

Key Messages

Most children today are in child care.

- In this study, 65 per cent of children were in some type of child care between the ages of 3 and 8.
- Other studies show that 68 per cent of Canadian parents who were either working or studying placed their preschool children in some type of child care.

Child care quality helps determine how it influences children's development and behaviour.

- Quality child care includes caregivers who:
 - are responsive and sensitive to children
 - offer a language-rich environment
 - engage children in activities that promote child development
- Child care in this study was linked to better learning for children and at the same time, it was linked to more aggressive behaviour. Experts believe that this is because lower quality child care can lead to more aggressive behavior in children.

Children in the francophone school division were better prepared to learn if they had been in child care where French was spoken.

- In "français" Kindergarten, children who had spoken and had been spoken to in French in child care centres or nursery schools, at home with their parents or during community activities had a richer vocabulary and could more easily communicate with their teachers and classmates.
- Early childhood is the time where language is more easily learned than any other time.

Parents are the most important people in their children's lives.

- Activities that parents do with their children along with parental characteristics (eg: education and income) have strong influences on child development.
- It is important for parents to laugh and play with their children, read to them, teach them to count, sing songs to them and provide praise and encouragement.

Insights into Child Care from Two Manitoba Communities

Introduction

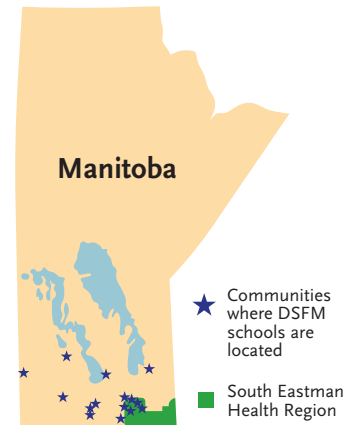
Child care is an important issue for Canadian families and for Canada's future. Research in early brain development tells us that children need a secure and stimulating environment for healthy child development. More Canadian children than ever before are in child care. They are growing up in families where both parents are working or studying or they are in single-parent families.

High quality child care encourages healthy development in children and provides

sensitive care while parents are at work or at school.

Depending on the quality of care and length of time spent in care, child care can improve children's learning and help disadvantaged children thrive. However, poor quality child care can be harmful to children.

The 1997 Manitoba Birth Cohort Study helped us learn about the types of child care arrangements used in Manitoba. The children and families in the 1997 study were from two Manitoba communities: the South Eastman Health Region and Manitoba's francophone community. To continue to improve child care, it is important that we understand the effects of child care on development.



How families use child care

- Family-based child care was the most common care experienced by children.
- As children grow, they are less likely to be in child care.
- Parents choose different types of child care as their children grow.
- Communities differ in the type and length of time children spend in child care.

What do we call child care in this study?

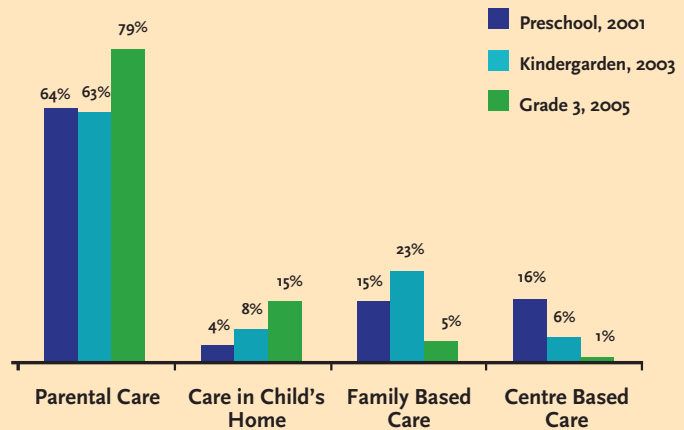
- **Centre-Based Child Care:** This refers to child care centres, preschool programs, nursery schools and after-school child care. Most centres are licensed* and usually offer full-time care for children.
- **Care in a Child's Home:** This is provided by someone in the child's home such as a parent, relative, nanny or babysitter.
- **Family Based Child Care:** This refers to care given in the care provider's home. It may be licensed* or unlicensed**.
- **Parental Care:** This refers to parents who care for their own children.

* Licensed care conforms to formal provincial standards and is monitored regularly by the province.

