attended an ECE service outside the home, the other parent was always involved with dropping them off or picking them up at the end of the day. In three cases, the children's grandmother picked them up from Kindergarten or the education and care service and looked after them until one of their parents returned home from work.

In one situation, two grandmothers shared the same day, on alternate weeks, to care for their grandchildren after they attended an education and care service and school, while the mother worked a fixed shift at the airport between 4.30am and 4.00pm on a weekday. The other day she worked was a Saturday, when her husband cared for the children.

A number of these parents had partners who also either currently worked shifts, or had done so previously. One family had both parents working shifts.

[Husband] does permanent night shift. His hours are from 5.00pm to 2.00am, Monday to Friday. He could get a day job but it is just better for us, not financially, but for the kids. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

One parent occasionally called on her 15-year-old step-daughter to look after her pre-school-aged child; another occasionally used a babysitter.

A particular feature of the airport quarantine officers' work was their four-day-on-four-day-off rotating shift pattern. It meant that no week was ever the same in their home, that they sometimes worked during the weekend and that their sleep patterns were irregular and they were often tired. It also meant that they were able to plan in advance.

Four-days-on-four-days-off ... a block of shifts ... same pattern, so we have pretty much a long time to plan which is good. Quite handy with shift work, whereas I know there are other places that don't have that option [of planning ahead]. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

4.4 NON-STANDARD WORK WITH UNPREDICTABLE HOURS

In the third category of non-standard work, parents worked on-call and in seasonal jobs.

4.4.1 Midwives

We talked with five independent midwives from two different collectives – one based in the city, and the other an hour's drive away.

Their days and hours of work were difficult to determine because of the variable nature of their work, which covered appointments with pregnant mothers, post-natal visits and on-call attendance at births. Generally, they scheduled their appointments for set days of the week (such as Monday and Tuesday mornings, with evening appointments if that worked best for their clients). They also needed to be immediately and unpredictably available to attend a birth at any time of the day or night. All the midwives had part-time caseloads, and they were medium-paid.⁹

One midwife we interviewed was not working at the time of the interview because she was unable to fit her work schedule with her childcare needs.

4.4.1.1 Their childcare arrangements

The midwives we interviewed used a range of childcare, including home-based services, education and care services, a grandmother and a sister (aunt to the pre-school-aged child). These childcare arrangements allowed them to work during the week (during 'standard' hours) to see their clients for ante- and post-natal visits.

It was the need to be immediately available to attend a birth at any time that presented a challenge to these parents. No formal care arrangement accommodated this aspect of their work. All of the women relied on their partner in the first instance, particularly if the call to attend a birth happened at night or during the weekend. They all noted that their partners had degrees of flexibility in their jobs that allowed them to be available.

Some could call on a grandparent. One midwife, who had to be able to attend a birth at hospital within 20 minutes, noted "if you are on call you need someone like my mum you can call up immediately".

Another midwife used her parents (both in full-time paid work), her sister-in-law and a good friend.

The midwife we interviewed who was not working had continued to work as an independent midwife when her first child was pre-school-aged, and then had moved to working casual shifts at a hospital while the child was cared for by a nanny. Neither of these arrangements worked out and she is currently not working. She also said that neither she nor her partner had family living in the same city.

⁹ Firkin (2003) interviewed ten midwives to investigate their experience of engaging in non-standard work. The report provides a good overview of the pattern of work midwives commonly engage in and includes an analysis of how they managed the "home/work nexus". The report highlights the importance of collegial and partner support, and that midwifery is a "lifestyle". Firkin's research was part of the Labour Market Dynamics Research Programme on non-standard work.

4.4.2 Horticultural seasonal workers

We talked with five employees at a rural pack house processing horticultural produce, and a supervisor.

During the season, which runs from January (or February) until June, the pack house operates two shifts, 7.00am to 4.00pm and 4.30pm to 11.30pm. Four parents we interviewed all worked the earlier shift. One parent was an office administrator who worked 8.00am to 3.00pm. The pack house was in a rural setting and all the parents needed to travel around 30 minutes each way between home and work every day.

This group were lower-paid workers. When they were not working the season in the pack house, the parents tended to be on a Work and Income benefit.

4.4.2.1 Their childcare arrangements

All the parents working in horticultural seasonal work with an early shift start were using home-based services, sometimes combined with an education and care service or Kindergarten.

Seasonal workers had early starts. Two left home at 5.30am, with their children in their pyjamas, dropped their children at the home-based caregiver and then drove for 30 minutes to start work at 6.30am.

A number of the parents in seasonal work used multiple carers. In one case, a child would be dropped off in their pyjamas at the home-based caregiver's home before breakfast, and the carer would take the child to an education and care service. The carer then picked the child up when the service closed for the day, and the mother would collect the child from the home-based caregiver.

In another case, a two-year-old child was cared for by a sequence of four different carers from the time the parent left home with the child in time for the start of her 6.30am shift, until she returned home with the child at the end of her workday late in the afternoon.

One parent said she collected her two younger children from a home-based caregiver at 4.50pm, but if a machine broke down they had to do overtime, and then it could be 5.30pm before she picked them up. While the employer often released them in those circumstances, it could be hard as most employees had children.

If everybody clocked out at 4.00pm to pick up children there would be nobody here to finish the process. The majority of people have children whether they are pre-school or primary-aged kids. (Horticultural seasonal worker 2)

One grandparent became a registered caregiver for a home-based service so that she could be paid for caring for her grandchild.

In summary, we observed two aspects of this workplace that were a challenge when making childcare arrangements. Firstly, the early starts, combined with the location of the pack house in a rural setting that required transport and travel time of at least 30 minutes, meant that parents needed to find care services that opened at 5.30am. Secondly, the seasonal nature of the work meant the exact start and end dates of the season, and, therefore, an enrolment date for childcare, could not be accurately predetermined.

4.5 SUMMARY

Parents in the study used a range of informal and formal childcare, and often a mixture of both.

Most of the parents used at least one form of informal care, and often more. Informal care arrangements included the parent's partner, grandparents, step-children, other relatives, friends and colleagues.

Except in the case of sole parents, it was unusual for both parents not to have some involvement in their pre-schooler's day-to-day care arrangements, especially transport, either at the beginning or end of the workday. In most cases the parents seemed to work as a unit to support each other's work commitments, and complemented each other's care of the children. The care provided by grandparents was significant and is discussed in more depth in the following section.

Informal care arrangements were generally unpaid. The exceptions to this were one grandparent who was paid \$100 to \$150 a week; another grandparent who was given petrol money; and a teenaged step-daughter who was paid as a babysitter.

Step-children, friends and neighbours tended to be used as a back-up for more regular and formal childcare arrangements. They were used in cases of emergency, such as when a home-based caregiver was sick, or if the parent needed to work in the evening.

Parents who had limited informal care available to them seemed disadvantaged by this.

Most parents in the study also used some type of ECE, including Kindergarten, education and care services, home-based services and Kōhanga Reo. Parents paid for these services. All but one of the ECE services used by parents in this study were offering Free ECE. Some children had a number of caregivers (up to four in a day), and complex arrangements that often (but not always) involved a mixture of formal and informal childcare.

The hours that the pre-school children spent in formal care in any week ranged from between 10 hours and 20 hours at the lower end, and between 45 hours and 57½ hours at the higher end.

Most Kindergartens, education and care services and home-based services were situated in the home suburb, one as close as across the road from the parent's home.

Picking the child up from care and returning home was sometimes described as a stressful time. Parents were often juggling the pressures of leaving work at a set time, driving through traffic to collect their children before closing-time at the childcare service and returning home with a tired child (and parent) to begin a dinner, bath and bedtime routine.

The aspects of non-standard work that seemed to present the most challenge to these parents arranging childcare for their pre-schoolers were shifts that started early in the morning, went overnight or were during the weekend. Some forms of non-standard work, particularly on-call and seasonal work, meant parents had significantly reduced ability to plan ahead and set childcare arrangements.

4.6 INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS ON CHILDCARE

The small number of parents participating in this study does not allow the results to be generalised across all parents with pre-school-aged children who work non-standard hours. It is also not possible to make comparisons of the parents we interviewed on the basis of their age, gender or ethnicity, or the number of children they had.

