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June 2007

Hooray for vacation! But what about summer childcare for six-year-olds?

By AMÉLIE DUCHARME and HÉLÈNE DESROSIERS, Institut de la statistique du Québec

When summer arrives and classes end, parents almost always have to change or adapt their school-year strategies so that they can balance work and family life. During summer breaks, which tend to average about ten weeks, parents have a number of childcare options for their school-aged children. Some parents prefer to arrange it through their families (involving either a parent – if work can be missed for several weeks in a row – or another person), whereas others favour childcare settings specially adapted for this time of year.

Whether for a few weeks or for the whole vacation period, 53% of 6-year-old children regularly received childcare during the summer period in 2004, according to data from the *Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development* (QLSCD 1998-2010), because of the work or school obligations of their parents. Of this number, nearly 61% received care solely from organized childcare services, such as day camps or vacation camps, whether public or private, whereas about 32% were in childcare either in their own home (16%) or in someone else's (16%). Nearly 7% of the children in childcare in the summer of 2004 experienced more than one type of care arrangement (Figure 1).

The duration of summer childcare

These Québec children received childcare, on average, for a little more than six weeks. Actually, nearly 61% of the children received care for at least six weeks, of whom 32% did so for the entire summer or almost (between eight and ten weeks). No significant differences emerged, however, for either childcare arrangement relative to the average number of weeks that children received care.

Summer childcare was used less often for children from low-income families...

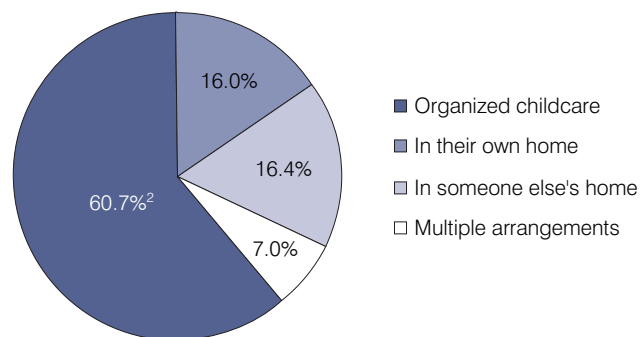
Among children whose parents were actively employed in the spring of 2004, the majority received regular childcare during the following summer. In fact, nearly two children out of three (65%) with an employed single parent or with both parents working received regular care during the summer. The remaining children (35%) had other arrangements. It may be that some parents saw their work situations change and that others had jobs allowing them to care for their young children during the summer (e.g., teaching jobs, staggered work schedules or work days, time taken off work during the summer months). Other parents may have preferred opting to use childcare only occasionally.

Income level was closely associated with the choices parents made about summer childcare. About 45% of children from low-income

What is meant by summer childcare?

Questions about childcare arrangements for the summer of 2004 were retrospectively asked to parents in the spring of 2005, at the time of the eighth round of the QLSCD. Summer childcare as defined here means regularly taking children to childcare, between June 23 and August 30, 2004, because parents were working or in school. No specific information concerning the number of days a week or the number of weeks of childcare was given to parents; they were the ones who had to define what they meant by regular childcare. Concerning the childcare arrangements used, these could have been public or private, paid or unpaid (e.g., grandparents, older siblings, cousins, friends).

Figure 1
Distribution of 6-year-old children¹ regularly receiving childcare during the summer months, by childcare arrangements, Québec, 2004



1. Children born in Québec only.

2. This category includes mainly day camps (59%).

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, QLSCD 1998-2010.

families¹ received childcare during the summer months in 2004, compared with 56% of other children. This disparity, however, has to do with the fact that children in the former group were less likely to have working parents; the relationship disappears when the parental employment status is taken into account.

1. Based on low-income cut-offs as defined by Statistics Canada according to size of family and region of residence for the reference year 2003.