** Unlicensed care can be by a relative, friend or neighbour and may not necessarily conform to provincial standards.

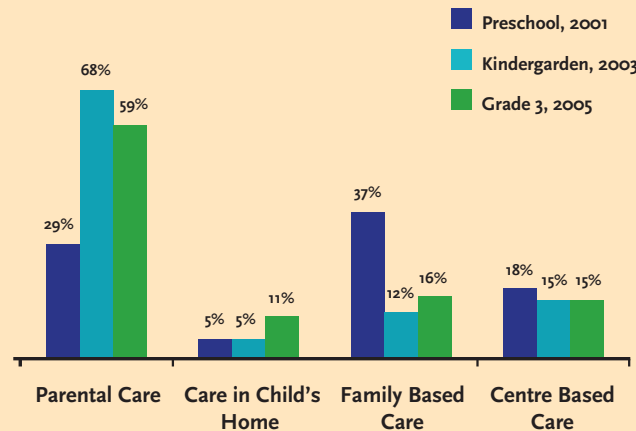
In preschool, 36 per cent of children in the South Eastman Health Region were in child care.

Child Care in South Eastman Health Region



In the francophone community, 71 per cent of preschool children were in child care.

Child Care in the Francophone Community



How The 1997 Manitoba Birth Cohort Study was done

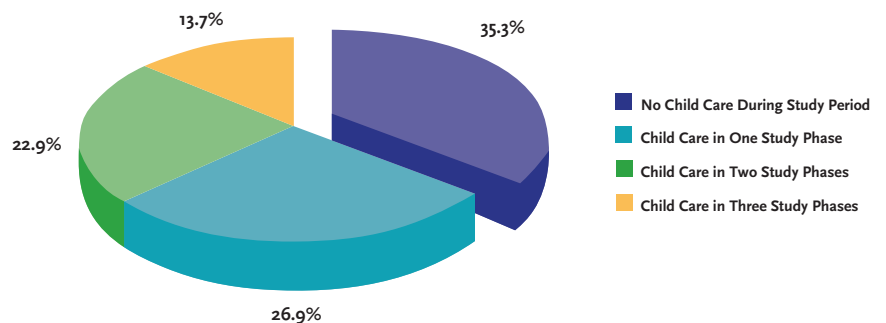
In 2001, parents and their children (ages 3 and 4) participated in this study.

- 347 children from Manitoba's rural south eastern region, defined by the boundaries of the South Eastman Health Region
- 193 francophone children from communities with a school in the francophone school division across the province (including Winnipeg and the South Eastman Health Region)

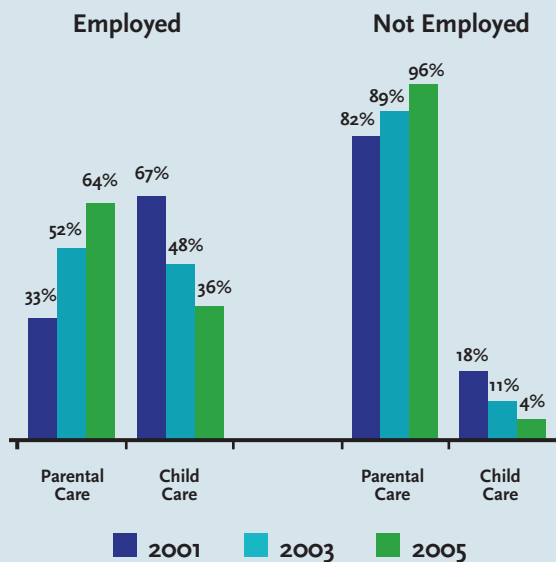
In 2003 (children were in Kindergarten) and 2005 (children were in Grade 3), parents and children were re-interviewed about child and family characteristics and child development and behaviour.

Almost 65 percent of all children in the study were in child care at some point.

Child Care Across Phases of the Study



The most important factor in deciding to use child care is whether the mother is employed outside the home.