Of the parents interviewed for this study, six were Māori, two were of Pacific descent and two were Asian or lived in an Asian household. The size of the interview group is too small to make any statements about differences or similarities between the childcare arrangements that parents of different ethnic groups make. However, some participants themselves mentioned that aspects of their culture had an influence when they made decisions about the care of their children (or grandchildren in one case). For example, one Māori parent chose a Kōhanga Reo so her children could be fluent in te reo. Another parent said:

[Son] stays at home with the in-laws, they live with us because they are Chinese, it is their culture. It is a cultural thing... Generally, especially in China, the grandparents bring up the children... When they retire they come and live with you and bring up the kids. (Airport quarantine officer 5)

An Asian parent noted the different childcare arrangements that were made by members of her PIN group.¹⁰

When I said 'oh no, mum and dad are both working in the afternoon now so we don't have anyone to look after the kids in the evening' they said 'Well, welcome to the real world', the European mothers. [For] some of them their parents live far away, but a lot of them said we just wouldn't go to mum and say can you cook them dinner. So we are probably the lucky ones actually when we say we are juggling that. Certainly in my PIN group the mothers really struggle. They pay for people [to care for their children]. (Rest home carer 1)

One other observation we made was how the household in which the parent we interviewed lived affected their childcare arrangements. We captured the following range of households in the study (also see Table 1):

- > Sole mother with pre-school-aged child.
- > Two parents with pre-school-aged child. Some also had school-aged children and some had step-children who lived with them on a part-time basis.
- > Extended family living in the same household, including one or two parents, with pre-school- and school-aged children and one or two grandparents.

The predominant household was one of two parents with two children. Several of the parents had children with special needs, one of whom was a pre-schooler. The child's disability influenced the decisions that were made about his care. After he attended a Kindergarten where he was helped by a teacher's aide, his grandmothers alternated caring for him before his parents came home.

Parents in a two-parent or extended family household with early shifts were usually able to leave their pre-schooler sleeping in their bed when they left for work (unless the partner was also doing shift work or travelling with their job), whereas two solo parents took their children in their pyjamas with them to a home-based service early in the morning before starting their shift.

¹⁰ PIN (Plunket In your Neighbourhood) groups are organised by Plunket to connect new mothers who live in the same community.

5. FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' DECISIONS ABOUT CHILDCARE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

We expected that families' childcare arrangements would be shaped by the nature of their non-standard work and how it was managed. The case studies provide a number of examples of this. Other factors also influenced parents' decisions, sometimes significantly.

In this section we focus on how parents chose their childcare arrangements, and explore parents' satisfaction with their childcare, including its accessibility and the stability of arrangements. We then describe what parents saw as ideal care arrangements and look at how partners and grandparents were involved in caring for the pre-school-aged children. In the last part of this section we consider the impact that non-standard work had on parenting.

Parents in our study typically described the way they managed the transitions from home to paid work, their childcare arrangements and the return to home, as one of 'juggling'. We note that some of the experiences described by parents in this study are not unique to them because they work non-standard hours – they are also experienced by working parents more generally.

5.2 HOW PARENTS CHOSE THEIR CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS

During the interviews we asked each parent "Who made the decision about how your pre-school-aged child would be cared for?" A number of parents reported making the decision jointly with their partner.

Depending on what we are deciding. If it is something major we will talk it through [together with my partner]. Sometimes if shifts come up and I know they are quite short [at work] then I will say yes. [My partner] will grumble! But a lot of the time I will let him know beforehand. (Rest home carer 1)

More often than not, one parent had more of a role to play in making these decisions (for example, one would visit and phone several ECE providers), and this was more often than not the mother.

Because I was the one coming back [to work after parental leave] as I felt I could, I was the one who was planning about where to put [our son]. (Airport quarantine officer 1)

Like most people I suppose there is not as much input from [husband] as there is me making all [the decisions]. (Airport quarantine officer 2)

I find it really frustrating that it seems to be the woman's job to work out the childcare arrangements. So I'm always the one that goes into WINZ and sorts all that sort of thing out. I think it is a real shame because they're his children too and it's not that he's not interested or anything, I think that he just hasn't thought about it. (Midwife 3)

It was hard because as I said [my husband] does early mornings and he's not up on the know with how things go. It's not their field. So it means like I had to get in touch with [caregiver] to see what was available and trying to get [her children] into the same place. (Horticultural seasonal worker 2)

In other cases, grandparents were involved in making the decision, particularly where they played a part in providing care for the pre-schooler, or where the parent needed some assistance in making this decision. One parent sat down with her husband (a night-shift worker), the grandparents (both in paid work) and a year planner to plan childcare arrangements.

At the very beginning of the year we've got to sit down and do a year planner. My holidays and childcare are always planned a year in advance, especially if we are going to try and save money. We all sit down and talk about it, because my parents go on holiday too, so I can't really depend on them all the time. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

In another case, a grandmother offered to move to be in the same city so she could be involved in the care of her grandchildren while her daughter trained and worked as a midwife.

Parents' values played an important role in shaping their childcare arrangements. Two factors appeared most significant – what motivated them to do the work they did, and how they saw their parenting role and their relationship with their children.

The intrinsic value of working was an important motivator in a number of cases.

It's quite a juggling act. Do I have to work really? For me, I think I need it [work]. If I didn't, I think I'd be a different person. So it's not just about the money really. (Airport quarantine officer 1)

[I'm working] so that I can get a better job and that can help both of us. (Horticultural seasonal worker 1)

[Having son in childcare] is a nice break for me. Because I've always worked since I left college at 15. (Horticultural seasonal worker 4)

I love this job ... have been here seven years ... I think this is the only full-time job that suits around my kids with the job [husband] has. [My employer is] quite flexible to getting time off with the kids and being able to shift-swap. (Airport quarantine officer 4)



For almost all of the parents in the study, financial pressures provided a strong motive for them to work. Paying off a mortgage was most often cited. One parent had progressively increased her work hours after having children, and said: “It was about money, we have mortgage repayments.” She added that the kind of work she did was not a part-time job, and it was her choice to be readily available to her clients.

Another parent was informed by her Work and Income Case Manager that she would be eligible for the Childcare Subsidy if she returned to work. She subsequently found seasonal work at a pack house and her mother became a home-based caregiver so she could care for the parent’s pre-school-aged child and also be paid for it.

Another parent went back to work so she could maintain her nursing licence.

After three years if you don't practise you lose your licence ... that's the reason I came back to work. Because I was off for nearly three years and I thought ... once they've gone to school I'll want to work and I don't really want to go back and do a whole course plus pay thousands for it. So that's why I came back to work. I don't really want to be away from the kids but at the same time, once they start school I want to work again. It sounds like a juggling act, but once he goes to school it won't be too bad. So I keep looking forward to November! (Rest home carer 1)

When we asked parents about their childcare arrangements, they often commented on how they saw their role as a parent. One mother in particular was frustrated that the need to work to pay off their mortgage outweighed her strong desire to be at home with her 14-month-old daughter.

I'd rather be at home ... work is a necessary evil to be honest ... [daughter] came along at a time when we weren't quite ready for her ... I didn't have any choice but to go back to work. I'd rather be at home being a mum rather than having my child being raised by someone else. But it's just the way it has to be... [Interviewer: That's a pretty tough position for you to be in.] It's horrific. (Recruitment centre employee 1)

Many parents said they knew working non-standard hours allowed them or their partner to spend more time with their children than other families whose parents worked standard hours. One-third of our sample of parents worked part-time, which was a choice they made in order to achieve their desired balance between work and family commitments.



5.3 SATISFACTION WITH CHILDCARE AND ITS IMPACT

Most of the parents in the study described their experiences with childcare as very good.

They are fantastic, they are good ... they've got great facilities. They genuinely love and care for the kids. [Daughter] just adores the carer that she mainly has ... the carers there are great, they are fantastic and I tell them that all the time. I feel quite included. I go in there and they are always extremely welcoming. They tell me what her day has been like and they just know her so well as well. I wouldn't change anything in there. (Recruitment centre employee 1)

One parent was so happy with her home-based caregiver that she moved her child when the caregiver changed her employer.

Parents described their care arrangements as having positive effects on their children and spoke very highly about their carers, and the important roles they played in their children's lives. This seemed to be the case whether the child was in a care and education service, Kindergarten, Kōhanga Reo or at a home-based service.

They get to go to play group. They get to go to music and movement. (Horticultural seasonal worker 2)

Another parent, whose two-year-old daughter went to a home-based caregiver from 5.30am to 3.30pm five days a week, reported that her daughter was playing more, learning and speaking more and was learning to share and enjoying reading.

In one situation, the home-based caregiver developed a relationship with the children similar to that of a grandparent. The sole parent involved did not appear to have any close family or friends, other than the caregiver. Her five-year-old child had been with the caregiver continuously since the age of eight-and-a-half months. The parent looked to the home-based caregiver as a friend, adviser and confidant. She was delighted with the progress that her son had made with his socialising skills and his reading, and attributed this to the caregiver.

