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The role of informal childcare: A synthesis and critical review of the evidence

Full report

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1 Executive summary

1.1 Overview

This study explores what we do and do not know about the roles that 'informal childcare' play for different families. It shows how these have evolved over the past decade – and discusses how they may continue to evolve – in the light of demographic and policy changes. It documents what is and is not known about the quality of 'informal childcare' and its effects on child development. And it assesses the economic arguments for state support of informal childcare. The report combines new empirical analysis (of the Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents, the Millennium Cohort Study, the British Social Attitudes Survey and the Labour Force Survey) with a review of the published quantitative and qualitative evidence.

This executive summary highlights key findings, with the intention of pointing the reader to the more detailed discussions in later chapters. It describes, rather than attempts to draw conclusions from, the evidence. For a broader discussion of the evidence and its implications, the reader should refer to the summary report '*The role of informal childcare: critiquing the evidence'*.

1.2 Definitions and scope of review

Defining precisely what is meant by 'informal childcare' is not straightforward. The term is used to mean different things – and sometimes left as a loose definition – in different contexts. At its broadest, it is simply the converse of 'formal childcare'. Formal childcare is childcare which is government-regulated (and studies usually include early years provision within this umbrella term) and can either be paid for by parents (with or without government or employer subsidies) or be provided free at source as part of the entitlement to part-time early years provision. If we take 'informal childcare' to be simply the converse of formal childcare, then it is 'unregulated childcare', and some studies do define it as such. **However, the central focus of *this* review is on childcare provided by non-parental family and friends, regardless of whether that care is regular or an ad hoc arrangement.** Childcare that sits on the blurred boundary between 'formal' and 'informal childcare' is not included in this definition, nor is care provided by either non-resident or resident parents. In reality, the review often focuses on the role played by grandmothers, given their importance amongst informal childcarers. The review has a strong focus on informal childcare used to facilitate parental work or study. The role that some grandparents play as *sole carers* or guardians of their grandchildren is outside of the remit of this review. The review has tried to look across the UK, but has an inevitable focus on England, in part due to data limitations.

1.3 The current use of informal childcare

This review has produced new empirical evidence on who uses different types of informal childcare, and when and how they use it. The key finding is that families who use informal childcare are not a homogeneous group and neither is there a 'model' way in which informal childcare is used. More detailed findings include the following *(and see Chapter 4 for full details)*:

1.3.1 Packages of care and duration of use

- Informal childcare is often used as part of a package that includes both formal and informal childcare, particularly for preschool children. Most packages combine group-based formal childcare with grandparental care. Some parents are combining childcare in order to provide the necessary care to fit with their working patterns; others choose to use more than one provider in order to give children a more varied or better experience.
- Pre-school children spend fewer hours with informal providers than they do with formal providers. Although reliance on grandparents as a sole provider of childcare (outside school) is greater for older children, these children are not spending many hours a day or week with them. This information is key when considering the relationship between children's educational and socio-emotional development and their childcare provision.
- Informal childcare is much more likely to be used than formal childcare to cover non-standard working hours *(see Chapter 5)*. This may reflect parental choice and views (of both parents and grandparents) about what is the 'best' childcare for children in their traditional 'leisure' or 'family' time. But it may also reflect the mismatch between parents' working hours and the availability of formal childcare.
- Families rely more on informal childcare during the school holidays than they do in term-time, either because they needed no term-time childcare (because of the hours covered by the school day) or because their formal provision is not available for any or all of the holiday hours required. Parents rely heavily on grandparents to provide this holiday care.

1.3.2 Variations between different families and children

- Informal childcare is important across all stages of childhood. Although the proportion of children in any form of childcare decreases as children get older, the relative proportions using informal childcare to formal childcare increases. Half (51 per cent) of the pre-school children who are in any childcare while parents work spend some time with informal childcare providers. For many (23 per cent) this is as part of a package in combination with formal childcare. The proportions of children with informal childcare providers while parents work increases to 60 per cent for primary school children and 82 per cent for secondary school children. However, as these children get older, they are less and less likely to be with both formal and informal providers. Only 15 per cent of primary school children and five per cent of secondary school children who are in childcare while parents work have some kind of package which includes both informal and formal childcare. Grandparents continue to be important carers for older children, but other informal providers, such as older siblings, play a larger role.
- The vast majority of informal childcare is done by grandparents rather than other relatives, friends or neighbours. Among working parents, similar proportions use formal childcare as use informal childcare, but grandparents are used more than twice as often as any other formal or informal childcare provider.
- Use of informal childcare is common among families across all socio-demographic groups. Although there is an income gradient, it is perhaps weaker than one might expect. This leads us to infer that parents do not solely choose informal childcare because it is low or no cost. Nor do they only use it because they have no other options open to them.

- Working lone parents – particularly those with school-age children – rely more on informal childcare than working couple parents. However, the differences are not as stark as one might expect, and perhaps working lone parents are relying on informal childcare in periods where couple parents are looking after children between them. There are also associations between using informal childcare and mothers being poorer, younger, less qualified, from lower socio-economic groups, and living in urban areas outside of London, although substantial proportions of families who fall outside of these groups also use informal childcare.
- Within all informal care options, less-educated mothers rely on a wider set of informal providers than more-educated mothers. Among children who are in childcare while their parents to work, Asian children are more likely to be cared for solely by informal carers, but White children are more likely than others to be looked after solely by their grandparent (28 per cent). Six in ten Black children rely solely on formal care. These differences in the use of informal (and formal) childcare could reflect differences in cultural attitudes to the role of mothers and the appropriateness of familial care, differences in the propensity to be a lone parent or couple family, geographical differences, or differences in the availability of informal childcarers *(see Chapter 5)*.
- The attractions of informal childcare for student parents include that it can be nearer home; that it can be flexible; that student parents sometimes need childcare outside of non-standard hours; and that, because most student parents have school-age children, they need 'wraparound' care to cover the before and after school period *(see Chapter 5).*

The review identified several areas where the research base was limited: childcare provision during school holidays, childcare for families with children with SEN and disabled children *(see Chapter 5)*, childcare used by student parents, and childcare use by minority ethnic families.

1.4 Informal childcare and government policy and changes since the National Childcare Strategy

Few of the policies of the previous government were directly concerned with informal childcare, but the amount of informal childcare that is used will clearly be affected by a wide range of the previous government's policies which either affect parents' and informal childcarers' decisions about paid work. A number of policies have resulted in an increase in maternal work (eg the minimum wage; changes to taxes, tax credits and benefits; maternity leave and pay flexible working rights; welfare reforms and the conditions placed on lone parents). These may have affected the demand for childcare, be it formal or informal. A second set of policies have altered the nature of the childcare choices available to parents. Most of these relate to formal childcare, including the childcare element of the working tax credit; tax-free childcare vouchers; entitlement to early education; extended schools; various smaller policies to expand formal childcare or raise its quality. However, the increase in the state pension age for women may have affected the supply of informal childcare.

Across all socio-economic groups, the number of working families – both lone parent and couples – has increased since 1999. There has also been a fall in those working fewer than 16 hours each week. Consistent with these trends, the use of both formal and informal childcare has risen since 1999. The rise has been at a faster rate for formal childcare, and so there are now more children in formal than informal childcare. The number of formal childcare places registered with Ofsted has also risen, as would be expected. This rise has been accompanied

by increases in the proportion of parents who think that there is a sufficient number of childcare places in their locality, and that the quality of these places is fairly or very good (it is not known how parents' views of the affordability of formal childcare have changed over the period). But even in 2008, almost as many parents said that there was not enough formal childcare as said there was enough, and parents were split on whether childcare was affordable, so the proponents of the National Childcare Strategy cannot claim that it is fulfilling the needs of all parents.

A key finding for this review is that the number of children in informal childcare has risen over the past decade across all age ranges (of children) and socio-economic groups (of their parents), (although the evidence to suggest a fall in the numbers between 2004 and 2008). The increase is mainly accounted for by more children being looked after by their grandparents. As a considerable proportion of the increase in *formal* childcare use is due to preschool children attending part-time early years provision, some of the rise in the numbers of children in *informal* childcare may reflect that the two are used in conjunction with each other (trends in the combinations of care used for work-related reasons are not available from the Childcare Survey). Indeed, it seems that this may be the case because, as a proportion of all time spent in childcare, the hours that children spend with informal providers has fallen between 2004 and 2008, in relation to the hours spent in formal care.

Some have suggested that the rising employment rate amongst older workers will reduce the scope for grandparents to provide informal childcare. But the literature does not support such firm conclusions. It is possible that the amount of childcare that grandparents can offer will fall in future, either because more grandparents want to remain in paid work, or because more become involved in caring for adults, but the use of grandparents as informal childcarers has risen over the past decade at the same time as the employment rate of older workers has risen.

See Chapter 3 for more detail on the trends in supply and demand over the past decade.

1.5 Why do parents choose informal over formal childcare?

Several studies have looked at the reasons that parents give for choosing particular formal and informal providers, although many are subject to the limitations of asking parents to retrospectively rationalise their choices. Their findings are relatively consistent, although there is variation in the extent to which importance is placed on informal childcare being low or no cost, with survey data tending to place it as higher priority than qualitative studies.

The fact that informal care is a low or no cost option is an important factor in parents' reasons for choosing informal providers, but studies rarely report that this is their sole or primary reason. Parents place great weight on the caring attributes of the carers (which clearly a 'choice' or 'quality' rather than 'necessity' issue). Where parents are taking practical issues into account, these are as likely to be issues of reliability, flexibility or convenience. There is little sign that parents using informal care hold more negative views about the quality or availability of formal care than other parents. Parents using only informal care are less aware of these issues than those using formal childcare, and one might surmise that these parents have not taken these issues into account when selecting informal childcare over formal provision. However, parents using a mixture of formal and informal childcare think that formal childcare is less affordable than those using only formal childcare. Whether this is causal is unknown, but it suggests that cost, for some, means that they choose to combine formal with informal care.

Some qualitative studies have highlighted the potentially negative consequences that lone parents (and surely other parents) have to take into consideration when thinking about using informal childcare. Lone parents voiced concerns over family and friends feeling obliged to help (which, in turn, might compromise the quality of the care they provide). Feeling of guilt and concern about this meant that some lone parents used grandparents less than they would have liked to. There were some concerns over grandparents 'interfering' with their own childrearing practices. In assessing the 'quality' of the care that grandparents and other informal carers could give, some voiced concerns over the potential for inability for them to provide activities or stimulation, plus a lack of opportunity for social interaction. This all provides a reminder of the more nuanced choices that parents are making when deciding on whom to approach to provide childcare.

There are considerable gaps in the literature on understanding parents' childcare choices. Some stem from the inherent difficultly in collecting robust evidence on why parents made the choices they did. The evidence on whether the way that parents assess quality (which is often in terms of the quality of the caring environment) is related to the quality of care they receive is limited and mixed. There is little to no research on the choices that parents make about using combinations of different forms of informal or formal childcare: this is the real situation for many parents, making it rather artificial to ask parents to explain why they chose to use particular individual providers who only make up part of a package.

For more detail on parental choice, please see Chapter 6.

1.6 Grandparents' perspectives

Grandparents provide most informal childcare. There is a little up-to-date evidence from 2009 British Social Attitudes Survey on the prevalence and profile of grandparents who look after their children, but it does not focus solely on childcare while parents work. In 2009, nearly two thirds of grandparents looked after their grandchildren, although for most, this involves only a small number of hours each week. Grandmothers and grandfathers are equally likely to look after their grandchildren. However, where they are involved, grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to be spending a greater number of hours per week. Younger grandparents are more likely than older grandparents to look after their grandchildren, and for more hours each week. The data suggest that, for many grandparents, their own paid work does not stop them from having a role in looking after their grandchildren. Looking at the other sources, which provide some picture of childcare while parents work, it seems that it is much more common for grandmothers than grandfathers to take on (at least the primary) role of childcare provider, and it is more common that this is the maternal (not paternal) grandmother. Grandparents were more involved in childcare if mothers worked part-time rather than full-time.