... and among children from large families

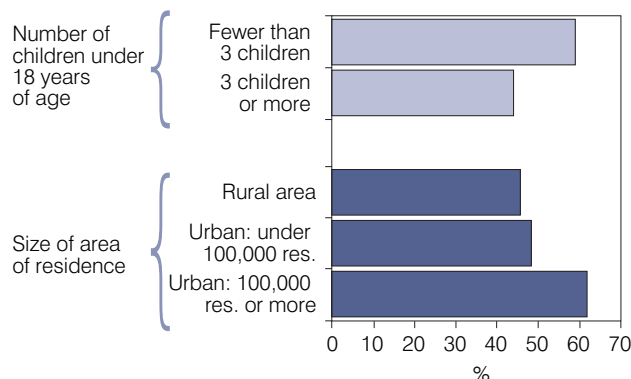
One might expect that strategies adopted by parents concerning childcare would vary according to the number of dependent children they have. Here the data show that the use of summer childcare is less frequent among children from large families: 44% of six-year-olds from households with three children or more were in childcare during the 2004 summer season, whereas the same was true for 59% of children living in households with fewer than three children (Figure 2). The disparity by number of children remains even when we take into account parental employment activity. It could have to do with the different employment characteristics among mothers of large families. According to QLSCD data, these mothers more frequently held part-time jobs; it might therefore prove more practical or more financially advantageous for some of these families to make other arrangements. By contrast, neither the educational attainment of the mother nor her immigrant status appears to be associated with the use of summer childcare for six-year-olds, which was also the case for family type (single-parent, intact two-parent, or blended two-parent families).

Organized childcare services were more popular in large urban areas

According to QLSCD data, six-year-old children living in urban settings were more likely than their peers living in rural areas to have had childcare during the summer of 2004 (56% as opposed to 46%). Within urban settings, an internal distinction emerges: a greater proportion of children living in areas with 100,000 inhabitants or more were placed in childcare than those living in smaller urban areas (62% as opposed to 48%; Figure 2). As for the preferred childcare arrangements, children from large urban areas were more likely to go to organized childcare services (69% as opposed to 54% of children in urban areas under 100,000 inhabitants and 45% of rural children). Variations in the labour force participation rate among mothers or in the supply of organized childcare services could, in part, account for observed regional differences.

Figure 2

Proportion of 6-year-old children¹ regularly receiving childcare during the summer months, by number of children under 18 years of age in household and size of area of residence², Québec, 2004



1. Children born in Québec only.

2. Spring 2004.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, QLSCD 1998-2010.

Concluding remarks

Quite a few Québec families used some form of childcare for their six-year-old children during the summer months of 2004. The majority of these children were looked after in organized childcare services.

In the spring of 2005, when the eighth QLSCD round took place, around 54% of parents mentioned wanting to put their seven-year-old children in childcare during the summer, which was the same proportion for the preceding summer. Organized childcare services remained the arrangement preferred by 68% of parents. Data retrospectively gathered in 2006 will allow us to find out to what extent parental intentions were actually carried out.

About the survey

The Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2010) is conducted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec (ISQ) in collaboration with various partners. The Study is financed by the Ministry of Health and Social Services of Québec (MSSS), the Ministry of Families and Seniors (MFS), Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon, and the ISQ. The main objective of this study is to understand pathways and to identify the factors that, during early childhood, contribute to social adjustment and the educational achievement of Québec children when they enter the school system.

The population targeted by the QLSCD was made up of children (singleton births only) born to mothers residing in Québec in 1997-1998, excepting those with mothers then residing in the administrative regions (as defined by the Ministry of Health and Social Services) of Northern Québec, the Cri territories, and the Inuit territories, as well as on Indian reserves. The initial sample suitable for longitudinal follow-up was made up of 2,120 children.

More information about the survey may be found on the QLSCD web site, also known as "I am, I'll be", at www.jesuisjeserai.stat.gouv.qc.ca.

For access to the microdata file for the survey, contact the Research Data Access Centre of the ISQ (Centre d'accès aux données de recherche de l'ISQ – CADRISQ) at www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/cadrisq, or call 1 514 343-2299.

This fact sheet, translated by Robert Sullivan, is also available in French under the title « Vive les vacances! Qu'en est-il de la garde estivale à 6 ans? ».

This bulletin was designed by Direction Santé Québec

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Legal deposit

Library and Archives Canada
Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec
2nd Quarter 2007
ISSN 1913-4851 (printed version)
ISSN 1913-486X (on-line version)

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Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2007

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