Another parent noted the following benefit of her children's childcare:

My children going to [Kōhanga Reo] has really heightened my sense of being Māori ... having had my children in that has really ... I guess there has been a sort of renaissance for me. (Recruitment centre employee 2)

Nonetheless, parents were acutely aware of some of the potential negative effects of having their child in care while they worked.

There are some things you've got to sacrifice and that's where you've got to sacrifice other stuff like with your children. [Interviewer: What sort of things do you feel like you are sacrificing with your children because you are working?] My time away, my time with them, I am missing a lot. Probably educational stuff like doing their homework with them. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

Several parents in the study had very complex childcare arrangements including long hours and multiple caregivers, which leads us to consider the possibility of negative effects on the children. One parent whose daughter was in childcare for 57½ hours a week said:

But [daughter] doesn't do Fridays at kindy, she goes to [home-based caregiver] on a Friday, because by that time she's just lost the plot. At least she gets to have a sleep

and stuff at daycare, where at kindy it's just too hard. So like today she said to me 'Mum don't wake me up, I'm tired, I don't want to go'. (Horticultural seasonal worker 2)

Another parent described the care arrangements she used so that she could manage her seasonal work from February to June:

[Caregiver] takes [my youngest daughter] to kindy at 8.30am and then at 2.30pm one of the other caregivers that works for the company that the kids go, to picks her up and then drops her off to the lady who watches her, and then we pick her up. So there are four people in [ECE] who look after her. It gets quite confusing. If I ask [my husband] to go and get [daughter] he's like 'Well, where am I going?' (Horticultural seasonal worker 2)

One parent told us he was unhappy with the care his child was getting at an ECE service:

His daycare was good, his pre-school was just ok – too many kids, not enough teachers and I don't think they learnt bugger all there really. It was more of a childcare set-up than a learning facility in my opinion. But his daycare is certainly very structured and he seems to be learning more from that. (Airport quarantine officer 6)

Another parent spoke about the possible impact on the home-based carer's family:

The lady that the kids go to is really good, considering she has got children of her own. It is probably a bit harder for her because if the children choose not to go back to sleep or if the baby is unsettled, then ... we've been pretty lucky because at the moment it hasn't managed to wake her house up. I can see it's probably not the easiest thing for her but she's in the position where the extra money does help her too. (Horticultural seasonal worker 2)

We noted that the demand for one home-based caregiver was such that she worked from 5.30am to 10.00pm. The impact of these working hours for the caregiver warrants further consideration.

5.4 ACCESSIBILITY OF CHILDCARE

When we began the study, we wanted to learn whether families had difficulty finding 'non-standard' childcare when parents worked non-standard hours and days.

While the parents in the rural centre used home-based services that were available from 5.30am until 10.00pm, none of the other parents in the study who lived and worked in the large cities or urban areas appeared to have accessed a similar service.

Several parents expressed a wish for childcare facilities that catered better for their non-standard hours of work. Some parents would have liked more flexibility in how childcare centres operated. For example, they were unable to choose different days each week at the centre to fit their shift roster, and they only had the option of their child attending and paying for full days, rather than part of the day.

What would definitely help me is if you had a daycare that you could change the days in the week. I've never been able to find a daycare where I can say I'd like him here Monday and Tuesday, and the next week Wednesday and Thursday. That's obviously not going to be able to work for them because they can't work their staff around it for the numbers of children. But because I work an eight-day-week the days I work are always changing and I cannot find a daycare that is willing to [work around] a rolling working week... And obviously no-one does weekends either which is a real pain. (Airport quarantine officer 1)

The major thing that put me off childcare facilities is that none of them do half-days anymore. Because I do have flexibility with my working arrangement, and he's only little, I would really prefer for [son] to be in half-day rather than full-day care. But none of them will do that. That's really sad because that would make a huge difference for me as a part-time worker. (Midwife 4)

Otherwise, the parents in the study raised issues that are known to occur for other parents who work standard hours. For example, a number of parents reported difficulty in getting their children into a local childcare facility. One parent had the child on the waiting list at a number of centres, so far without success.

I've put her on a childcare waiting list and it's such a long waiting list. I went from one place to another and I'm still waiting. She's got to wait for the call for kindy now [when daughter turns three]. (Rest home carer 2)

One parent said that it was difficult to get her two-year-old child enrolled in her local childcare centre because the centre was full of three- and four-year-old children whose parents were taking advantage of Free ECE (whether they were working or not).

At the very start ... getting my [daughter] into childcare at the age of two was really hard [because of Free ECE for three- and four-year-olds]. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

Another parent said:

Now the 20 free hours has come in, I know that it is a real problem [for some people I know]. They just cannot get two-year-olds into centres anywhere ... because of the three- and four-year-olds. Everyone has gone – 'I can get 20 free hours so I'll do it', and there is no space for the littlies coming through. They were telling me at my son's pre-school that there is a waiting list of 80 people to get in there now because there are so many three- and four-year-olds, they just can't get the two-year-olds in. People who probably wouldn't use it now go '20 free hours, yeah, now I will'. (Airport quarantine officer 1)

Almost all of the parents who used formal childcare services had their child enrolled in centres that were offering Free ECE. Parents had also accessed Working for Families subsidies where they were eligible. Only two parents had not pursued the issue of subsidies. One of these parents did not want the 'hassle' of negotiating with Work and Income. The other parent found it difficult to get to the nearest Work and Income office, partly because of the hours she worked. The funding and subsidies provided by the Government appeared to be a critical factor in parents' ability to work.

It was quite good that the Government decided to pay for the 20 free hours, that made a huge difference. It is quite a big cost. I mean you are forking out ... there was one stage when it was probably costing \$300 a week in childcare. So to have that hit on the head made a big difference. (Airport quarantine officer 3)

That's an absolute lifesaver, really, really fantastic. (Midwife 3)

5.5 STABILITY OF CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS

Parents in the study tended to have fairly stable care arrangements.

Parents involved in non-standard work with unpredictable hours had stable arrangements for the period of the season and for the 'routine' work they did as midwives. Their childcare arrangements changed only when they were on-call, and typically they had elaborate arrangements in place to cope with situations where they were called out to attend a birth at a time when their partner was unavailable. One parent in our study recounted a situation when her husband was away and wider family support was not available. At that time she relied on a friend, who was also a midwife.

[My partner] and [son] have [gone away] this weekend to see his father who is unwell. My colleague is on-call for my [other] children, my girls, tonight. So she'll come down and hop into my bed if I have to go out to a birth. Because we have that commitment to our clients to be there as much as possible. (Midwife 4)

Parents we interviewed told us that they had to make changes in their care arrangements most often when they or their partners changed their jobs, or when employers altered arrangements. For example, a review of shift patterns for airport quarantine officers had begun to alter the flexibility formerly enjoyed by parents. Where they used to have the option of working early shifts on a permanent basis, the review was now requiring all employees to work rotating shifts.

One parent was in the process of changing her job as an independent midwife to one in a primary unit in a hospital, because of the unpredictability of her work and its impact on her children.

It hasn't come from a fact of I hate my job now, it's come from my kids are too young and I can't keep doing it to them... [At the hospital] it's a rotating roster, you get a month in advance, so I can organise it rather than going 'Can anyone look after my kids?' [when she is called out for a birth]. (Midwife 1)

Another parent said:

I went back as a casual midwife. I had [a nanny] come in twice a week but I didn't always get work at that time because they just ring when they need [to]. Most of the time I did get work, but sometimes I didn't. [The nanny] was flexible enough to take a day off herself. But that was quite difficult and then after half a year she left. It was just too unreliable for her. (Midwife 5)

Another parent changed childcare arrangements to find a better fit for his daughter.

She's got girls who are like her at the [new] place ... the demographics of the children are a bit different ... they're all about her age and seem to relate to her a bit better ... she just didn't fit in as well [in the first place]. (Airport quarantine officer 3)

Grandparents' changing needs also led to changes in care arrangements. Some parents in the study spoke of needing to change work hours because the grandparents were becoming more tired as they aged; because of changes in the grandparents' own shift work hours and days; and because the grandparents' interests had changed.

We asked the parents in our study what sort of back-up or contingency plans they had in case of emergencies or sickness. For parents who lived in extended family households, this did not seem to be an issue. Other parents could rely on the help of their own parents (the children's grandparents), other family members (such as a sister or step-children) or a neighbour.