Qualitative work sheds some light on grandparents' on providing care for their grandchildren. In general, this research highlights the range of views but gives no impression on their relative importance. Some grandparents take on the childcare role because they feel that they could provide the best care for their grandchildren or because they do not want their grandchildren in formal childcare, being looked after by 'strangers'. Some grandparents view their role in terms of a 'job', and recognise that informal care could offer something to parents that formal childcare count not (such as flexibility and low cost). Childcare also contributes to some grandparents' own feelings of well-being, bringing enjoyment and pleasure.

There are obviously differing ways that parents can negotiate informal care arrangements with grandparents: while some engage in open discussion and negotiation, it is clear that some arrangements are made on the basis of unspoken assumptions and implicit expectations (which could differ between the two different sides). One study concludes that grandmothers did not expect reciprocity or want 'reward', but parents tended to feel a stronger sense of 'debt' and want to repay grandparents for their help. There seems to be a difference here between grandparents and other informal childcarers: there is evidence that negotiations with other informal childcarers – chiefly, friends – came with more explicit expectations about reciprocity, often in the form of doing things 'in return', and parents were more in favour of paying these people than they were grandparents. Others have suggested this reflects the 'balanced reciprocity' found between two people without a very close relationship and 'generalised reciprocity' found among close family members.

For more detail on the perspectives of grandparents, see Chapter 7.

1.7 Informal childcare and children's educational and socio-emotional development

Large numbers of families use grandparents and other forms of informal childcare either in conjunction with or instead of formal provision, and it is therefore important to understand how exposure to different forms of informal childcare is associated with children's educational and socio-emotional development, and how this varies across types of care, intensities of exposure and socio-demographic family profiles. The review has drawn on the available evidence from both the UK and the US, and new analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study. A major limitation is that most studies – including the new work presented here - can report only on *associations* between informal childcare and children's outcomes, but cannot provide convincing evidence about *causation*.

There is little strong evidence to suggest that children are substantially advantaged *or* disadvantaged by being looked after by their grandparents or other informal childcarers. This applies to both educational outcomes (vocabulary development and school readiness) and socio-emotional outcomes. Where some small associations were found between childcare in the three years of life and outcomes at age 3, these do not appear to last long and were not apparent at age 5. This is the key finding of our analysis and review of the literature.

Analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study suggests that children living in more advantaged households (according to their mothers' education, benefit receipt or single versus couple households) who are looked after by their grandparents rather than in formal centre-based care experience *slightly* higher vocabulary development in the early years. By the age of three, they were significantly further ahead than children in centre-based care. However, there is no evidence to suggest that being in grandparental care *dis*advantages children in less advantaged families in comparison to children in centre-based care; it just did not put them further ahead. Evidence about associations between childcare arrangements and school readiness is mixed: with some finding a negative association with grandparental care at the age of three, and others finding no statistically significant differences between children in different childcare arrangements. Moreover, further analysis looking at children's educational development at the age of five, and comparing it to their childcare arrangements before they had started early years provision showed little significant association between using different forms of informal childcare between the ages of one and three, and age five

vocabulary or school readiness scores. In other words, if there was an earlier effect, then it seems to disappear after two years of early years provision.

Using Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to look at children's socio-emotional development, there is evidence of a small association between more negative peer relationships and being looked after by grandparents, especially among boys, and especially among families from more disadvantaged backgrounds. There is also evidence of a positive association between socio-emotional development and being looked after by grandparents among more educated families. This was still apparent when the children reached age five, whereas the negative association among children in less educated families had disappeared once they had spent time as three and four year olds in early years provision.

Relatively recent research has suggested that children looked after by grandparents are more likely to be obese, even within children with the same socio-economic statuses, and that visits to a GP or A&E were higher amongst those children using informal care.

More detail on children's outcomes is in Chapter 8.

1.8 Measuring the quality of informal childcare

There is a strong body of evidence about the differential effects of formal early years provision and childcare of good and less good quality, with some evidence of links between childcare quality and measures of children's cortisol. But the same body of evidence is not available on the quality of different forms of informal care. Those who have tried to measure the quality of informal care have done so in different ways – making comparisons across studies difficult – and with varying degrees of self-assessed success. Finding scales that can be used across both formal and informal settings is difficult. These measurement problems make it difficult to draw substantive findings from the evidence with any confidence, but, as there is some convergence across measures on these points, a tentative conclusion is that (in the US) informal carers tend to provide a less rich learning environment than formal providers, and that their disciplining is more variable, but that they score better in terms of sensitivity and responsiveness. These findings relate to the (UK) evidence that children spending time with grandparents have better vocabulary than children in formal childcare (linked to responsiveness) but are potentially less school ready (linked to the learning environment).

1.9 Is there a case for state financial intervention for informal childcare?

We have considered whether are convincing economic arguments that would justify government intervention to encourage the use of informal childcare, and we have reviewed specific proposals to support informal childcare. Arguments which could, in principle, favour policy intervention to encourage or support informal childcarers (much as government policy currently supports formal childcare) could take one of three forms. First, that parents place too little value on the benefits to their children experiencing informal childcare. Second, that financial constraints prevent families from affording informal childcare. Third, that parents place too little value on the benefits to themselves of being in work, and that subsidising informal childcare would lead more parents to work. We found very little hard evidence to support or refute these potential arguments. In particular, even though the vast majority of informal childcare –and particularly care provided by grandparents – is not paid for directly,

we simply do not know whether more informal childcare arrangements might exist were potential informal childcarers to be remunerated. A government could be concerned about the burden that childcaring places on informal childcarers, if one chooses to view it as a burden, and might seek to recognise that burden. On the other hand, if a government viewed informal childcare as something provided willingly by friends or relatives, then there would be no case for compensating informal childcarers in this way.

Overall, then, we view the case for government intervention to support informal childcare is, at best, not proven. Perhaps a more convincing reason not to favour policies which aim to subsidise informal childcare directly is that there can be no easily-verifiable record of which families use informal care, for how long and at what financial cost. Of the policies which have been proposed to support informal care, the only one which is not subject to this criticism is one that supports informal childcare indirectly by, for example, increasing support for families where all adults work or for all parents, perhaps limited to children of a certain age.

For further discussion of these issues, see Chapter 9.

1.10 Suggested directions for future research

Clear gaps in the research evidence emerged during the course of compiling the evidence for this review. The following, in the authors' order of priority, is a list of suggestions for future research and data collection:

- The collection of robust survey data on the prevalence and profile of grandparents providing childcare, including relating those to the characteristics of the families and children and to the work patterns of the grandparents.
- A robust examination of the choices that parents make in terms of the types and combinations of childcare.
- The measurement of the quality of the childcare provided by informal carers.
- Up to date (ideally survey) data on the perspectives of grandparents about the roles that they play. In particular, a study which involved all generations would add hugely to the evidence base.
- Further analysis on childcare for disabled children to understand the role that informal childcare does and could play.
- Combining data from a number of waves of the Childcare Survey in order to increase the sample sizes of some smaller sub-groups of interest, such as those from different minority ethnic backgrounds, families with a disabled children or children with SEN, and student parents. This exercise would give more precise figures on prevalence.
- If a government was interested in introducing a policy to support informal care, then we would first need to know a great deal more about the way in which financial considerations affect parents' choices over informal and formal childcare and their decision about whether to do paid work, and about how financial considerations affect actual and potential informal childcarers' decisions to offer childcare. Probably the only robust way to produce such evidence would be through a well-evaluated pilot programme.

These are discussed further discussion in Chapter 10.

2 Introduction

2.1 Overview

This study explores the roles that 'informal childcare' plays for different families. We review how it contributes to families' abilities to organise their lives. We show how this has evolved over the past decade – and discuss how this may continue to evolve – in the light of demographic and policy changes. We document what is known about the quality of 'informal childcare' and its effects on child development. We look at the economic arguments for state support of informal childcare.

We combine our own empirical analysis, using the Department for Education's (DfE's) Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents (referred to from now on as 'the Childcare Survey'), the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), the British Social Attitudes survey and the Labour Force Survey (LFS), with a review of the published quantitative and qualitative evidence. While our focus is informal childcare used across the UK, in reality much of our evidence (including from the Childcare Survey) covers only England, and sometimes Great Britain.

This full report provides a depth and breadth of evidence on informal childcare. It is intended as a resource for those interested in or working on the formation of policies around childcare, parental paid work and the support of informal carers, particularly grandparents. For a synthesis of the evidence and a broader discussion of its implications, the reader should refer to the summary report '*The role of informal childcare: critiquing the evidence*'.

2.2 Research aims

Despite the integral role of informal childcare – largely by grandparents - in the lives of a large number of working families, it receives little attention from policy makers and, in turn, very little in the way of research funding. Partly this is because it has been seen purely as a 'family matter', and thus not of interest to social policy. So, the primary aim of this review is to draw together what robust evidence there is on informal childcare and to highlight the gaps in evidence. We draw attention to the implications for different types of families using different patterns of care without treating either 'families' or 'informal childcare' as homogenous groups.

In the following chapter, we review the role of different forms of informal childcare for different families over the past decade. We relate this to policy-making concerning early years and formal childcare and facilitating parental work, as well as to changes in the availability of formal provision and grandparental care. Then, focusing on the following questions, we review the existing research evidence in subsequent chapters –

1. Who uses various configurations of informal childcare, and how much and when do they use it (Chapter 4)?
2. What role does informal childcare play for certain groups of families who may have particular childcare needs (Chapter 5)? We focus on families with disabled children or children with special educational needs; minority ethnic families; student parents; and parents who work non-standard hours.
3. Why do different types of families use informal rather than formal childcare (Chapter 6)?

4. What do we know about the grandparents who provide the childcare support (Chapter 7)?
5. What evidence is there to support the promotion or discouragement of 'informal childcare' in different types of families because of outcomes for children (Chapter 8)?
6. Is there a role for state financial intervention in the 'informal childcare' 'market'? If so, what models might be fruitful, and which are not (Chapter 9)?

We note where there is little or no robust evidence, or where the evidence is contradictory. Where appropriate, we suggest the kinds of evidence or analyses that would be needed to clarify various issues.

2.3 Defining 'informal childcare'

Defining precisely what is meant by 'informal childcare' is not straightforward. The term is used to mean different things – and sometimes left as a loose definition – in different contexts. Depending on the focus of the study, what is appropriately counted as 'informal childcare' necessarily varies.

There are some groups of people who are almost always included within the umbrella term of 'informal childcare': grandparents, other family members and friends or neighbours. However, at its broadest, 'informal childcare' is simply the converse of 'formal childcare'. So, as 'formal childcare' is childcare which is government-regulated and either paid for by parents (with or without government or employer subsidies) or provided as part of a free entitlement to part-time early years provision for three and four year old children, so, 'informal childcare' can be defined as 'unregulated childcare'. This definition includes some forms of paid childcare such as babysitters or unregistered nannies, childminders or au pairs. The argument for including these within the umbrella definition of 'informal childcare' is that they are ineligible for almost all funding streams to offset childcare costs. Thus, they sit outside of the usual definitions of 'formal childcare'. On the other hand, the relationship between provider and parent in some of these cases – unregistered childminders for instance – is more similar to formal childcare. Even within a narrower definition, which includes only relatives, friends and neighbours, 'informal childcare' does not always mean 'unpaid' childcare. Informal childcare can involve both monetary and/or reciprocal payments.

Non-resident parents are sometimes included within the definition of informal childcare, and at other times are not. On the one hand, they can be seen as someone who is looking after children in the absence of the parent who is mainly responsible for them. In cases where informal childcare is defined very broadly, covering all periods when children are not with resident parents, then it is appropriate to include non-resident parents as providers of childcare. This is the approach taken in the DfE (formerly DCSF and DfES) publications on Childcare Survey[1] (eg Speight et al, 2009). However, a narrower definition of informal childcare, which focuses on arrangements made by parents to facilitate them to do something (such as work, study, going out) – rather than simply on who is looking after children in the absence of a resident parent - excludes non-resident parents. In fact, in some instances, this issue extends to resident fathers, with some studies focusing on non-maternal childcare – who is looking after children in the absence of their mother (eg Hansen and Hawkes (2009) using data from the Millennium Cohort Study). Clearly, this definition is appropriate only when the study is focusing specifically on the mother:child relationship.