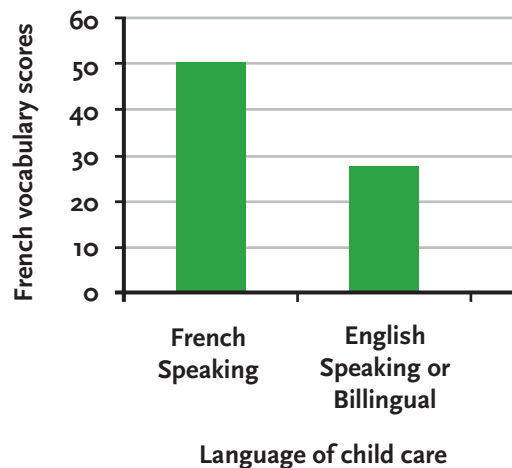
Characteristics of families most likely to use child care, in order of importance:

- mothers who were employed
- single parents
- families with preschool aged children (compared to school age children)
- mothers with Grade 12 or higher education
- families with middle or higher family incomes (over \$30,000)
- English or French speaking families (compared to other languages)

How child development and behaviour were measured:

- Reading skills were measured by how children communicate in preschool (Ages and Stages Questionnaire), their literacy skills in Kindergarten (Early Development Instrument) and how well children read in Grade 3 (reported by teachers).
- Learning ability was measured by how children understand and use symbols (Who Am I? Instrument) in preschool and Kindergarten. It included how well they read and how well they understand mathematics in Grade 3 (reported by teachers).
- Aggressive behaviour was reported by parents. Parents were asked if they observed their children bullying or being mean to others, getting into physical fights, kicking, biting or hitting other children.
- Positive social behaviour was reported by parents. They were asked if they observed their children engaging in co-operative play with others, trying to help or comfort another child who was crying or upset.

Francophone children in French-speaking child care centres had higher vocabulary scores in Kindergarten.



What is the link between child care and child development?

- **Children in centre-based child care** appear to have higher reading skills and better ability to learn in school than children cared for solely by their parents.
- **Children in family-based child care** appear to have higher reading skills than children cared for solely by their parents. This was found only for middle and higher income families. In lower income families, there were no differences in reading skills between family-based child care and parental care.
- **Children cared for in their homes** by someone other than their parents appear to have poorer reading skills than children cared for solely by their parents.
- **Children who were in child care** (any type) appeared to show more aggressive behaviour than children who were cared for solely by their parents.
- No differences were found in positive social skills between children in child care and children cared for solely by their parents.

What else was linked to healthy child development?

- parents who do activities with their children (eg: reading to them, making puzzles or playing outside)
- mothers with a high school education or higher
- family income higher than \$30,000 per year
- living in an urban area (Winnipeg or Steinbach) rather than a rural area
- quicker development by girls than boys
- ability to learn in school and to behave better increase with age

What to look for in a child care centre or a family-based child care:

When you visit a family based child care or a child care centre, consider the following questions:

- Is the child care centre or home clean and safe?
- Do the children appear to be happy and enthusiastic in what they are doing?
- Do the adults appear to be warm, friendly and responsive to the needs of the children in their care?
- Is the centre or provider licensed by the provincial government?
- Does the centre have a plan of activities for the children?
- What do they do when children misbehave?
- What experience does the staff or family child care provider have?
- What education and training have the staff or provider completed?
- For how many children are individual staff members responsible at any one time during the day?

For more information, see *A Parent's Guide to Quality Child Care* in the Publications and Information section at www.manitoba.ca/childcare or call 945-0776 (Winnipeg); toll free at 1-888-213-4754

“What transpires in the family appears to be more important in explaining children’s early social and emotional development than whether children are cared for by someone other than their mothers on a routine basis.”

NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2005) *Nonmaternal Care and Family Factors in Early Development: An overview of the NICHD Study of Child Care*. The Guilford Press. p.280



Next steps

In 2008, the provincial government launched Family Choices: Manitoba’s Five-Year Agenda for Early Learning and Child Care. The province is increasing its investment in early learning and child care. Plans include:

- funding more child care spaces
- building and renovating child care centres, including converting extra school space into child care centres
- supporting high quality child care
- improving wages for child care workers

To learn more about Family Choices, visit www.manitoba.ca/childcare or call 945-0770 (Winnipeg; toll free at 1-888-213-4754.

More details about this study can be found in the following reports. “*The Long-term Effects of Child Care on Children*” is available online at

www.manitoba.ca/healthychild/ or call 945-2266 in Winnipeg; toll free at 1-888-213-4754. “*Living in French in Early Childhood and Learning in français Schools: Is There a Connection*” is available upon request at the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine at (204) 878-9399. (Summary report is available in English and the full report is available in French only.)