I myself rely heavily on my family because they live close by, my parents... Because in nursing you just can't say 'It's one o'clock, I have to go'. There's always something that will crop up. So I do have a bit of a leeway in the morning. (Rest home carer 1)

There were some occasions where my parents were away and we were stuck. So I would go and drop her [with my partner's sister] to his sister and she would stay there for the whole day until I get there. (Rest home carer 2)

[My older daughter from a previous relationship] is old enough now [to look after my son]. But then she's got so much homework that she's getting from high school and so on. She's never going to get that done if she is looking after [son] for half a day or a day. I'm mindful of when I call upon her. If I had something really urgent for work she always helps us out. But I'm always mindful not to call on her too much because she's at an important time of her life too. (Airport quarantine officer 6)

We have had a 16-year-old girl down the road babysit for us a few times on a Friday night and various other times. (Airport quarantine officer 3)

The neighbour is usually home with her kids so she has said I can just call her and go. A back-up, I've got about five back-ups! (Midwife 3)

Parents could take leave to care for sick children. Some parents and grandparents also took annual leave or had negotiated to work a shorter shift (and consequently receive less income) so they could pick up their children from childcare.

Two grandmothers we interviewed who worked as rest home carers were very willing to support their families at short notice, such as when a child was sick and needed to stay at home. Their workplace supported this by allowing them to take sick leave to care for their grandchildren.

It is easier for me to take time off work and look after [granddaughter]. At least I have got sick leave. (Rest home carer 4)

Other parents seemed to have very limited support systems, and they expressed concern about this.

I've got two older sisters but they don't live in [the same city]. Dad and mum both work full-time as well. Dad will have [daughter] for a little while in the weekend. She has stayed there overnight on the weekend a few times but they just don't have the capacity to pick her up and drop her off... I don't have a huge amount of support. There's not someone that can take her for me and drop her off. (Recruitment centre employee 1)

I've had a few situations where I'm about to drop [my son] off at the caregiver and they ring to say they're not available today because something has happened. He comes to work with me and I tell you what, with a two-year-old that's a screaming nightmare! (Midwife 4)

One midwife was very conscious of having very little arranged for a certain time of the day.

Between 3.00pm and 5.00pm is my real Achilles heel. It's quite stressful actually. Because I've got no immediate care. From 5.00pm the previous night till 3.30pm the next day I've got care and I'm covered. Between 3.00pm and 5.00pm it's a bit of a stressful time so if anything were to happen between those times it's going to take me longer to get someone to come and look after them. (Midwife 3)

One mother said she and her husband felt they couldn't ask their siblings and friends to help as they were all in similar situations, with both parents working and children in childcare.

[Husband's] got four brothers but everybody works. Everyone's got children. Everyone has their kids in daycare, so we are all in the same boat. There is no-one who is not really doing anything apart from working. (Recruitment centre employee 1)

We observed parents weighing up their options and being conscious of the need to reciprocate, especially with family and friends.

Begging and borrowing childcare is very stressful. You have to be careful to reciprocate and when you are really busy that is very tricky. (Midwife 4)

5.6 PARENTS' IDEAL CHILDCARE ARRANGEMENTS

Parents interviewed frequently talked of having to make trade-offs to be able to juggle non-standard work and childcare. In the interviews, parents were asked explicitly to describe their ideal arrangements, and typical answers are summarised below.

A number of parents said their ideal childcare arrangement would be for them to not work at all and be at home instead caring for their child.

My ideal scenario would be to stop work altogether. (Airport quarantine officer 5)

If I didn't have to work [for the money], I'd be at home. It's important the children are with their mother. (Midwife 2)

Not having to work the drastic hours. To be able to work ... a normal two eight-hour days and for me not having to get up at 3.00am in the morning and having weekends free ... if I didn't have to work I wouldn't work. I'd rather be at home with the kids until they both went to school. (Airport quarantine officer 2)

Another parent's ideal was to:

Work part-time with the same pay and spending more time with the children. Every parent would like to spend more time with their children. (Airport quarantine officer 4)



Some parents had a strong preference for family to care for their children.

Why I do the eleven-hour days, is that I'm there for the rest of the week. They are being brought up by us, and they do enjoy the day with the grandmothers, and the Saturday they're with my husband and they're with family ... that's important to me. (Airport quarantine officer 2)

Really prefer someone I can trust and someone who knows my girls, someone I know. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

Even if there were more pre-school hours, I probably wouldn't want to send him for longer hours away from me. Because I want to be bringing up my kids. (Rest home carer 1)

Most parents, whose children were cared for outside their home, had chosen a service that was in their home neighbourhood. Parents seemed to prefer their children to be close to home, in the neighbourhood where they would meet other children who eventually they might go to school with, and to minimise travel time for the child.

We decided to get her as close to home as we could because she doesn't do well in the car. She pretty much moans from the minute I pick her up to the minute I get home. So I would rather have that, rather than close to the city and have a crying baby for an hour on the way home. The only worry with that is that if anything happened to her and I need to get there quickly. I bring my car into the city every day and park in the city, which is horrendously expensive, but I don't want to run the risk of not being able to get to her quickly if I needed to. So it has pros and cons having her where she is. (Recruitment centre employee 1)

One parent talked about making arrangements so that the care came to the children, rather than the children having to travel long distances to it.

We weren't taking our girls back and forth [to their grandmother's home in another suburb]. The girls aren't leaving home, we've just got the adult moving. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

Another parent talked about ideally reducing their working hours.

I wouldn't work as much, I wouldn't work as many hours, that would be my ideal ... have a freehold house. I'd go down to probably 20 hours a week ... I'd put them in part-time and I'd work part-time, in a centre that has fluent te reo that was close to home. (Recruitment centre employee 2)

Two parents described an 'ideal caregiver':

In my ideal world I would have somebody who is very flexible. A person, the same person all the time, a nanny. That this person could come and stay overnight, because my partner has to travel to Australia. She could sleep here and I would know that my children are looked after. (Midwife 5)

What would be ideal would be someone like mum. Someone I could call up and say I need you now ... to know that they were always there. (Midwife 3)

As noted previously, some parents in our study would have liked more flexibility in the hours and days that childcare centres operated. They suggested opening for longer hours during the week, opening over the weekend and having more flexibility in the days their child attended each week (to fit around their rotating shifts) and the hours their child attended, including being able to attend and pay for part-days.

Most parents mentioned they would like to pay less for childcare; however, they were also grateful for the Free ECE they received. We got a sense that Free ECE enabled these parents to work more or reduced some of the financial pressures they were under. However, one parent also noted that the Childcare Subsidy didn't cover the hours that she worked, often six days a week.

WINZ subsidises you for 50 hours a week. Coming here with travel and everything you are working over the 50 hours. And with working on Sundays there's nothing for people who work weekends. (Horticultural seasonal worker 2)

One parent had the following ideas for helping parents with their childcare arrangements better:

If the Government was able to put something in place for working families it would be great. Probably paying for more educational daycare and childcare for parents. So a subsidy, or some second income that parents can take if they want to take time off and spend time with their children... Allowances like other solo mothers and beneficiaries have to stay at home and look after their children. Whereas some of us have to come into work and send our kids off to school. But when they are sick you have to stay home and look after them. There are working parents who are going to run out of leave when their children are sick... There is only a minimum there. [I've got] limited sick leave and I've got my two daughters as well, so 10 days ... is basically not enough. So that is when you are running into annual [leave] and you've got school holidays to take off as well. In the long run everyone is bound to take leave without pay at some stage to look after their kids. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

In contrast, some parents did say they already had their ideal arrangements in place. A number of parents said how much they enjoyed working.

5.6.1 Support from their partner

Parents in the study usually relied heavily on support from their partner (with the exception, of course, of the two single parents we interviewed). Parents worked as a team. Without this support, some parents might not have been able to continue working non-standard hours. One parent said:

Although we have daycare, it doesn't really help us at all with work as such, the hours just don't cover what we do ... it is not ever going to cover the hours that I work, so you are always going to need that other person to be there as well. (Airport quarantine officer 1)

Another parent said:

There's sort of a network. So if I have been up all night then my husband will call my mum and say that I've been up all night and could she pick the kids up. So she'll pick the kids up and hopefully by that time I would have had enough sleep ... the whole family is [involved]. I couldn't do it without mum. (Midwife 3)

A number of partners of parents in the study were in jobs that gave them some flexibility to accommodate the demands of shift-work, irregular times and days of work and the unpredictability of on-call work. For example, parents working early morning shifts relied on their partners to take children to childcare that was outside their home (daycare, Kindergarten, Kōhanga Reo or home-based care). Other partners were self-employed and, sometimes but not always, could accommodate shift-work changes or call-outs – for example, by not working on a particular day and foregoing earnings.

In one case, the midwife's partner was a tradesperson.