[1] Note that we exclude non-resident parents from our own analysis of this survey.

Definitions of 'informal childcare' do not solely revolve around what kinds of people are involved in the childcare. The regularity of the arrangement is another factor that varies between studies. Some studies – again the Childcare Survey is an example – include within their definition of 'informal childcare' ad hoc and circumstantial acts of reciprocity (for instance, picking up children from school as a one-off arrangement). These studies are capturing all circumstances in which children are not with their resident parent(s) – and it is feasible to pick up ad hoc arrangements because they ask a set of detailed questions about a recent (usually the previous) week. Other studies focus on regular childcare arrangements and do not pick up ad hoc arrangements. This is either because the structure of the interview does not allow for picking up this level of detail or because the focus of the study means that these kinds of arrangements are not relevant. For instance, studies looking at associations between being in different forms of childcare and children's outcomes will focus on arrangements that are used on a regular basis. Indeed, for the same reason, some studies define whether children are in 'informal' or 'formal' childcare on the basis that they are with them for a minimum number of hours each week. Where the evidence allows, we include all informal childcare without excluding that used for short periods of time. However, again, we are sometimes limited by the available evidence. Moreover, it is true to say that – when looking at any associations between being in informal childcare and children's outcomes – we think it appropriate to focus our attention on children who are regularly looked after by an informal childcare provider for at least a few hours each week.

In this review, our central focus is on childcare provided by non-parental family and friends. We do **not** include childcare that sits on the blurred boundary between 'formal' and 'informal childcare'. Wherever possible, we do **not** include non-resident parents (or indeed resident fathers) within our definition of 'informal childcare'. Our interest in informal childcare is in the ways in which families use it – or choose it – alongside or instead of 'formal childcare', and the differential associations between using 'informal childcare' over 'formal childcare' or 'no childcare'. For these reasons, we think it inappropriate to include non-resident parents within our definition, in the same way that we have not included shift-parenting within two-parent families as a form of childcare.

We have avoided using 'informal childcare' as a generic term, although this has not always been possible either because of limited sample sizes or the way in which others have reported their findings. Wherever the evidence allows, we are specific and explicit about which forms or patterns of informal childcare we are discussing. Indeed, these patterns often include combining different forms of informal childcare and formal childcare, and we include these within our discussions. We look at the evidence related to social policy implications, economic issues and child-care quality for different types of informal childcare, knowing that some forms may be empirically or analytically more or less similar. Given the available evidence, in some cases we distinguish between grandparents, other familial and non-familial childcare. However, given that grandparents account for such a large proportion of all familial care, we often find that our capacity to report in detail on other family carers is limited. Most of the evidence does not allow us to look separately at the roles of grandmothers and grandfathers, so we usually talk about grandparents as a whole. However, we do report on evidence from the British Social Attitudes Survey series (eg our own analysis; Dench and Ogg, 2002) and others (eg Wheelock and Jones, 2002) on the relative childcare roles that grandmothers and grandfathers do. From this, we know that when we report on 'grandparents' we are largely referring to the roles played by grandmothers.

The review has a strong focus on informal childcare used to facilitate parental work or study. The rationale for doing so stems from a desire to look at how families use and choose informal childcare

within the context of a decade of policy-making concerned to help parents to combine paid work and family life (as discussed in Section 2.4 below). Our own analysis of the Childcare Survey focuses almost exclusively on childcare used when parents are working or studying. The exception to this is our review of the evidence related to the associations between childcare arrangements and children's socio-emotional and educational development, where parents' reason for using the childcare is secondary. Lastly, there is a body of evidence about the role of grandparents as sole carers or guardians of their grandchildren. This group of grandparents are outside of the remit of our review.

2.4 Informal childcare within the wider policy background

The evidence on which we draw for this report was gathered prior to the change in government in May 2010, from a period in which there had been a large state investment in formal childcare (that is, regulated and fee-paying) (articulated in DCSF 2009; DCSF 2010; and summarised in Waldfogel and Graham, 2008). The dual aims of the National Childcare Strategy, introduced by the Labour government in 1998, were to improve the employment opportunities for parents, particularly mothers, by making childcare more accessible; and to improve the life chances of children, both by dint of raising families' incomes by facilitating parental work and by providing free access to early years education for preschool children. As a result of this - and a number of other policies aimed at family friendly employment, in early 2011:

- Parents – mainly those on low and middle incomes working 16 hours a week or more[2] - have access to a number of financial subsidies to help towards the cost of registered, *formal* childcare, most notably the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit, but also through employer support for childcare. In addition there are other localised policies related to making formal childcare more affordable, such as the London Affordability Pilots.
- Parents of three and four year olds (and some two year olds) have free access to early years education for 15 hours each week.
- There has been a large increase in the number of places in early years settings, both free part-time places and fee-paying full-day services. Plus Extended Services have meant that access to formal out of school provision for school-age children has improved substantially.
- Efforts have been made to increase the quality of formal provision, with changes to the curriculum and the introduction of new qualifications for staff in early years settings.
- Working parents with dependent children have the right to request flexible working patterns, including part-time work.
- There have been substantial improvements to mothers' rights to maternity leave and maternity pay.

Until 2009, there had been no government consideration of the role of informal childcare. However, from 2011, grandparents of working age who look after grandchildren (under 12) for more than 20 hours each week receive National Insurance credits. This recognises the fact that their caring responsibilities can have a negative impact on their capacity to work and thereby affect their pension provision.

[2] Note that the intention is to subsidise childcare for families working fewer than 16 hours per week when the Universal Credit is introduced in 2013.

Despite a large degree of government intervention in the formal childcare market for more than a decade, we continue to see large numbers of families using informal childcare[3]. On the face of it, reasons for the continued use of informal care are perhaps obvious. Several factors, such as a preference for familial care and a desire for home-based care are beyond the influence of government policies on formal childcare. And, arguably, some of the previous government's policies may have increased the need for families to draw on informal support. Providing free part-time early years education might increase the need for informal childcare providers to provide additional or 'wraparound' childcare to fit with these hours[4]. In addition, there are roles that 'informal childcare' plays that formal childcare currently does not. For instance, despite the fact that very large numbers of parents work outside 'normal' hours (e.g., at evenings or weekends), the previous government's policy has not addressed the fact that formal childcare is rarely available at these times. In other ways, we might have expected parents' demand for informal childcare to have reduced. For instance, those previously using it primarily for reasons of cost may now find that they are able to afford formal childcare.

These are all issues which we explore in our report. However, at this stage, it is worth raising some issues about how *other* areas of the previous government's policy may affect informal childcare – in terms of its supply rather than, as above, its demand. The decision to raise women's retirement age to match that of men has the potential to work against the role that older women play in caring for grandchildren. Plans to increase statutory retirement age beyond 65 may have a similar effect, as might the general encouragement of older women to work. So, policies related to older people and work do not take account of the role that they play in facilitating younger people's work. Nor do they take account of the fact that current government policies for elder care result in many older women having a key caring role for older relatives (the numbers of which are set to rise), which again, may impact on the role of grandparents as childcare providers. These are issues raised by organisations such as Grandparents Plus, but largely ignored, as yet, by government.

At the time of writing this report, the Coalition Government has made or is planning a number policy changes which may affect families' need for and use of formal and informal childcare in the coming years. The details of some of these policies are not yet clear, but involve changes to the tax and benefit systems (eg around the universal credit, the removal of the baby element of the child tax credit), the introduction of the Early Intervention Grant and changes to the funding of Children's Centres and the removal of targets around the qualifications of early years education staff.

While our review focuses on the picture within the UK, it is worth pausing to put the UK picture in the context of other countries. Plantenga and Remery's (2009) comparative review of childcare across 30 European countries categorises the UK as one of the countries (along with the Netherlands, Portugal, France and Luxembourg) which combine relatively high levels of use of formal care with a well-developed system of 'other' arrangements (in which they combine home-based childminders and family/friends). Within the UK, the vast majority of this care is done by family and friends.

[3] Trends and patterns of current use are described in detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

[4] Since September 2010, parents have been given greater flexibility in deciding how to use the free hours of early years education for which they are eligible across the week. However, it is not clear that this will be possible in all settings.

2.5 Methodology

This study combines a review of the existing literature with our own analysis of four survey datasets: the Childcare Survey; the Millennium Cohort Study; the British Social Attitudes survey; and the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

2.5.1 Literature review

The review includes both quantitative and qualitative studies. We have not used formal systematic review methods. Rather, our key concerns in searching the literature were ensuring that we cast the net widely enough to draw in the range of evidence available, and that we properly assessed the evidence for robustness and rigour. We drew up a set of relevant criteria against which to evaluate each study's methodological strengths, and assessed the evidence according to those criteria (see Appendix 2). That said, there is no doubt we will not have picked up *all* the available evidence on informal childcare. It is an issue that comes up in a wide variety of contexts – be it maternal work, kinship and social networks, or wider discussions about the role of carers - and therefore we may have missed some evidence referred to in these contexts.

Rather than focus on existing reviews, we draw largely on original evidence from research reports and articles. Using a number of key words, we sought from a full range of sociological, educational and psychological databases. In the main, we concentrate on work produced in the last 12 years, given the radical shift in policy and provision related to formal childcare, maternity provision and family friendly working arrangements have changed in this time. However, on occasion, where a study is highly relevant and its findings not intrinsically linked with the availability of these arrangements, we have included it in the review. Our review includes only work published in English. Some issues in the review are clearly linked to the particular cultural, societal or policy context of the UK (and sometimes just of England). These include how families use informal childcare alongside school and paid work; how grandparents combine childcare responsibilities with other caring roles and/or their own paid work. On these issues, we restrict the review to evidence from the UK. On other issues, it is appropriate to draw on evidence from outside the UK. Evidence on the association between type and quality of care and children's educational and socio-emotional development is an example. In most but not all cases, our non-UK evidence comes from the US. At the start of each chapter, we explain and justify whether or not it includes evidence from outside the UK. The Daycare Trust recently published a literature review on informal childcare (Rutter and Evans, 2011a). While there is a degree of overlap between our two reports, there are differences in foci (including the definition of informal childcare for the purposes of each review) which mean that the two reports can be seen as complementary. Our report has a strong focus on new analysis (of the Childcare Survey, of the MCS, of the British Social Attitudes survey) which has allowed us to comment further than the existing literature.

2.5.2 Data sources for the new analysis

Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents

This survey is the primary source of quantitative prevalence data on families' childcare use and preferences in England. It is a cross-sectional survey series funded by DfE, with the data reported here collected by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). It began in 1999 and now runs annually, each year involving interviews with around 7,000 parents with children under 15. Each

year, the data are used to produce a large descriptive report on the current year, with comparisons over time. While we draw heavily on these published reports, we have conducted further analysis on families' use of 'informal childcare' and their reasons for using it. For current prevalence figures, we have drawn data collected in 2008 data[5]; plus we use data from 1999, 2004 and 2007 to look at trends over time. Further information on the technical details of the 2008 survey can be found here in Speight et al (2009): http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR136%28R%29.pdf.

Millennium Cohort Study

The MCS began as a longitudinal study of approximately 18,000 children born in the UK in 2000. The first sweep of the study was conducted when MCS children were about 9 months old. This over-sampled individuals from ethnic minorities and individuals living in disadvantaged areas of the country. Two further sweeps of data which were collected when the children were aged about 36 months (sweep 2) and when they were about 5 years old (sweep 3) have been used for this report. Further sweeps of data will be collected at future key milestone ages (eg data collection has now been completed for the age 7 sweep, and a further sweep being conducted at age 11). The MCS is led by the Institute of Education and more information about the MCS can be found here: www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/text.asp?section=000100020001. We believe these to be the best source of data on the relative effects of formal and informal childcare on child outcomes among pre-school children. We have used MCS data to estimate the relative effects of formal and informal childcare patterns on cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes at ages 3 and 5, after controlling for a wide set of observable characteristics, including: family income; education; working patterns; early physical health characteristics; family structure; hours in childcare; and, the home-learning environment[6].

British Social Attitudes survey

This is an annual cross-sectional survey run by NatCen since 1983. Interviewing a random probability sample of around 3,000 adults each year, the survey collects data on people's attitudes towards a wide range of social issues. We have used a limited amount of data from the 2009 survey to look at the profile of grandparents who look after their grandchildren. Further information on the survey can be found here: http://www.natcen.ac.uk/series/british-social-attitudes.

Labour Force Survey

This quarterly survey of 60,000 GB households conducted by the Office for National Statistics provides data on labour market participation and its related demographics. We have carried out a limited amount of analysis of these data to look at trends in employment patterns of older people, to look for changes that might affect the 'pool' of grandparents as childcare providers. Further information on the survey can be found here:
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Source.asp?vlnk=358&More=Y.

[5] At the time of doing the analysis, the 2008 was the most recently available. There is now a published report on data collected in 2009 (Smith et al (2010): http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RR054.pdf

[6] For our analysis, we chose to sample those who responded to all three surveys and those where the mother is the main respondent. We also excluded individuals who had missing data for some key characteristics, such as education, measures of the home-learning environment and ethnicity. This left us with approximately 11,100 observations.

3 The picture since the introduction of the National Childcare Strategy

3.1 Introduction

In Section 2.4 we start to raise some issues that may explain the continued high levels of use of informal childcare among working families, and in Chapter 4 onwards, we describe and discuss the evidence on each of these issues. Here, we use trend data on childcare use from the Childcare Survey (from its start in 1999 up to 2008) to see whether the policy changes of the past decade related to formal childcare *are* associated with changes in the ways in which working families are using informal childcare. We also address the question of whether changes in the socio-demographic profile of the key providers of informal childcare – namely grandparents – might affect their availability and in turn be associated with changes in the use of informal childcare. For this, we draw on data from the Labour Force Survey. Necessarily, we document changes in the use of formal as well as informal childcare – as we are interested not only in the actual numbers of families and children using informal childcare over the past decade, but also at the relative proportions of families using different types of care. That is, to what extent has there been any change in the overall *numbers* of working families using different types of informal childcare and in the *amount* that they use. And, to what extent has there been any movement in the relative position of informal and formal childcare in the lives of working families?

Since the start of the National Childcare Strategy in 1998 we have seen –

- An increase in maternal work, particularly among lone mothers. There has been a particular increase in the number of parents, notably lone parents, working 16 hours or more in order to be eligible for Working Tax Credits.
- Enhanced maternity rights which have given more mothers the opportunity of staying at home longer after the birth of a child.
- An increase in the amount of full-time, but more markedly part-time, early years and childcare provision for preschool children, resulting in greater numbers of preschool children in early years education and formal childcare, especially among three and four year olds who are entitled to a number of free hours each week. While this provision is not primarily intended to be used as childcare to facilitate parental work, and many parents do not use, or indeed view, it as childcare, it is nonetheless part of the overall picture of provision for this age group.
- An increase in the number of formal childcare before and after school places for school-age children.
- An increase in the number of older working women.

These factors combined imply an increase in demand for childcare (at least for children over the age of one), be it formal or informal childcare. The rise in the use of part-time early years education has

the potential to increase the part-time use of informal childcare, with working parents having to 'join up' childcare alongside early years education. Conversely, an increased propensity for older women to be in paid work implies an adverse effect on the supply of informal childcare providers. However, given the ways in which these societal and policy changes play out alongside each other, commentators may find it hard to predict the combined impact they may have had on parents' use of formal and informal childcare

With the data available, we do not expect to be able to identify direct *causal* links between any of these changes and trends in families' use of informal childcare over the past decade. For instance, given the overall level of demand for childcare may have increased, changes in the relative proportions of families using different forms of childcare would not necessarily result in a decrease in the actual numbers of families using a particular form of care. Moreover financial subsidies and part-time early years provision may lead to more families combining formal and informal childcare in ways that they did not do so in the past. And, of course, policies will have taken different amounts of time to feed into provision and parental choice. However, in broad terms, in the sections below, we are able to see whether the changes in aggregate mean that there is more or less call on different types of informal childcare providers from different types of families, and how this relates to changes in the supply of formal (and possibly informal) provision. After all, the previous government introduced several initiatives under the Childcare Strategy with the aim of increasing parents' access to formal childcare and, so, we will be able to see if the aggregate effect of this Strategy has led to a reduction in the use of informal childcare.

In later chapters we use the 2008 Childcare Survey data to look in detail at how different types of families use childcare, and in what amounts. However, when looking at trends over time in the following sections, we talk about patterns of change very much at the 'top level'. So, when we present trends in childcare use, we compare across broad working family types and simply report on whether they have used childcare in a previous week or not, without looking at amounts or combinations of care. This decision was led partly by the fact that not all the information was available back to 1999, and partly by the need to place some limits on the amount of data that we could present in what is one chapter of a longer review. We have focused on evidence about lone parent versus couple families with different working patterns; with under threes versus early years versus primary versus secondary school-aged children.

In the sections below, we address the following questions –

1. Have there been any changes in the number or proportions of families, particularly working families, using informal childcare? If so, among which types of families and age of children? Have there been any changes in the amount and relative amount of time that children spend with different formal and informal childcare providers (Section 3.2)?

2. Have there been changes in parental work patterns, which might affect the demand for childcare (Section 3.3)?

3. Have there been changes in the 'supply' of grandparental care (Section 3.4)?

4. Has there been an increase in the number of OFSTED-registered formal childcare places available (Section 3.5), which might affect the demand for informal childcare?

5. Have working families' perceptions about the availability, quality and affordability of local formal childcare changes over time (Section 3.6)?

3.2 Changes in the number of families using informal childcare

Between 1999 and 2008, the number of children under 15 who had been in formal childcare in a particular term-time reference week had risen by 1.23m from 1.95m to 3.18m (Table 3.1)[7][8]. However, it appears that this childcare is often being used in addition to – not instead of – informal childcare, and has not led to a drop in the numbers of children being looked after by relatives or friends. By 2008, there were 0.41m more children being looked after by relatives or friends than in 1999. (We look at how parents use informal childcare instead of or in combination with formal childcare in greater detail in Chapter 4.)

Table 3.1 Use of childcare providers in last week, 1999-2008

Base: All children

	Number of children (millions)[9]		
	1999	2004	2008
Any childcare	**4.10**	**4.87**	**4.92**
Formal childcare	**1.95**	**2.76**	**3.18**
Early Years Provider	1.15	1.59	1.61
Out of school club	0.27	0.86	1.30
Childminder	0.38	0.30	0.35
Informal childcare	**2.30**	**2.99**	**2.71**
Grandparent	1.63	2.00	1.89
Older sibling	0.21	0.31	0.28
Another relative	0.30	0.45	0.37
Friend or neighbour	0.38	0.70	0.50

In proportions, the increase in the number of children who spent time in *any* childcare in a given term-time week equates to a ten percentage point rise (Table 3.2). The rise in the proportion using formal childcare was greater than for informal childcare (14 percentage points compared to six percentage points). The increased use of formal care is attributable to rises in the use of early years and out of school clubs rather than childminders (as reflected by the number of childcare places in Table 3.20), likely due to the combination of the introduction of free early years provision and a growth in maternal work.

[7] See Speight et al (2009) for a further discussion of these trends, which includes an explanation of the extent to which *minor* methodological changes may have affected these data.

[8] Note that we would not expect these figures to correspond to the number of formal childcare places in Table 3.20, given the much wider age range.

[9] Grossed up estimates are based on the number of children 0-14 in England according to ONS mid-year population estimates.

Table 3.2 Use of childcare providers in last week, 1999-2008

Base: All children

% using each provider

	1999	2004	2007	2008
Any childcare	**44**	**54**	**54**	**54**
Formal childcare	**21**	**30**	**32**	**35**
Early Years Provider	12	17	19	18
Out of school club	3	9	10	14
Childminder	4	3	4	4
Informal childcare	**24**	**33**	**30**	**30**
Grandparent	17	22	21	21
Older sibling	2	3	3	3
Another relative	3	5	4	4
Friend or neighbour	4	8	6	5
Weighted base	*8761*	*7802*	*7136*	*7076*
Unweighted base	*7693*	*7802*	*7136*	*7076*

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show how the numbers and proportion of children using formal and informal childcare providers has changed over time. An alternative way of looking at the issue is to take account of the amount of time that children spend with different providers, and whether the relative proportions have changed over time. Unfortunately, the data on hours of childcare required to do this are only available from 2004 onwards. However, even over this period, Table 3.3 shows the proportion of *time* that children spent with informal providers has gone down between 2004 and 2008, from 48 per cent of all childcare hours to 41 per cent. The biggest increase has been in time spent in out of school clubs.

Table 3.3 Proportion of time in childcare spent with particular providers in last week, 2004-2008

Base: All children in childcare

% of time spent with each provider

	2004	**2008**
Formal childcare	**46**	**52**
Early Years Provider	27	27
Out of school club	11	17
Childminder	4	5
Informal childcare	**48**	**41**
Grandparent	30	27
Older sibling	5	4
Another relative	6	4
Friend or neighbour	8	6
Weighted base	*4175*	*3853*
Unweighted base	*4508*	*4075*

Tables 3.4 and 3.5 show the numbers of children in different forms of childcare over the decade. Table 3.4 provides figures for preschool children (overall, plus split by 0-2s and 3-4s); Table 3.5 provides figures for primary school and secondary school children. Between 1999 and 2008, the numbers of children in all three age groups in formal childcare has risen. The rise is greatest among primary school children, where the proportion has doubled from 0.63m to 1.35m – because of an increase in numbers in out of school care. In terms of informal care, the modest rise is seen across all age groups, with no particular trend in one age group over another.

Table 3.4 Number of pre-school children using childcare providers in last week, by age of child

Base: All children
Number of children (millions)

	All pre-school			0 to 2 year olds			3 and 4 year olds		
	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008
Any childcare	1.75	2.01	1.94	0.82	0.99	0.92	0.93	1.02	1.02
Formal childcare	1.24	1.58	1.55	0.44	0.58	0.59	0.80	1.00	0.97
Early years	1.05	1.47	1.42	0.31	0.48	0.48	0.75	0.99	0.94
Out of school club	0.01	0.04	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.05
Childminder	0.20	0.14	0.15	0.11	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.06	0.07
Informal childcare	0.82	1.03	0.99	0.51	0.62	0.56	0.31	0.41	0.43
Grandparent	0.67	0.79	0.81	0.43	0.49	0.47	0.24	0.30	0.34
Older sibling	0.01	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.01	0.02
Another relative	0.12	0.18	0.17	0.07	0.11	0.10	0.05	0.07	0.06
Friend or neighbour	0.10	0.15	0.11	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.05	0.07	0.05

Table 3.5 Number of school-age children using childcare providers in last week, by age of child

Base: All children
Number of children (millions)

	All primary school			All secondary school		
	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008
Any childcare	1.86	2.22	2.23	0.49	0.64	0.74
Formal childcare	0.63	1.03	1.35	0.08	0.15	0.28
Early years	0.09	0.12	0.18	<0.01	<0.01	0.01
Out of school club	0.23	0.70	0.99	0.03	0.12	0.26
Childminder	0.17	0.15	0.19	<0.01	0.01	0.01
Informal childcare	1.16	1.47	1.25	0.32	0.49	0.47
Grandparent	0.77	0.96	0.85	0.18	0.25	0.24
Older sibling	0.10	0.16	0.11	0.10	0.13	0.14
Another relative	0.15	0.21	0.15	0.03	0.05	0.06
Friend or neighbour	0.25	0.41	0.30	0.03	0.14	0.09

Tables 3.1 to 3.5 include childcare used for any reason (eg so parents can work; to help the child's development; to give parents some time to do other things). However, as our key interest is in childcare used to facilitate parental work or study, in subsequent sections of this chapter, we focus in on 'working families' – that is working lone parent families and couple families where both parents

work (and might therefore have some need for childcare for work-related reasons[10])[11] . Table 3.6 shows the number of children in working families in different forms of childcare. Among children in working families, the number of children in *formal* childcare has almost doubled from 1.14m to 2.15m in the last week[12]. The number of children in working families with *informal* carers has increased by a fifth, from 1.56m to 1.91m. Most of this increase is due to more children being looked after by their grandparents (risen by almost a quarter). While in 1999 more children were looked after by informal carers than formal providers (33 per cent compared to 24 per cent), the opposite is now true (37 per cent compared to 42 per cent).