He is sort of around off-and-on with occasional days of work. He tends to have more flexibility than someone who has an 8.00am to 5.00pm job. He can sometimes ring up clients and say, 'Look, I need to be at home with the kids today', whereas I think people who are employed for a company might not be able to do that. Although he quite often works on the weekends, so it goes both ways. (Midwife 1)

We were told of one situation where the parents worked mirror shifts at the same workplace, and handed over the child in the work carpark.

From when [son] was little my husband was still working here. So we worked the same four days on, had the same four days off, but if I was on an early shift he'd be on a night shift ... so basically, it sounds terrible, but my husband used to drive in and we'd meet outside the front [of work] and he'd give me the car keys and I'd drive home with the kids and then he'd take the car in the carpark and generally he'd be home in time for me to leave in the morning. Sounds kind of bizarre ... it was the way it worked at the time. It was pretty sleep-deprived, because if you worked a night shift you'd have to get up. Say you'd be home at 3.00am, you'd still then be getting up at 7.00am to look after the kids all day and then have to come to work at night ... we sort of did everything on our four days off when me and my husband were doing it and it was sort of, it was hard. (Airport quarantine officer 2)

Another parent said:

When I came back to work two days, [partner] would work four days, I would work two days and we have two days off as a family. That was ideal. That really worked. (Airport quarantine officer 1)

One of the parents in the study worked full-time on a four-days-on-four-days-off rotating shift roster. Her husband worked night shifts from 5.00pm to 2.00am, Monday to Friday at a different workplace.

So [husband is] not getting that much rest during the day. After taking the children to school and kindy, he goes back to bed. Then he has to reset the alarm to go back to pick up [child from Kindergarten]. She still has [an] afternoon nap so she's asleep with her dad again [in the afternoon]. Then they reset the alarm for 2.30pm, so they get up to pick up [other child from school]. He has broken sleeps, sometimes he won't sleep if we've got school events on ... at the moment he's managing, but I can say only just. When I've got my days off I relieve him so he can get that sleep. If he did it continuously then I think we'd have a problem there. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

One employer we interviewed had a partner who worked non-standard hours. His job allowed for flexible work, including starting early and working from home. He said, however, that he was conscious of this arrangement, especially as he was in a management position.

The mucking around of the hours, I feel like I am inconveniencing the organisation a little bit. Like yesterday I had the director call me on my cell phone and I was at home. She talked to me for an hour and a half while [son] was charging around and throwing things at me. Sometimes some of the other managers who just work Monday to Friday, quite often instead of looking at my Outlook calendar, they say to me 'What hours are you working next week?' So it makes me feel a bit guilty that I have got this sort of arrangement. (Airport quarantine officer 6)

Some parents would have preferred a different balance in the responsibility for their children's care that was taken by them and their partner. For example, one midwife had taken a smaller caseload as she felt her work needed to fit around her partner's, and he did not want to stop working as much as he did.

Originally my ideal working situation would be both of us working a bit more than part-time. (Midwife 1)

Another parent and her husband found it unsustainable to work mirror shifts full-time with two children. The nature of her husband's work, and that of others who were self-employed or in management positions requiring significant travel, constrained choices regarding childcare.

When partners travelled away from home for their work, parents had to make other arrangements.

It is the after hours that's the most difficult thing. My husband went away for a conference for a week and that was a really stressful week. I got my mum to come and stay. Because I thought if I needed to get up in the middle of the night and ring her it would be a nightmare. I've got no-one else who could step in and do that. (Midwife 3)

5.7 GRANDPARENTS

A significant number of pre-school children were cared for by grandparents while their parents worked. Some grandparents lived in the same household as their children, and so cared for their grandchildren at home. Others were involved in negotiating the transition between a childcare centre and taking the child home before their parents returned back from work.

On a Thursday my husband starts work late because [son] goes to kindy. He drops [son] off at kindy for a morning session at 9.45am then the grandmothers alternate every second Thursday. So they'll pick [son] up from kindy ... and pick [daughter] up from school and have them either at their place or our place. (Airport quarantine officer 2)

In several cases, grandparents had made significant changes in their lives so that they could support their children and care for their grandchildren.

In one case, a parent said her mother had moved cities so she could provide support during her daughter's study.

[My mother] retired and moved up here to look after the kids when I went to study full-time. She stepped in and did a lot of the picking up stuff and if it was a day where I was called out to a birth she would step in and do it. Because in your training you have a practice component and you have to attend so many births. (Midwife 3)

In another case:

My mother gave up her full-time work to go part-time to help us [look after the children]. I was trying to get [daughter] into early childhood, but they were all full ... as soon as she turned three we got her into kindy. [Interviewer: So what did you do when she was two? You eventually found somewhere?] No we didn't. We had to leave her at home and that's when my mother went from full-time to part-time ... we paid her but it was less [than her full-time job]. But it wasn't really about the money. It was more about getting a stranger to look after her. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

Another grandparent had become a registered home-based caregiver to look after her grandchildren at her home and be paid for it.

I drop them off at my mum ... she's a [home-based caregiver]. She just looks after [my children]. I'm normally at mum's at about 6.15am and then I get home at about 4.30pm and just stay at mum's for a cup of tea, sometimes tea. Because I can't be bothered doing anything [too tired]. Sometimes [child] stays overnight at mum's. (Horticultural seasonal worker 5)

A number of grandparents whom parents relied on were themselves in paid employment and were either unavailable at particular times to assist, or were themselves involved in non-standard work that required further juggling of shifts. One parent in the study, a rest home caregiver who worked up to 60 hours a week, 2.30pm to 11.00pm, relied on the pre-schooler's grandfather during the day. When he started shift work at 5.00pm, childcare was provided by the child's father, or other members of the large extended family, including the grandmother who had two part-time jobs, or the parent's siblings.

In some families, grandparents could only play a limited role in their grandchildren's lives because of their own work commitments, health and inclinations.

[My husband's parents] are a little bit older ... so that has impacted a little because [husband's] mother works full-time and [husband's] father is retired and he has hip problems. I don't feel comfortable leaving my children with him because [the children] are awfully active. So I don't like leaving them with him full-time, for longer than say a couple of hours. (Recruitment centre employee 2)



I've got my dad who we use on occasions. If I start the night shift at 3.45pm and [partner] can't get off till 5.00pm, I'd drop my boy there and [partner] will pick him up from there. He's not really someone I'd be comfortable to leave [son] with for a terribly long time. He's had a hip replacement so he's not really up for the job, but a couple of hours he's fine with. (Airport quarantine officer 1)

My sister has two children. I think [my mother] had a lot of problems with my sister. My sister used to dump kids on her, and mum was working, and she just couldn't be bothered on a Saturday looking after the kids. So I think she's got a bit put off by all that. (Airport quarantine officer 5)

The grandmothers, they've got a life as well, so they can't be on-call. (Airport quarantine officer 2)

Another parent said:

I think [my mum has] had enough now. I think she's quite pleased that [son] is now in full-time childcare. She found it very hard, very tiring. She is 68. She's looked after her own kids. From the beginning it was her idea to move up here and look after the kids. She was pleased for herself to be in that role because it is an important role. I suppose when you're retired [you ask] what is your role. You're not working... She was important to us and that was a really nice part of it for her. She got to do something that a lot of grandparents don't do because they are working. She's got such a fantastic relationship with the kids. She's their second mum. So it worked in a positive way for her, for everybody. Now she's had enough! Now she's getting into so many different activities. I think she's made a transition. She was important [in her caregiving role for us] and now she's into a lot of other things. I think that she's quite happy that her role has finished. I think that she'd kill me if I ever got pregnant again! (Midwife 3)

In some cases, where parents relied on regular support from grandparents, they either paid them or compensated them in some way. One grandparent, for example, was offered a car and petrol to enable her to travel across town to help her family with care. Another parent said:

We are paying her so that is helping. Because we've got to, well we don't have to but... I mean it's not cheap, petrol these days, and she is working part-time [so she can be there to care for her grandchildren]. It comes out of our income and we are working full-time these days so we can manage. Just the times that she is there, just depends on [our financial situation], how much money we are left with. And she's quite happy with it because in the end she is spending time with her grandchildren... I get paid fortnightly so probably \$100 for the first week and the next week \$150. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

In another case, a grandparent was prepared to forego income from shift-work, and not accept payment from the parents, because "she loved being part of her grandchild's upbringing". Some grandparents seemed taken aback by the suggestion that they could be paid for caring for their grandchildren.