Table 3.6 Use of childcare providers in last week among working families, 1999-2008

	Number of children (millions)[13]		
	1999	2004	2008
Any childcare	**2.50**	**3.07**	**3.29**
Formal childcare	**1.14**	**1.68**	**2.15**
Early Years Provider	0.54	0.85	0.97
Out of school club	0.20	0.57	0.94
Childminder	0.34	0.27	0.32
Informal childcare	**1.56**	**2.07**	**1.91**
Grandparent	1.11	1.43	1.37
Older sibling	0.15	0.22	0.21
Another relative	0.20	0.27	0.24
Friend or neighbour	0.27	0.48	0.35

In percentage terms, this is an increase from 33 per cent of children in working families with informal carers in the given week to 37 per cent, and from 24 per cent to 42 per cent with formal childcarers (Table 3.7). The starkest rise is among children in out of school provision, which has risen nearly fivefold from 4 per cent to 19 per cent.

[10] For evidence on student parents, see Chapter 5.

[11] In later chapters, when we are using only data from 2008, we are able to pinpoint childcare that is used to facilitate parental work (as opposed to any childcare used by working parents). However, as we are not able to do that with earlier waves of the Childcare Survey, the trend analysis necessarily focuses on 'childcare used by working parents'.

[12] This proportionate rise is much greater than the proportionate increase in the number of children in working lone parent families and couple families where both parents work.

[13] Grossed up estimates are based on the number of children 0-14 in England according to ONS mid-year population estimates.

Table 3.7 Use of childcare providers in last week among working families, 1999-2008

Base: All children in working families

% using each provider

	1999	2004	2007	2008
Any childcare	**53**	**63**	**62**	**64**
Formal childcare	**24**	**34**	**36**	**42**
Early Years Provider	12	17	19	19
Out of school club	4	12	11	18
Childminder	7	6	6	6
Informal childcare	**33**	**42**	**38**	**37**
Grandparent	24	29	27	27
Older sibling	3	5	4	4
Another relative	4	6	5	5
Friend or neighbour	6	10	8	7
Weighted base	*4365*	*4195*	*3969*	*4020*
Unweighted base	*4018*	*4281*	*3868*	*3973*

Again we can look at this in terms of the *amount* of time that children spend with formal and informal carers. Table 3.8 suggests that the relative amount of time that children spend with informal childcare providers has fallen by 10 percentage points between 2004 and 2008, with a drop in the proportionate use of all the informal providers listed. So, while the numbers of children with informal childcare providers remains high in 2008, they are spending a smaller proportion of their time in informal care relative to formal care than they were in 2004.

Table 3.8 Proportion of time in childcare spent with particular providers in last week among working families, 2004-2008

Base: All children in childcare in working families

% of time spent with each provider

	2004	2008
Formal childcare	**42**	**51**
Early Years Provider	21	23
Out of school club	11	18
Childminder	6	7
Informal childcare	**53**	**42**
Grandparent	34	28
Older sibling	5	4
Another relative	5	4
Friend or neighbour	9	6
Weighted base	*2627*	*2580*
Unweighted base	*2806*	*2670*

3.2.1 Variations among children of different ages

Especially given the differences by provider, it was important to look at changes for children of different age groups (Tables 3.9 and 3.10). Among children in working families, there has been increase in the proportion of children in formal childcare across all age groups, with the greatest proportionate rise among preschool children (a 17 percentage point rise from 55 per cent in 1999 to 72 in 2008). However, given that there was a 20 percentage point rise in the proportion of three and four year old children with early years providers, it is important to recognise that not all of the rise among preschool children will be due to the need for parents to find childcare in order to work: this rise may in large part be due to the almost universal take-up of early years provision by eligible three and four year olds. Having said that, given the blurred boundary between early years provision and childcare, the rise in the use of part-time early years provision may relate to the increasing numbers of children being cared for by grandparents – who can play the role of additional support/childcare to supplement the hours in early years education. Moreover, the 18 percentage point increase in the number of children under three in early years provision shows that by no means all of the increase in formal childcare use among pre-schoolers is related to the free provision. Note that – in line with the timing of various government policies concerning early years – most change came between 1999 and 2004.

The number of primary school children in out of school care has increased four-fold since 1999 (from seven per cent to 28 per cent) and proportion of secondary school children in out of school care has gone from only 1 per cent to 15 per cent. In contrast with patterns of use of early years provision, much of the increase in children using after-school clubs has happened in the last few years, as the extended schools agenda has developed. Among these age groups, informal childcare has remained important throughout the decade, as a proportion of all children using childcare. However, a drop in the proportion of school-age children suggests that, perhaps, fewer families are using informal childcare because of the expansion of provision after-school.

Table 3.9 Use of childcare in past week among working families, by age, 1999-2008

Base: All children in working families

% using each provider

	Pre school			0 to 2 year olds			3 and 4 year olds		
Use of childcare	**1999**	**2004**	**2008**	**1999**	**2004**	**2008**	**1999**	**2004**	**2008**
Any childcare	**77**	**87**	**86**	**72**	**82**	**82**	**83**	**93**	**92**
Any formal	**55**	**70**	**72**	**42**	**54**	**59**	**71**	**90**	**86**
Early years provider	42	63	64	26	43	48	63	89	83
Out of school club	1	2	3	0	1	*	2	4	6
Childminder	15	10	10	15	9	10	15	10	10
Any informal	**44**	**51**	**48**	**46**	**53**	**49**	**41**	**48**	**46**
Grandparent	37	41	40	40	44	42	34	38	38
Sibling	*	2	1	*	2	1	1	2	2
Other relative	7	8	7	7	9	8	6	7	6
Friend/neighbour	5	7	4	4	5	4	6	8	5
Weighted base	*1087*	*1081*	*1052*	*604*	*605*	*570*	*483*	*476*	*482*
Unweighted base	*1021*	*1401*	*1364*	*568*	*661*	*622*	*453*	*740*	*742*

Table 3.10 Use of childcare in past week among working families, by age, 1999-2008

Base: All children in working families

% using each provider

Use of childcare	Primary school			Secondary school		
	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008
Any childcare	**51**	**62**	**63**	**32**	**39**	**43**
Any formal	**18**	**29**	**39**	**4**	**9**	**16**
Early years provider	2	2	3	*	*	*
Out of school club	7	19	28	1	7	15
Childminder	6	6	7	*	1	1
Any informal	**33**	**43**	**36**	**23**	**31**	**28**
Grandparent	22	29	25	13	17	16
Sibling	3	4	3	8	8	8
Other relative	4	6	4	2	3	3
Friend/neighbour	8	12	9	2	8	6
Weighted base	*2280*	*2083*	*1964*	*999*	*1031*	*1004*
Unweighted base	*2077*	*1859*	*1738*	*920*	*1021*	*871*

As we showed in Table 3.6, the number of children in working households in informal childcare in the week rose from 1.56m to 1.91m between 1999 and 2008. Although more preschool and primary school children were and still are looked after by informal carers than secondary school children, in fact, the largest proportionate rise in the numbers with informal childcarers is actually among secondary school children (Table 3.11). While virtually all of the increased use of informal childcare for preschool children came from an increase in numbers with their grandparents, among school-age children, an increase in the numbers of children with their grandparents should be seen alongside an increase in the numbers spending time with friends, neighbours and siblings. This suggests that parents are relying more than they were on these forms of (maybe sometimes reciprocal) care, probably before and after school.

Table 3.11 Number of children in working families using childcare in last week, by age, 1999-2008

Base: All children in working families

Number of children (millions)

	Pre school			Primary school			Secondary school		
Use of childcare	**1999**	**2004**	**2008**	**1999**	**2004**	**2008**	**1999**	**2004**	**2008**
Any childcare	0.90	1.10	1.16	1.25	1.50	1.59	0.35	0.47	0.55
Any formal	0.64	0.88	0.96	0.45	0.70	0.98	0.05	0.10	0.20
Early years provider	0.49	0.80	0.86	0.05	0.05	0.11	<0.01	<0.01	<0.01
Out of school club	0.01	0.02	0.04	0.17	0.47	0.71	0.01	0.08	0.19
Childminder	0.18	0.12	0.13	0.15	0.14	0.18	<0.01	0.01	0.01
Any informal	0.51	0.64	0.64	0.80	1.05	0.91	0.25	0.38	0.36
Grandparent	0.43	0.52	0.54	0.54	0.70	0.63	0.14	0.21	0.20
Sibling	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.06	0.11	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.11
Other relative	0.08	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.14	0.10	0.02	0.04	0.03
Friend/neighbour	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.19	0.30	0.22	0.03	0.10	0.07

Tables 3.12 and 3.13, which shows the proportion of all childcare time which is spent with formal and informal childcare providers, highlights a differential decline in the proportion of time that pre-school and school-age children are spending with informal childcare providers. Between 2004 and 2008, the proportion of time that pre-school children spent in informal childcare stayed very similar. However, there was a 15 percentage point drop for primary school and 16 percentage point drop for secondary school children in the proportionate time that they spent with informal providers.

Table 3.12 Proportion of time in childcare spent with particular providers in last week among working families, by age of pre-school child 2004-2008

Base: All children in childcare in working families

% of time spent with each provider

	Pre-school		0 to 2 year olds		3 and 4 year olds	
	2004	2008	2004	2008	2004	2008
Formal childcare	**65**	**67**	**52**	**58**	**79**	**78**
Early years	55	57	39	45	72	70
Out of school club	*	1	*	*	1	1
Childminder	7	7	8	9	5	5
Informal childcare	**35**	**32**	**47**	**41**	**21**	**22**
Grandparent	28	26	39	34	16	18
Older sibling	*	1	1	1	*	1
Another relative	3	3	5	5	2	2
Friend or neighbour	3	2	4	2	2	1
Weighted base	*942*	*909*	*499*	*466*	*444*	*443*
Unweighted base	*1257*	*1197*	*565*	*517*	*692*	*680*

Table 3.13 Proportion of time in childcare spent with particular providers in last week among working families, by age of school-age child 2004-2008

Base: All children in childcare in working families

% of time spent with each provider

	Primary school		Secondary school	
	2004	2008	2004	2008
Formal childcare	**34**	**47**	**16**	**26**
Early years	3	6	*	*
Out of school club	19	29	12	23
Childminder	7	8	1	2
Informal childcare	**59**	**45**	**74**	**58**
Grandparent	37	30	38	29
Older sibling	5	3	16	15
Another relative	6	4	5	4
Friend or neighbour	11	8	15	9
Weighted base	*1282*	*1243*	*402*	*429*
Unweighted base	*1153*	*1099*	*396*	*374*

3.2.2 Variation across different types of families

In broad terms, very similar proportions of pre-school children in working lone or couple households are looked after by their grandparents (30 to 40 per cent) (Tables 3.14 and 3.15). However, while the proportions have been relatively static among couple families where both parents work full-time, or where one works between 16 and 29 hours each week[14], more children in families where one parent works fewer than 16 hours each week are looked after by their grandparents than they were a decade ago (40 per cent compared to 33 per cent among children). Whether this is related to supplementing the hours provided free at early years providers is open to question.

The picture is less clear regarding primary and secondary school children. Among primary school children, there has been a slight increase in using grandparents when parents work full-time or long part-time hours; for secondary school the main increase (among couple families at least) is for shorter part-time hours[15].

[14] The numbers of working lone parents with preschool children are too small to be able to make comparisons across working hours,

[15] Because of sample sizes among lone parent families, we report on all school-age children together, rather than splitting by primary and secondary. Still the numbers of lone parent working fewer than 16 hours a week are too few to cite.

Table 3.14 Use of childcare in past week among working families, by work status of couple households and age of child, 1999-2008

Base: All children in working couple families

% using each provider

	Couple – both FT			Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (16-29 hrs)			Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (<16 hrs)			All in couple families		
	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008
Use of childcare												
Pre-school												
Any childcare	82	87	88	78	88	86	71	82	80	78	86	86
Any formal	66	73	75	55	70	72	47	64	65	56	69	71
Early years	48	64	63	43	64	65	39	57	61	43	62	64
Out of school	1	2	3	1	2	3	*	2	2	1	2	3
Childminder	22	12	12	14	9	9	8	6	6	15	9	9
Any informal	40	47	45	44	51	47	43	51	47	43	49	46
Grandparent	35	39	37	38	43	41	33	39	40	36	40	39
Sibling	*	1	*	1	2	1	*	2	1	1	2	1
Other relative	5	6	7	7	8	6	7	7	4	6	7	6
Friend/neighbour	3	5	4	5	6	4	7	10	5	5	7	4
Weighted base	*291*	*271*	*278*	*432*	*437*	*405*	*216*	*201*	*169*	*949*	*929*	*865*
Unweighted base	*279*	*352*	*333*	*406*	*555*	*529*	*199*	*263*	*241*	*893*	*1195*	*1120*
Primary school												
Any childcare	60	69	72	47	57	58	41	50	57	50	59	62
Any formal	26	36	47	16	25	32	10	17	36	18	27	38
Early years	2	2	3	2	2	4	1	2	8	2	2	4
Out of school	10	24	33	6	18	25	4	12	26	7	19	28
Childminder	11	10	11	5	4	5	2	1	1	6	5	6
Any informal	37	46	41	29	41	35	29	36	29	32	41	35
Grandparent	25	31	30	19	29	23	21	23	18	21	28	24
Sibling	4	6	4	2	3	3	2	2	2	3	4	4
Other relative	3	5	4	4	5	3	4	4	3	4	5	3
Friend/neighbour	8	12	8	7	11	10	4	12	8	7	12	9
Weighted base	*607*	*540*	*530*	*834*	*751*	*705*	*381*	*330*	*260*	*1841*	*1650*	*1531*
Unweighted base	*567*	*484*	*463*	*750*	*671*	*629*	*339*	*291*	*237*	*1674*	*1471*	*1360*
Secondary school												
Any childcare	35	40	44	29	38	40	18	41	47	30	39	43
Any formal	5	10	16	4	8	19	1	13	19	4	10	17
Early years	*	*	0	*	*	0	0	1	0	*	*	0
Out of school	1	8	15	1	6	17	0	11	19	7	16	8
Childminder	*	2	1	*	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1
Any informal	27	33	30	18	31	24	12	26	25	21	30	27
Grandparent	16	19	16	10	16	14	6	14	14	12	17	15
Sibling	10	10	11	6	8	6	5	6	7	7	8	8
Other relative	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
Friend/neighbour	3	7	6	1	7	4		9	6	1	7	5
Weighted base	*335*	*333*	*358*	*328*	*321*	*293*	*125*	*120*	*99*	*797*	*785*	*764*
Unweighted base	*314*	*334*	*310*	*294*	*314*	*259*	*115*	*115*	*86*	*731*	*774*	*668*

Table 3.15 Use of childcare in past week, by work status of lone parent households and age of child, 1999-2008

Base: All children in working lone parent households

% using provider

Use of childcare	Full time			PT (16-29 hrs)			PT (<16 hrs)			All in lone parents families		
	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Pre-school												
Any childcare	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	73	93	90
Any formal	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	47	72	73
Early years	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	35	68	66
Out of school	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	3	3
Childminder	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	17	13	11
Any informal	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	50	59	58
Grandparent	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	42	47	45
Sibling	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	0	1	3
Other relative	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8	11	13
Friend/neighbour	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	8	5
Weighted base	*49*	*50*	*60*	*70*	*93*	*110*	*20*	*9*	*17*	*138*	*152*	*187*
Unweighted base	*47*	*69*	*77*	*63*	*123*	*145*	*18*	*14*	*22*	*128*	*206*	*244*
School-age												
Any childcare	56	64	66	51	56	54	n/a	n/a	n/a	52	59	58
Any formal	21	31	40	12	18	24	n/a	n/a	n/a	16	24	31
Early years	2	1	1	1	1	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	1	2
Out of school	20	31	5	12	17	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	15	23	20
Childminder	8	8	9	2	4	6	n/a	n/a	n/a	5	5	7
Any informal	36	46	41	38	45	37	n/a	n/a	n/a	35	45	37
Grandparent	23	28	26	26	27	25	n/a	n/a	n/a	23	26	24
Sibling	5	9	4	3	5	6	n/a	n/a	n/a	4	7	5
Other relative	4	6	8	10	9	6	n/a	n/a	n/a	6	7	7
Friend/neighbour	10	16	9	10	11	7	n/a	n/a	n/a	10	13	8
Weighted base	*304*	*297*	*304*	*273*	*318*	*307*	*65*	*63*	*62*	*641*	*679*	*673*
Unweighted base	*285*	*283*	*261*	*248*	*296*	*266*	*59*	*56*	*54*	*592*	*635*	*581*

n/a sample too small to report percentages

In terms of the proportionate amount of time that children spent with formal and informal childcare providers, the story was very similiar for children of couple and lone parents working different hours. That is, among school age children, there has been a drop in the amount of time that children spend with informal childcare providers.

We looked at whether there were any important associations between parents' socio-economic status and their use of informal childcare between 1999 and 2008, but no clear patterns emerged. Speight et al (2009) report on the proportion[16] of children in lower income families receiving formal childcare between 2007 and 2008 (in reference to whether the Public Service Agreement to increase this take up is being met). There has been no significant change in the *proportion* (29 per cent in 2008) of children in lower income families in formal childcare.

[16] They also report on numbers of children using grossed up estimates. However, these seem to suffer from changes in methodology which make them hard to interpret.

3.2.3 Summary

The rise in the proportion of families using formal childcare since 1999 is greater than for those using informal childcare, and there are now more children in formal than informal childcare. However, contrary to expectations that the National Childcare Strategy might lead to a reduction in the use of informal childcare, the numbers of children in informal childcare has risen over the past decade, mainly accounted for by more children being looked after by their grandparents (although the range of providers was greater for secondary school children). This was true across all age ranges (of children) and socio-economic groups (of their parents). That said, among children using childcare, the amount of time spent with grandparents and other informal carers has fallen when looked at as a proportion of all time spent in childcare.

As a fair proportion of the increase in formal childcare use is due to preschool children attending part-time early years provision, this may account for a rise in the numbers of children in informal childcare, if the two are being used in conjunction with each other. The fact that there has been a substantial increase in parents working fewer than 16 hours per week using informal childcare *might* be related.

3.3 Changes in parental work patterns

We might expect that policies related to childcare, the benefit and tax credit systems and family friendly working arrangements may have led to an increase in the number of parents entering paid employment[17]. In this section, we use data from the Childcare Survey, grossed up using ONS mid-year estimates for the number of children aged 0-14 in England to see whether this is in fact the case.[18] Our interest in this is the potential knock-on effect on the demand for childcare, be it formal or informal.

Between 1999 and 2008, there *has* been an increase in the number of children living in lone parent working households and in couple households where both parents work (Table 3.16). Using data from the Childcare Survey[19], between these years, there has been a six percentage point rise in the number of couple households where both parents work, with a significant rise (from 21 per cent to 25 per cent) in the proportion of families where both parents work full-time (30 hours a week or more). The increase in the proportion of lone parents who work is starker, with an 11 percentage point rise to 52 per cent in 2008. This was largely accounted for by more part-time workers (working between 16 and 29 hours each week), a proportion which rose from 17 per cent in 1999 to 24 per cent in 2008). The period did not see a significant rise in the proportion of full-time working lone parents.

[17] All the evidence in this review precedes the recent economic downturn; the fieldwork for the 2008 Childcare Survey was done between February and July 2008.
[18] The total number of children 0-14 was 9,413,000 in 1999; 9,105,000 in 2004;9,033,000 in 2008.
[19] Although surveys such as the Labour Force Survey provide more detailed trends on employment patterns, we have used figures from the Childcare Survey in order to make direct comparisons with trends in childcare use taken from the same source.

Table 3.16 Family work status, 1999-2008

Base: All families

	1999	2004	2008
	% of all lone parent households	% of all lone parent households	% of all lone parent households
Lone parent – working	**41**	**49**	**52**
Lone parent – Full time	20	22	23
Lone parent – 16-29 hrs	17	23	24
Lone parent - <16 hrs	4	4	5
Lone parent – not working	**59**	**51**	**48**
Weighted base	*n/a*	*2080*	*1959*
Unweighted base	*1202*	*1893*	*1798*
	% of all couple households	% of all couple households	% of all couple households
Couple – both parents working	**58**	**62**	**64**
Couple – both full time	21	23	25
Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (16-29 hrs)	25	27	28
Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (<16 hrs)	11	10	10
Couple – one parent working	**35**	**32**	**29**
Couple – neither parent working	**7**	**6**	**6**
Weighted base	*n/a*	*5722*	*5118*
Unweighted base	*3661*	*5909*	*5278*

Table 3.17 shows the numbers of *children* living in working – and non-working – households. In aggregate, in 2008 there were 5.05 million children living in households where all resident parents were in work (lone parent in work and dual earner couple households). This is up from 4.7 million in 1999. Lone parents accounted for three quarters of this rise[20]. Because of our interest in demand for childcare, we focus on families we term to be 'working families' – that is, couple households where both parents work and working lone parents.

The number of children in full-time working households (lone parent working full time or two full-time workers in couple households) rose from 1.71 million to 1.95 million. The numbers in households with one parent working between 16 and 29 hours per week (and, for couple households, the other worked full-time) rose from 2.08 million to 2.32 million. The numbers of children in households where one parent worked fewer than 16 hours per week *fell* from 0.87 million to 0.77 million over the same period. Although some of these children will look after themselves during their parents' working hours and others will be looked after by their other parents, nevertheless these figures imply that the demand for childcare among this group will have increased in the past decade.

[20] This does not take account of changes in the number of lone parent households over this period. According to these figures, the number of lone parents rose from 2.19 million to 2.31 million between 1999 and 2008.

Table 3.17 Family work status, 1999-2008

Base: All children

	1999		2004		2008	
	% of children in lone parent households	No of children (millions)	% of children in lone parent households	No of children (millions)	% of children in lone parent households	No of children (millions)
Lone parent – working	38	0.84	44	0.97	47	1.10
Lone parent – Full time	17	0.38	18	0.41	20	0.46
Lone parent – 16-29 hrs	17	0.37	22	0.48	23	0.53
Lone parent - <16 hrs	4	0.09	4	0.08	4	0.10
Lone parent – not working	62	1.35	56	1.24	53	1.21
Weighted base	*2037*		*1894*		*1811*	
Unweighted base	*1787*		*1893*		*1798*	
	% of children in couple households	No of children (millions)	% of children in couple households	No of children (millions)	% of children in couple households	No of children (millions)
Couple – both parents working	53	3.86	57	3.93	60	4.03
Couple – both full time	18	1.33	19	1.34	22	1.49
Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (16-29 hrs)	24	1.71	26	1.76	27	1.79
Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (<16 hrs)	11	0.78	11	0.76	10	0.67
Couple – one parent working	39	2.79	36	2.47	33	2.21
Couple – neither parent working	8	0.57	7	0.49	7	0.48
Weighted base	*6717*		*5908*		*5265*	*6717*
Unweighted base	*5900*		*5909*		*5278*	*5900*

Looking across children of different ages – preschool, primary and secondary – the rise in the proportion of working lone parents is very similar across all three age groups. However, among couple families, the increase has happened for families with preschool and primary school aged children, rather than secondary (where the proportion of dual earner households was already and still is higher) (see Table3.18).