No, we all shared the cost of living and the rent, we all shared things. And no, I wouldn't have done that anyway. That was not an agreement ... I would never expect money from them. (Rest home carer 5)

Participants in the study talked about the benefits of having grandparents involved in the care of their grandchildren. One parent said of the relationship between the grandfather and granddaughter:

She learns a lot from from him. I guess he's being more of a mother than I am! (Rest home carer 2)

A grandmother said:

I do it because I enjoy doing it. Our family has always been involved in doing this kind of thing. I looked after an uncle and then I look after my dad ... we always looked after one another ... it's just a natural thing. (Rest home carer 5)

In contrast, two parents also spoke of some concerns they had about the type of care grandparents provided. One parent was not sure that having a grandparent care for her children was always in the best interests of the child's educational development.

My mother is there. But there are other things you'd like to be teaching [your children] but you're not home. There are a lot of things I'd like to teach my girls. I'd probably like to do spelling and maths. I'm not too sure my mother will go through [those things] with them. She'll probably just go through their standard homework. Whereas there are computer programs [that can help with their learning] that I would use. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

Another parent said:

Oh it's alright. Probably a few sort of problems, disciplinary problems. I mean to me, I'm adamant that discipline has to be discipline. Because kids must know structure. They must know what no and yes mean. And it is really important that you drum it into them, and I am the only one that disciplines him ... different cultural beliefs. (Airport quarantine officer 5)

Overall, however, the appreciation for grandparents was great.

I wouldn't survive without them, definitely not! (Airport quarantine officer 2)

She's awesome, my mum. (Horticultural seasonal worker 5)

If I didn't have my mum it would be horrendous. (Midwife 3)

5.8 IMPACT OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENT ON PARENTING

Hearing the parents in the study talk about how they managed their work-life balance led us to consider what sort of impact the work environment might be having on the quality of their parenting. Non-standard work – with its early starts, unpredictable hours and rotating shifts where no one week has the same routine – has significant pressures for parents.

These work patterns are likely to also have an impact on the parent's relationship with their child. For example, many of the parents we interviewed were at work at key 'bonding' times, such as when the child woke in the morning, mealtimes, bathtimes and bedtimes. They talked about not being able to commit to weekend activities like sports.

I mean they are still getting all [they need] ... apart from us ... apart from having the parents, they're still getting everything that they should. (Horticultural seasonal worker 2)

[Husband] wants to take [children] to sports and things like that. I think that's what my girls are missing out on, is that we can't keep to a commitment. [My husband is] working night shift and I'm working night shift. And we can't, as much as we'd want to.

I just think it would be dangerous to put them in a commitment like that because we'll be driving real tired, fatigued, and we'd have an accident. If we did put them in another commitment it would be more work for my mother. So there are things like that we can't do. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

Parents talked about being tired and getting sick.

On your four days off you do nothing. You go home, eat, go to bed, that's it. I don't have time for anything else ... I pick up my wife sometimes at 4.00pm and sometimes we're home by 5.15pm ... she has a shower, I have a shower. Get tea ready. I bath [son] and bed him. He's in bed by 7.00pm, then straight away after that I'm in bed. So there's no time for anything. (Airport quarantine officer 5)

And shift work does make you tired, so I'm not getting that much time with them anyway ... quality time with them. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

The times where I have had to manage both ends of the day on my own I have got sick. (Recruitment centre employee 1)

You get home and all you want to do is sit there and relax and you've got all these kids screaming at you and then [son] comes home and [another child] picks on him. It's just like, oh my gosh! (Horticultural seasonal worker 1)

You can't just look at the fact that I might be at a birth for however long. Because generally I get back from it and am shattered and I need to sleep [so my partner can't necessarily go to work. I can be at a birth for 20 hours and I] can barely walk, let alone feed the children ... so it can end up where [my partner is] taking two whole days off work for a birth. (Midwife 2)

They also talked about sometimes missing family time on the weekend.

[Interviewer: Would you like to not work Saturday?] Definitely. To have more family time. Because we've only got Sunday off [together with husband] and I'm absolutely shattered by Saturday night. It is only really Sunday that is our family day. And then you've got bits and pieces that you need to get done that you can't get done when there are kids around, like painting or doing the lawns. (Airport quarantine officer 2)

When I'm on weekend [shift I get] no rest. Basically trying to spend time with the kids. We do a lot of outdoor things, and school holidays coming up too, that will be different. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

Weekend time is very, very precious. We don't socialise a lot with many friends because it takes away from family time. You really have to be quite selfish because the time you have with your kids when they are in full-time care is very, very precious. (Recruitment centre employee 1)

Two midwives mentioned the negative effects non-standard work hours can have on the parents' couple relationship.

There is a huge divorce rate within midwives. Because it is very hard on families. (Midwife 3)

[My first relationship] didn't survive the midwifery. Definitely adds significant stress on relationships. We have a high percentage of relationships ending. (Midwife 4)

Another parent said:

[Partner's] shifts are from 4.30pm to 11.30pm. He doesn't get home till about midnight... We wait for the weekend [to see each other]. (Horticultural seasonal worker 5)

Some parents talked about the stress associated with organising childcare arrangements and their family generally.

[The roster] will last for three months, but they can't tell you what will happen after that three months. So will it change again, I don't really know ... I have life up till October! ... the not knowing a lot into the future to plan shifts and leave and things like that, it has made it harder. (Airport quarantine officer 1)

It is stressful. What happens if the girls are sick? Who is going to take time off? When they are sick you don't plan it ... a lot of time [thinking about it], lose sleep sometimes, but you get through it ... when you've got the nine-to-five jobs with parents it is so much easier because they're home to get them from school, and you're home to spend tea and do homework with them, and you can commit to the sports and other educational needs for the kids. Whereas us that work shift work, you just can't ... quite scary to think about [having more children]. I'd love to if everything was much easier than it is now. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

The stresses of the job alone, let alone childcare issues, are huge. (Midwife 4)

5.9 SUMMARY

This section considers the factors that parents in the study said influenced the decisions they made about the care of their children while they worked.

Parents said they generally made decisions about childcare with their partner, and sometimes with grandparents where they were going to be involved in providing care. The mother had a more dominant role in making these decisions.

Parents' values played a role in shaping childcare arrangements. They talked about the value they placed on work, and also how they saw their roles as parents. Many said they had chosen to work non-standard hours to allow them to spend more time with their children.

Parents were asked about their satisfaction with their childcare arrangements, and mostly they described very good experiences. They said that care arrangements had positive effects on their children, and spoke highly of their children's caregivers. However, parents were also aware of some of the potential negative effects of having their children in care. Several parents had complex childcare arrangements which included very long hours and multiple caregivers. One home-based caregiver often worked from 5.30am to 10.00pm.

One of the aims of this study was to find out whether parents working non-standard hours experienced barriers in accessing childcare. A limitation of the study was that parents who were unable to match their childcare needs and their non-standard work, and consequentially were not employed in these types of jobs, were not interviewed for the study. The findings of the study, therefore, describe the experiences of parents who were successful in co-ordinating their childcare needs and their non-standard work.

Parents in rural locations who worked early shifts relied on home-based caregivers. Other parents with early starts relied on their partner or grandparents to care for their children early in the morning. Some parents expressed a wish for childcare facilities that would accept their need for care on different days each week, or for their child to attend for half-days rather than full ones. Other parents in the study raised issues for parents who work standard hours, such as waiting lists for children under three years old.

With one exception, all the ECE services that children in the study were enrolled in were offering Free ECE. Most parents appeared to be receiving their Childcare Subsidy and Working for Families entitlements. The government funding and subsidies seemed to ease some of the pressures on these families.

Parents in the study appeared to have fairly stable childcare arrangements in place. Most had back-ups plans. These appeared to be weakest where the parent had limited family support. Parents talked about weighing up their options and being conscious of the need to reciprocate, especially when asking for assistance from family and friends.

Parents were asked what their “ideal” childcare arrangements would be. They frequently talked about having to make trade-offs to be able to juggle their non-standard work and childcare. Some parents would have preferred to not work at all. Others had a strong preference for family to care for their children while they worked. Most parents whose children were cared for outside the home had chosen an ECE service in their neighbourhood. Some parents would have liked more flexibility in the hours and days that ECE services operated. Most said they would like to pay less for childcare; however, they were also grateful for Free ECE. Some said they already had their ideal childcare arrangements in place.

Two factors that appeared to significantly influence childcare arrangements were support from the parent’s partner, and care provided by grandparents. Parents in the study (with the exception of the two single parents) worked with their partner to manage their work and family responsibilities. A number of partners worked in jobs with flexible hours, and this helped accommodate the demands of their partner’s non-standard work. Some parents worked ‘mirror’ shifts so they could care for their children predominantly in their own home.