Table 3.18 Family work status, by child's age, 1999-2008

Base: All children

	Pre school			Primary school			Secondary school		
	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Lone parent – working	26	32	35	41	46	50	47	53	60
Lone parent – Full time	9	11	11	18	20	21	25	24	30
Lone parent – 16-29 hrs	13	19	20	18	21	23	18	25	26
Lone parent - <16 hrs	4	2	3	4	5	5	4	4	4
Lone parent – not working	74	68	65	59	54	50	53	47	40
Weighted base	537	477	538	1075	949	871	426	465	402
Unweighted base	488	613	698	925	827	756	374	451	344
Couple – both parents working	42	47	51	56	58	61	66	66	67
Couple – both full time	13	14	17	19	19	22	28	29	32
Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (16-29 hrs)	19	23	24	25	27	29	27	28	26
Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (<16 hrs)	10	10	10	12	12	11	10	10	9
Couple – one parent working	50	45	41	36	34	31	25	26	25
Couple – neither parent working	8	7	7	8	7	7	8	7	7
Weighted base	2253	1931	1678	3272	2812	2467	1193	1165	1121
Unweighted base	2013	2345	2129	2820	2437	2168	1067	1127	981

Table 3.19 shows how this translates into numbers of children. In 2008 there were 1.33m preschool children in working families, 2.46m primary school children and 1.27m secondary school children. The number of children with full-time working lone parents or couple parents who both work full-time have risen in all three age groups. The most notable change is the number of preschool children with lone parents who work between 16 and 29 hours per week, which rose from 0.08m to 0.14m between 1999 and 2008. Taken together, these figures imply an increased need for full-time and part-time childcare across all age groups, but particularly among pre-school and secondary school age children.

Table 3.19 Number of children in working households, by child's age, 1999-2008

Base: All children

	Pre school			Primary school			Secondary school (under 15)		
	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008	1999	2004	2008
	No of children (million)	No of children (million)	No of children (million)	No of children (million)	No of children (million)	No of children (million)	No of children (million)	No of children (million)	No of children (million)
Lone parent – working	0.15	0.18	0.24	0.47	0.51	0.55	0.22	0.29	0.31
Lone parent – Full time	0.05	0.06	0.08	0.21	0.22	0.24	0.12	0.13	0.15
Lone parent – 16-29 hrs	0.08	0.11	0.14	0.21	0.24	0.26	0.08	0.13	0.13
Lone parent - <16 hrs	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.02	0.02	0.02
Lone parent – not working	0.43	0.38	0.45	0.68	0.60	0.56	0.21	0.26	0.21
Couple – both parents working	1.01	1.06	1.09	1.96	1.89	1.91	0.85	0.90	0.96
Couple – both full time	0.31	0.32	0.35	0.65	0.63	0.68	0.36	0.39	0.46
Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (16-29 hrs)	0.46	0.51	0.52	0.90	0.88	0.90	0.35	0.37	0.37
Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (<16 hrs)	0.23	0.24	0.22	0.41	0.39	0.33	0.13	0.14	0.13
Couple – one parent working	1.21	1.00	0.88	1.26	1.12	0.97	0.32	0.35	0.35
Couple – neither parent working	0.19	0.17	0.15	0.28	0.24	0.22	0.10	0.09	0.10

Looking across mothers in different socio-economic groups (crudely, professional/managerial, other non-manual and manual), there have been similar proportionate rises (Table 3.20)[21]. So, in terms of childcare, we would expect to see similar proportionate increase in demand across all types of childcare.

[21] Note the base here is all working mothers rather than working households.

Table 3.20 Mother's work status, by socio-economic group 1999-2008

Base: All mothers

	Prof and managerial			Other non manual			Manual		
	1999 %	2004 %	2008 %	1999 %	2004 %	2008 %	1999 %	2004 %	2008 %
Lone mother – working	**65**	**67**	**75**	**50**	**62**	**65**	**35**	**45**	**48**
Full time	49	47	58	23	29	30	9	12	14
Part time (16-29 hrs)	13	19	16	22	30	31	19	25	26
Part time (<16 hrs)	2	1	1	4	2	4	7	7	8
Not working	**35**	**33**	**25**	**50**	**38**	**35**	**65**	**55**	**52**
Weighted base	*n/a*	*108*	*127*	*n/a*	*844*	*837*	*n/a*	*801*	*703*
Unweighted base	*93*	*94*	*108*	*470*	*746*	*730*	*444*	*743*	*670*
Couple – mother working	**70**	**78**	**77**	**64**	**71**	**73**	**59**	**65**	**66**
Full time	43	52	50	24	28	30	18	20	20
Part time (16-29 hrs)	22	21	23	29	33	33	25	30	30
Part time (<16 hrs)	5	6	4	11	11	10	16	15	16
Mother not working	**30**	**22**	**23**	**36**	**29**	**27**	**41**	**35**	**34**
Weighted base	*n/a*	*612*	*737*	*n/a*	*2990*	*2643*	*n/a*	*1742*	*1392*
Unweighted base	*496*	*604*	*710*	*1850*	*3048*	*2657*	*1111*	*1816*	*1492*
All – Mother working	**69**	**77**	**77**	**61**	**69**	**71**	**52**	**58**	**60**
Full time	44	51	51	24	28	30	15	17	18
Part time (16-29 hrs)	21	20	22	28	32	32	23	28	29
Part time (<16 hrs)	4	5	3	10	9	9	14	13	13
Mother not working	**31**	**23**	**23**	**39**	**31**	**29**	**48**	**42**	**40**
Weighted base	*n/a*	*720*	*864*	*n/a*	*3834*	*3481*	*n/a*	*2543*	*2094*
Unweighted base	*589*	*698*	*818*	*2320*	*3794*	*3387*	*1555*	*2559*	*2162*

3.3.1 Summary

Across all socio-economic groups, the number of working families – both lone parent and couples – has increased over the past decade, implying an increase in demand for (either formal or informal) childcare. The numbers of both full-time and long part-time (16 to 29 hours per week) workers has increased, but there has been a fall in those working fewer than 16 hours each week. In broad terms, this pattern matches the increases in the use of childcare reported in Section 3.2, although there are some discrepancies (for instance, concerning secondary school children and about short part-time hours). Overall, it may be that the expansion in the formal childcare (discussed above) was not fast enough to cater for the increase in the number of working families over the same period, providing one explanation of the continued high demand for informal childcare.

3.4 Changes in the availability of grandparents to provide childcare for grandchildren

Gray (2005) provides the most comprehensive commentary on whether the 'supply' of grandparental care is likely to change over time, and we can add to this with more recent evidence from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) on the trends in working patterns of older men and women.

There is no consistent time-series of the employment rates of grandparents. For a consistent time-series, the best we can do is to examine employment trends among older adults as a proxy for grandparents. Tables 3.21 to 3.25 below, based on data from the LFS, show the well-known rise in employment for older men and women. Since 1993, the proportion of men aged between 50 and the basic state pension age who are working has increased by about 9 percentage points (with around two-thirds of the increase in workers attributable to full-time work). Amongst women, the increase is greater, at 12 percentage points. So, whereas in 1993, only just over two fifths of women were working in the decade before they could receive a state pension, in 2008 nearly two thirds of women do. Moreover, this increase is all accounted for by a greater proportion of women doing full-time work in the decade before they turn 60. (In fact, the proportion of women doing part-time work has fallen over this period). There have also been similar-sized changes in the employment patterns of men and women up to five years above the state pension age (some of these increases look like they have started more recently, suggesting there are cohort effects).

Table 3.21 Employment trends, men aged 50-64 and women aged 50-59

	% of men in			% of women in		
	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work
1993	38.4	6.9	54.8	44.7	27.7	27.7
1994	37.8	7.0	55.2	43.5	28.0	28.4
1995	37.8	7.2	55.0	43.2	27.8	29.0
1996	36.4	7.6	56.0	43.2	27.5	29.3
1997	35.1	8.4	56.4	42.5	27.0	30.5
1998	34.4	8.2	57.3	41.1	27.9	31.0
1999	34.0	8.3	57.7	40.2	27.4	32.4
2000	34.1	8.3	57.6	39.6	27.5	32.8
2001	32.8	8.5	58.8	38.9	27.3	33.8
2002	32.4	9.7	57.9	38.0	28.3	33.7
2003	31.2	9.9	58.9	36.6	28.2	35.3
2004	30.9	9.5	59.6	36.4	27.1	36.5
2005	30.3	9.6	60.1	35.6	27.0	37.4
2006	30.8	9.8	59.5	35.0	27.1	38.0
2007	30.3	9.8	59.9	33.9	26.6	39.4
2008	29.7	10.1	60.2	33.0	26.9	40.0

Note and sources. Authors calculations from the Labour Force Survey. Results have been weighted. Part-time work defined as <30 hours/wk.

Table 3.22	Employment trends, men and women aged 50-54					
	% of men in			% of women in		
	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work
1993	23.2	6.4	70.4	37.1	29.7	33.1
1994	22.4	6.4	71.2	36.4	30.0	33.6
1995	22.1	6.8	71.2	35.8	29.5	34.7
1996	21.3	6.9	71.9	35.4	29.5	35.0
1997	20.6	8.0	71.4	34.1	29.5	36.5
1998	20.0	7.4	72.6	33.6	30.0	36.4
1999	19.9	7.7	72.4	32.7	29.0	38.4
2000	20.2	7.5	72.3	32.9	28.9	38.2
2001	19.0	7.2	73.8	31.8	28.8	39.5
2002	18.7	8.8	72.5	31.1	28.6	40.3
2003	18.2	8.6	73.2	30.0	28.6	41.4
2004	18.3	7.8	73.9	29.1	27.5	43.4
2005	17.2	8.3	74.6	29.0	27.5	43.5
2006	17.5	8.5	74.0	28.5	27.2	44.2
2007	16.9	8.2	74.9	27.6	27.1	45.4
2008	18.1	8.5	73.4	26.8	27.4	45.8

Note and sources. Authors calculations from the Labour Force Survey. Results have been weighted. Part-time work defined as <30 hours/wk.

Table 3.23	Employment trends, men and women aged 55-59					
	% of men in			% of women in		
	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work
1993	35.6	7.1	57.3	52.7	25.4	21.8
1994	35.6	7.5	56.9	51.2	26.0	22.9
1995	36.6	7.3	56.1	51.2	26.0	22.8
1996	34.5	7.8	57.7	52.2	25.2	22.6
1997	33.7	8.8	57.5	52.9	23.9	23.2
1998	32.0	8.6	59.4	50.5	25.3	24.3
1999	31.7	8.7	59.6	49.7	25.4	24.9
2000	31.7	9.0	59.3	47.9	25.8	26.3
2001	30.3	9.1	60.6	47.3	25.6	27.1
2002	29.8	10.4	59.8	45.2	28.1	26.7
2003	28.7	10.4	60.9	43.1	27.7	29.2
2004	27.8	10.0	62.2	43.2	26.7	30.0
2005	27.0	9.9	63.0	41.9	26.6	31.6
2006	27.5	10.2	62.3	41.0	26.9	32.1
2007	27.8	9.6	62.6	40.3	26.2	33.6
2008	25.8	9.6	64.6	39.5	26.5	34.0

Note and sources. Authors calculations from the Labour Force Survey. Results have been weighted. Part-time work defined as <30 hours/wk.