A significant number of pre-school children in the study were cared for by grandparents while their parents worked. Some parents lived in extended family households. Others talked about their parents making significant changes in their lives so they could care for their grandchildren, such as moving cities and changing jobs. In some cases, grandparents were paid or compensated for the time they spent caring for their grandchildren. Some grandparents played a more limited role because of their own work commitments, health or leisure activities.

Finally, parents in the study talked about the impact the work environment had on their parenting. They talked about missing important times with their children, such as meals and bedtime, and about not being able to commit their children to activities like weekend sports. They talked about being tired and missing family time on the weekends. Some mentioned the stress placed on their couple relationship, and the ongoing stress associated with constantly organising childcare arrangements and their work.

6. PARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF EMPLOYER SUPPORT

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Here we report parents' experiences of how employers responded to their employees' childcare needs, and the managers' experiences of the issues and ideas about how workplaces might respond in the future. We also draw on interviews with the owner of an education and care service and three home-based caregivers about childcare provision in their rural area.

6.2 PARENTS' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR EMPLOYERS' SUPPORT

Parents' accounts of their employers' responses to their childcare needs ranged from very positive to negative. Parents at almost all of the workplaces in our study told us of particular practices that, they said, created flexibility for them and their co-workers as they juggled childcare. For example, in the rest homes and the pack house, shifts were designed to accommodate parents' needs. Some parents could take the child to work with them for a limited period of time (such as the carers at one rest home, to the delight of some residents).

[Interviewer: Have you always been able to get flexibility at your work?] Yes, actually they have always been good to me. The last two years I could say these are the hours I can work. You can take it or leave it, sort of thing, and they always accommodate me. And that's meant I was able to continue with nursing. (Rest home carer 1)

They [employer] are sympathetic to an extent to some of us parents. But all business organisations do have an organisation to run. Basically if you work for a company you have to put your own commitment in and that's what a lot of the staff are struggling with. Because we have work and we have children, and you are always going to say work is going to be a little above because you are providing for your children. (Airport quarantine officer 4)

A father in the study gave an example of his employer's support. The father's work role was flexible enough to allow him to take leave for an hour or so – rather than complete his afternoon shift – so he could collect his child from the education and care service.

In the case of the recruitment centre, account managers could start work later when their partners were away and therefore unable to 'do the drop-offs' at the childcare centre. However, these parents also said they were sometimes unable to attend after-hours client functions, had to sometimes say 'no' to urgent client requests, and felt the need to check emails from home on weekends.

One parent we interviewed had not disclosed to her employer that she had a pre-schooler. When we asked her if that made it difficult for the employer to support her childcare needs, the parent found it hard to believe the employer would consider her needs in any circumstances.

6.3 EMPLOYERS' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES

Employers we interviewed generally expressed a willingness to consider and accommodate the childcare needs of employees. The scope of the accommodation appeared to be influenced by a range of factors.

In some cases, local labour-market dynamics shaped the employer's interest or intention to employ mothers. Managers in the freezing industry spoke of an increasingly tight labour market over the past five years. At one plant, shifts had been reduced from three to two (6.45am to 3.15pm, and 3.45pm to 12.15am) when employers were "unable to get the people and decided to make hours more accommodating to people".

Managers at the horticultural pack house told us they tried to employ mothers on the 7.00am to 4.00pm shift, allowed job sharing of the night shift and employed those who could only work four days a week. Six people at the pack house were allowed to work 9.00am to 3.00pm. However, they also said "we can't have everyone doing it". At the pack house there was some recognition, from managers we spoke to, of the childcare needs of their employees.

If they are struggling with care they can talk to me. I gave one girl two weeks [held her job open] to get reorganised after it all fell through. When it comes to your children, only because I'm a mum, you take the time.

The nature of the work was important. For example, where an employee could be readily substituted the employer was more amenable to some flexibility around late starts, early finishes or absences because of a child's needs. One employer maintained a pool of on-call labour to enable women with childcare needs to leave work early if required.

A rest home employer indicated that it was a challenge managing the requirements of having a registered nurse on duty at all times, and ensuring that they could have breaks and the flexibility to manage their childcare needs. Similarly, employers in seasonal industries in small or rural towns explained that they had to manage their need to maintain adequate staff per shift, when shifts might be understaffed at the start of the season.

What constitutes a 'season' was also a factor in employers' willingness to consider and accommodate the childcare needs of employees. A season varies according to the nature of the product being produced or processed. In our study one season was six months long, and another 11 months. Employers reported that women with childcare requirements preferred the shorter season as they could make informal or private arrangements that friends and family would tolerate more readily for six months than a longer period.

It's a small community and some people do not want to fall out with friends and relations, so short-term work is best for them.

Other factors were important. One employer was considering what changes to its operations and employment agreements might be required if it wanted to employ mothers for the period while their child was at an ECE service. Their view was that the local rules (union as well as accepted practice) about seniority in seasonal industries would make this change difficult.

We would like to bring people in for four-hour slots, unfortunately because of the CEA [Collective Employment Agreement] we require the co-operation of the existing workforce who may see protection for themselves, on account of their seniority, as their priority. But then absenteeism puts more stress on the existing workforce.

One employer noted:

We've got some young couples we have allowed to work alternate shifts, but it is not good for working families ... we keep an eye on them ... got people we can call on to help... Chaplain ... they call me Uncle.

Some employers had considered opening an ECE service at their workplace, but none were giving that current consideration. They noted several drawbacks, particularly compliance with regulations and policies.

A rest home manager said that on a one-to-one basis, they could help to change shifts to suit parents' needs, and they did allow people to swap their shifts. Assorted start-times for caregivers on early shifts were structured around employees' childcare arrangements.

The independent midwives in our sample were an exception as they worked with other midwives in a collective, and so were self-employed. As a collective, they organised a model of working together that suited the needs of all their members, including a system of back-up midwives and cover for weekends.

As previously noted, the employer of airport quarantine officers had recently undertaken a review of their service. The team manager noted:

Since we did this change here the staff have been quite unhappy. The reason they've been unhappy is the change. We've changed their teams. The times they've worked. The people they used to socialise with on their days off are now working opposite them ... it's not like if you work 8.00am to 5.00pm and your work may change, but you're still working 8.00am to 5.00pm. With shift-work, the work might change and the hours might change and the days might change that you're needed to work... You can't put anything in concrete.



During the interview some employers noted that participating in the research had made them realise that they could get more information about the support and options available to their employees. Those employers intended to approach Work and Income and a local ECE provider to increase their understanding of childcare options for employees, and their organisation.

6.4 PARENTS' SUGGESTIONS OF HOW THE EMPLOYER COULD DO BETTER

Parents offered various suggestions about how their employers could do better. Some revealed a greater understanding than others of the constraints under which their employers and managers operated.

One parent felt that her employer did not like employees taking time off for sickness, and so often her child had had to go to the home-based service feeling unwell. The employer required a doctor's certificate if there was any absenteeism. She felt that the employer did not know anything about childcare subsidies or arrangements that mothers had to manage to enable them to go to work.

One parent spoke of the pressure on her in a production-line situation: 'I don't feel I can leave work until all the product has gone'. That sometimes means 'I leave work after three o'clock and can't guarantee to be at [home-based service] by 3.30pm'.

Parents on rotating shifts would have liked to see more opportunities for shift swapping, but 'it is pretty hard to shift-swap. Everyone wants the same shifts'.

One parent was of the view that large employers should provide childcare services at the workplace as part of their commitment to being a family-friendly and 'good' employer.

6.5 SOME CHILDCARE PROVIDERS INCREASINGLY RESPONSIVE

Since the focus of our study was on parents, we did not seek information from ECE service providers. In the rural centre that we visited, however, we learnt that some childcare providers were becoming increasingly responsive. In this rural area, because there was a lot of non-standard work, the local Kindergarten was being very responsive to parents' needs and was thinking of offering extended hours. Another childcare provider extended their responsiveness to include the unpredictable needs of the local Fire and Ambulance Services. If necessary, members of the local volunteer fire brigade could drop their children at the childcare centre on their way to the fire station to respond to a call-out.



7. FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

All parents juggle family responsibilities and commitments outside the home, particularly paid work. This report has focused on the particular forms of juggling done by parents of pre-school children in our study who work non-standard hours and days.

Non-standard work is undertaken by many people in many different industries and workplaces. There is no 'typical' non-standard workplace. The three categories of non-standard work used for this study – non-standard work with regular, irregular and unpredictable hours – provided a useful framework which acknowledged this variability.

Working non-standard hours adds a level of complexity to a family's work-life balance. People who work non-standard hours often have interrupted sleep patterns, have less routine and predictability in their working week and may work 'antisocial' hours, limiting opportunities for social and leisure activities. The following aspects of non-standard work particularly affected the parents in our study, and their ability to manage the care arrangements for their pre-school-aged children: on-call work which was highly unpredictable and did not allow for planning in advance; early shift starts; rotating shifts where the parents' work pattern changed every week; work over the weekend.

There are advantages to non-standard work. Non-standard work offered opportunities for some parents to earn a higher income. We also saw examples where non-standard work gave people without formal qualifications greater flexibility to get on-the-job training. Shift-work meant that both parents and, often, the wider family could juggle paid work and have more childcare provided by family members.

In this study we found parents using various types of care for their children while they did non-standard work. Parents used informal care, provided by their partner, grandparents and other family members and friends. Parents also used formal ECE, including education and care services, Kindergartens, home-based services and Kōhanga Reo. Most parents used a combination of informal and formal care. Some parents also used more than one form of formal care – for example, a home-based service (for an early morning shift) followed by Kindergarten. Some of these arrangements were quite complex. Some children had multiple caregivers and others spent long hours in care each week (up to 57½ hours a week for one child). Some home-based caregivers were also working very long hours.

Most parents chose an ECE provider in their home neighbourhood (as opposed to near their workplace). Travel time was a feature for parents working in both urban and rural locations.

Some parents expressed a wish for ECE services that catered for their non-standard hours of work better – for example, open longer hours, open over the weekend, more flexibility in the days their child could attend (so the care could match their rotating shift roster) and part- rather than full days.

Parents with early shifts, who were solo mothers or whose partner was unavailable to care for the child in the morning, all used home-based services which began caring for the children at 5.30am.

Generally, parents with limited family support (no partner, grandparents or other extended family members) had fewer options for informal care for their pre-school-aged children. Similarly, the household in which the parent lived influenced the type of care arrangements they had for their pre-schooler, with more informal care being provided where the parent lived in an extended family household.

The support and involvement of partners and grandparents in childcare emerged as a dominant theme in the study. The willingness and availability of partners and families to care for the children of parents who worked non-standard hours was a key factor in parents' decision-making about their childcare arrangements. Without this support, many of the parents in our study would simply not have been able to continue the work they did. Being able to work together as a team meant that the parent working non-standard hours and their partner could, more often than not, successfully manage their work and family commitments.

Grandparents eased the pressure even further. Some grandparents were paid for the care they provided.¹¹ For many grandparents, caring for their grandchildren was a special role they felt privileged to undertake. Caring for and developing a relationship with their grandchildren while supporting their own child and their partner was important to them. Some parents didn't, or were reluctant to, have their children cared for by grandparents for long periods of time. They were conscious of their age, ability, health and desire to maintain an independent and busy life.

This sense of not overburdening family members with care responsibilities also extended beyond grandparents. Parents were conscious of the need to reciprocate when asking their siblings or friends to help care for their children.

A thread running through the interviews was the strong sense of love that parents had for their young children. The parents demonstrated in their actions that, in the words of one of the sole parents, their child "came first". Indeed, one of the perceived benefits of non-standard work was the increased opportunity it provided to spend time with pre-school-aged children. We also observed the positive influence a good ECE service can have on families.

However, we also observed some of the downsides to non-standard work. We wondered to what extent children are disadvantaged when they are not with their parents or wider family at critical bonding times like wakening, mealtimes, coming home, and the dinner, bath, bedtime routine. Weekend work significantly affects quality family time. Some of these issues are not unique to parents who work non-standard hours.

The constant juggling and stress were significant for many parents. Despite the creativity, energy and efforts of parents, their partners and extended families and friends to ensure that children were well cared for, when we interviewed parents we heard and saw evidence of overworking and high levels of stress. On the other hand, most parents had fairly stable childcare arrangements and back-up plans.

Parents' decisions were influenced by the values they held about their role as parents, what it meant to be a family and the place of work in their lives. For some parents, keeping the care of their children within the family was very important. For some parents, financial pressures, especially mortgages, meant they were spending more time at work and away from their children than they ideally wanted. Mothers were often the key negotiators in making decisions about childcare. Parents usually made decisions together and grandparents were also often involved.

The cost of childcare was mentioned by most parents, irrespective of their income. However, parents in the study were also grateful for the assistance provided by Free ECE for three- and four-year-olds, and we got a sense that this assistance eased some pressures for them. We also observed that most parents were aware of and were accessing the funding and subsidies they were entitled to.

¹¹ In the Families Commission Successful Outcomes project (2005), one suggestion for helping families was "providing money for grandparents who are the main caregivers for their grandchildren so they have the resources to look after them as they would wish and are given recognition for their role" (p 9).

We found examples of well-informed employers who were experienced in working with employees who had childcare needs. We also found that the flexibility provided to employees varied across workplaces. The nature of some workplaces (such as the production line) limited the amount of flexibility that could be offered. In contrast, rest homes, in particular, were very flexible and could accommodate their employees' childcare needs.

Labour markets in some industries meant that in some places mothers were seen as key employees and, consequently, employers were finding ways to be flexible to accommodate parents' needs while still meeting the demands of their business. We found evidence in one rural community of an ECE service that was becoming increasingly responsive to the needs of working parents.



7.1 CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The following points summarise some of the key findings of this study and point to areas where further research could be undertaken.

- > Having different care options is important. Parents make active choices and mix-and-match care services to fit their individual circumstances.
- > Partners often work together as a team to make decisions about childcare for the overall benefit of their family.
- > The development of ECE services within neighbourhoods, close to the child's home, should be encouraged. Further consideration should be given to the viability of locating ECE services as part of workplaces.
- > Some pre-school-aged children are in ECE services for long hours and some caregivers are working long hours. The impact of this should be considered further.¹²
- > Recognition should be given to the role that is played by grandparents in the care of pre-school-aged children.
- > Free ECE and financial support provided by the Government for working parents seemed to be easing pressures on the parents in this study.
- > The pressure to work (usually financial) significantly compromises some parents, who would rather be at home caring for their children. Nonetheless, the intrinsic value of working was also important to many parents in the study.
- > Employers should continue to be supported so they can offer flexibility to their employees with children.
- > The study did not include parents of pre-school-aged children who were unable to find a balance between their caregiving responsibilities and working non-standard hours. Further research could consider the barriers these parents faced.

¹² The Families Commission has a qualitative study underway to find out more about parents who work long hours.

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APPENDIX 1

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS FOR PARENTS AND EMPLOYERS

Questions for parent/employees

Family and job context: Who are the members of your family and what are their ages (*where appropriate to ask*)? What is the nature of your current job and working hours?

What are your family's ECE needs?

What are your priorities for ECE (*eg, education/social development/safe childcare*) while you work?

What would your ideal ECE arrangements be? What kind of service would you like to use? When and where? (*Now, in the past and in the future? Formal and informal ECE?*)

What ECE arrangements have you made? How have these changed or how do you see them changing in the future? (*Where is the gap between this ideal, and their current situation? Eg they may not be satisfied with the standard of care provided by an extended family member, but feel they have no alternative.*)

What prevents you from having your ideal ECE arrangement? (*Eg, cost/lack of availability/can't get place/too far away/doesn't exist/doesn't fit in with arrangements for other children.*)

Who makes decisions about your hours of work, shifts, etc? What happens when these change? (*Formal policies and informal practices. Do they feel they can ask their manager or team leader if there is a problem over access to ECE?*)

What are the implications for you and your family of not being able to make your ideal ECE arrangements? What trade-offs do you have to make? What kind of challenges does this present?

What support do you rely on from outside the home for ECE? Other members of family? Friends? Neighbours?

Questions around the person's motivation for their choice of work, and the influence (if any) on their decisions about the care for their child. Eg, was their choice of work a vocation; or did they have little choice about where to work (eg low skills, limited local opportunities); or did they choose their work because it fitted around their family commitments?

QUESTIONS FOR EMPLOYERS/TEAM LEADERS

The questions will vary depending on the nature of the industry, the size of the firm or organisation, whether the interviewee is the employer, HR manager or team leader.

Context: What is the nature of your business/role and what is the profile of your workforce/staff? (*This could include length of time in business, size, number and composition of staff (ethnicity, gender, skill levels). Some of the information will be available to researchers in published form, so that we can avoid having to spend too much time on the context.*)

Can you tell me a little about your understanding of employees' childcare needs?

What challenges do employees' childcare needs present for you as an employer/manager?

As an employer/manager, what do you do to help employees with their childcare needs (*eg, policies, subsidies, schemes such as holiday programmes, flexibility over shifts*)?

Is there anything more you think you, as an employer/manager, would like to do (*could do*) to help your employees manage their childcare needs?

What else would help you manage the challenges of employees' childcare needs (*eg, local/national government, community initiatives*)?

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