Table 3.24	Employment trends, men and women aged 60-64					
	% of men in			% of women in		
	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work
1993	58.6	7.2	34.2	79.0	14.3	6.7
1994	58.5	7.1	34.4	78.5	14.6	6.9
1995	58.5	7.5	34.0	77.9	14.7	7.4
1996	57.9	8.3	33.8	78.2	14.6	7.2
1997	56.5	8.6	34.9	77.2	15.4	7.5
1998	57.2	9.1	33.7	78.6	14.2	7.2
1999	56.3	8.5	35.1	78.5	14.0	7.5
2000	56.3	8.7	34.9	78.0	14.7	7.4
2001	55.0	9.5	35.5	75.5	16.2	8.3
2002	54.1	9.9	35.9	75.7	16.0	8.3
2003	51.0	11.0	38.0	75.2	16.8	8.0
2004	50.4	11.0	38.6	73.7	17.1	9.1
2005	50.1	10.8	39.1	72.7	17.2	10.1
2006	49.9	10.6	39.5	71.4	18.0	10.6
2007	47.4	11.7	40.9	71.3	17.9	10.8
2008	46.1	12.3	41.6	69.8	18.8	11.4

Note and sources. Authors calculations from the Labour Force Survey. Results have been weighted. Part-time work defined as <30 hours/wk.

Table 3.25	Employment trends, men and women aged 65-69					
	% of men in			% of women in		
	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work	Not in work	Part-time work	Full-time work
1993	89.2	6.0	4.8	93.4	5.2	1.4
1994	88.1	6.3	5.7	93.7	5.1	1.2
1995	87.8	6.5	5.8	93.4	5.4	1.3
1996	88.6	6.4	5.0	94.1	4.6	1.3
1997	87.6	6.9	5.5	93.4	5.4	1.2
1998	87.6	6.7	5.8	93.4	5.6	1.0
1999	87.4	6.8	5.8	92.8	6.2	1.1
2000	88.1	6.7	5.2	93.1	5.8	1.2
2001	87.8	6.7	5.5	93.3	5.3	1.3
2002	86.7	7.3	5.9	92.7	5.8	1.4
2003	85.5	8.3	6.1	91.6	7.0	1.4
2004	85.4	8.2	6.4	91.9	6.5	1.6
2005	84.1	8.4	7.5	91.2	6.7	2.0
2006	83.1	9.1	7.8	90.8	7.2	2.0
2007	82.6	9.3	8.1	90.8	7.3	1.9
2008	81.5	9.5	9.0	89.9	7.9	2.2

Note and sources. Authors calculations from the Labour Force Survey. Results have been weighted. Part-time work defined as <30 hours/wk.

Looking over a longer time period, Grandparents Plus (2009) cite figures from the LFS that the proportion of women who are economically active has risen from just under 60 per cent in 1971 to almost 75 per cent. Gray (2005) reported a similar pattern between 1989 and 2002, although her data source is not clear. In light of this trend (as well as increasing geographic dispersion of extended families discussed below), Gray (2005), Dench and Ogg (2002), and others have expressed concern

that that the availability of grandparents as child-carers may be declining. On the face of it, as the LFS is showing a disproportionate increase in full-time work among older women, these concerns are conceivably valid (although we do not know if this trend holds true for grandmothers with dependent age grandchildren). We might speculate that there is a potential policy conflict between increasing maternal work (which often relies on grandparental childcare) and attempts to increase employment among older people and the changes to statutory retirement age. However, looking at the last decade, these concerns are not borne out by the trends in the number and proportion of families using grandparental care, which have not seen a drop since 1999, and have in fact increased. It may be that the shift in the proportion of older women working full-time is not sufficient to have an impact on grandparental childcare or that those grandmothers who decide to work full-time are already those less likely to be involved in caring for grandchildren. Arthur et al (2003) did find in their qualitative study that grandparents' willingness to provide childcare was influenced by their own working status or working hours.

Jan Pahl (cited in Gray, 2005) points to a potential *increase* in the supply of grandparental care, with increasing life expectancy and good health meaning that more grandparents are around for longer to look after grandchildren. This may partly explain why an increase in employment rates among older women has not led to a decrease in the proportions of families being helped out by grandparents. Indeed, Gray's own demographic analysis (data source unclear) suggested that in 2001 the chance of a newborn having a living maternal grandmother under 70 was ten percentage points higher than in 1981. According to our own analysis of the 2009 British Social Attitudes survey, a quarter (27 per cent) of people aged 50 to 54 are grandparents; and this proportion rises to a half (51 per cent) among people aged between 55 and 64. To look at this further, Gray used demographic data alongside data from the TUS on older employed women engaging in childcare for other households. She found that – in 2001 – the combined effects of changes in demography and employment rates among women aged 50 to 69 meant that maternal grandmothers were slightly more available to help their daughters with childcare than in 1981. Moreover, Dench and Ogg's evidence that grandparents now have fewer grandchildren than in previous generations suggests that, within families, grandparents will have fewer calls on their time and thus may be more available to help. According to data from 1998 British Social Attitudes, grandparents have an average (mean) of 4.4 grandchildren[22]. Griggs (2009) cite figures from Buchanan and Griggs that the proportion of grandparents with ten or more grandchildren has fallen from one in ten in the 1950s to now one in twenty.

However, a counter argument is put forward by Dench and Ogg (2002) who point to concerns that as the women have children older, then grandparents are older than previous generations and in less good health to look after grandchildren. Again, Gray illustrates how the average age of becoming a mother has increased steadily since the 1970s and Griggs (2009) cite figures from the British Social Attitudes survey series that the numbers of grandparents over 70 have grown between 1998 and 2007. Moreover, their figures emphasise a differential age profile across socio-demographic groups, with 'working class' grandmothers much younger on average than middle class grandmothers. Dench et al (1999), Mooney and Statham (2002) and Griggs (2009) raise issues about whether grandparents may be less able to look after grandchildren given that increasing numbers have their own parents to look after. However, despite evidence of an increasing number of four generation families, there is little evidence to support concerns that this will have an impact on grandparents' ability to provide childcare for their grandchildren. Dench et al (1999) found that having a living

[22] This information is not available in the 2009 survey.

parent did not reduce the likelihood of having contact with grandchildren. Moreover, from the Childcare Survey, we know that most grandparents have nowhere near a full-time role in caring for their grandchildren.

Gray cites Dench and Ogg's findings from 1998 British Social Attitudes of the potential effect of increased migration over the last two decades, citing evidence of fewer three generation households and a decreased likelihood of a child living within 15 minutes of a grandparent. (Arthur et al (2003) found that 15 minutes travel was a lower threshold for looking after children.) Using ONS population estimates, 2001 Census data and data from the Survey of English Housing, she points to the increased mobility of the English population, both among parents moving over a long distance for work reasons and grandparents moving out of urban areas and towards the coast or rural areas.

3.4.1 Summary

It is reasonably difficult to piece together this patchy evidence and come to any firm conclusions about the changing availability of grandparents as childcare providers. Evidence on the proportions of families using grandparental childcare suggests that changes in grandparents' working patterns and changing demographics have not had an effect on the supply of grandparent care. However, if grandparental employment levels continue to rise – which is conceivable given both the rising retirement age and the fact that the next generation of grandmothers will be one which has been more likely to continue working through their own childrearing stage – we may see a decrease in the supply of childcare that grandparents can offer.

3.5 Availability of formal childcare places

So, we have evidence that the number of children with working parents – and therefore probably the demand for childcare - has increased since 1999. Plus, we know there has been a rise in the numbers of children in *both* formal and informal childcare. Since 1997, there has been around a 50 percent increase in the number of registered formal childcare places available in England for children under 8[23] (Table 3.26). In 2008, there were an estimated 1.5 million places compared to 1 million in 1997, according to Ofsted figures[24][25]. The step change in numbers happened in the early years of the Childcare Strategy, although there continued to be a steady rise since 2004. The places have grown within group setting providers rather than among home-based childminders. Although the increase in the number of places in group settings are among those providing extended day rather than sessional care, short sessions (in line with the free early years entitlement for three and four year olds) will be offered within many of these settings.

[23] Places for children aged eight and over do not need to be registered and, as such, are not included in Ofsted's figures. However, in reality, a proportion of the childminders and out of school clubs will be catering for children aged eight and over.

[24] Recent reports about a decline in nursery places are not reported here, as we cite 2008 figures to fit with the available data from the Childcare Survey.

[25] Butt et al (2007) cite evidence from the Childcare Providers Survey which suggests that the number of children enrolled has not increased as much as the number of places available which they suggest reflects that demand has not increased with supply and there is spare capacity. However, they also surmise that this may be due to more children taking up full-time places and less scope for multiple occupancy.

Recent anecdotal evidence suggests that the drop in the number of registered childminders may be due to increased state regulation. Alternatively, an increase in the availability of early years and after school provision may have dampened levels of demand for childminders. Whatever the reason, capacity shrinkage among this group – traditionally seen as providing more flexible care than group setting providers, and the main formal providers of home-based care – may imply the need for greater reliance on informal carers who can provide similar roles in these respects[26]. However, again we should stress the disadvantage of having to rely on data on childcare places for under eights. In Table 3.1, we show a slight increase between 2004 and 2008 in the number of children (of all ages) being looked after by childminders.

Table 3.26: Number of registered childcare places in England, 1997-2008[27]

	1997	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Day nurseries	193,800	507,700	542,900	588,300	612,500	635,600
Sessional providers	383,700	256,300	244,200	230,100	218,100	206,300
Out of school clubs	78,700	341,500	358,100	372,108	372,600	371,500
Childminders	365,200	318,100	319,700	321,700	308,700	295,300
All[28]	**n/a**	**1,466,300**	**1,509,600**	**1,559,400**	**1,560,400**	**1,555,800**

Source: Ofsted

3.5.1 Summary

These findings are broadly in line with the figures on childcare use in Section 3.2. It is a shame that we do not have figures on the number of places available for older children to look at the effect of the Extended Schools Strategy which has been implemented in recent years.

Although these figures provide a measure the current supply of childcare, this does not necessarily indicate what might happen in the future. In the medium-run, the sector will expand or contract in accordance with levels of demand and ability to run at a profit. So, arguably, these data do little more than validate the scale of childcare use from the Childcare Survey.

3.6 Changes in parents' perceptions of local formal childcare provision

Of course, parents' decisions on whether and which forms of childcare to use are not directly influenced by what is available and what it costs. They firstly need to be aware of the childcare in their local area and what it would cost them. So, in this final section on how things have changed over the past decade, we report on whether parents' perceptions of the formal childcare in their

[26] Although it is possible that there has been an increase in unregistered childminders looking after children aged eight and over.

[27] Figures cover all registered places for 0-7 year olds. Places for children 8+ do not need to be registered and so are not counted.

[28] "All" includes the provider types listed plus crèches – facilities that provide occasional care for children and are provided on particular premises. Some providers offer more than one type of care and are included separately under each of the relevant provider types.

area, to see whether, from that, we can understand their patterns of use of formal – and particularly informal – childcare over that period.

The Childcare Survey includes questions which ask parents –

(a) Whether there are a sufficient number of childcare places in their local area;

(b) How good or poor the quality of the childcare is in their area;

(c) How affordable this childcare is.

Table 3.27 shows the views of families with pre-school, primary school and secondary school children on the above three issues. Although an increasing proportion of parents think that there are enough childcare places in their local area (the proportion has risen from 30 per cent to 40 per cent from 1999 to 2008), it is still the case that only a minority of parents think that there are enough places. In 1999, parents of younger children were more likely to think there were enough places, and this is still the case in 2008.

The picture is very similar when it comes to parents' views of the quality of the childcare in their local area. More parents rate local childcare as 'very' or 'fairly' good in 2008 than they did in 1999, and parents of young children did, and still do, hold more positive views than parents with older children. But, despite parents holding more favourable views than they did in 1999, still large proportions of parents do not think that the quality of their local childcare is good.

Unfortunately, the Childcare Survey did not ask the same question about affordability of childcare as it did in 2004 and as a result we can only compare parents' views in 2004 and 2008. There was no significant in parents' views on the affordability of local childcare over this period. In both 2004 and 2008, parents with younger children were more likely than others to think that local childcare was affordable.

Table 3.27 Perceptions of childcare provision 1999-2008, by age of child

Base: All families using childcare in past year

	Pre-school			Primary school			Secondary school			All		
	1999 %	2004 %	2008 %	1999 %	2004 %	2008 %	1999 %	2004 %	2008 %	1999 %	2004 %	2008 %
Whether sufficient places available												
Too many	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
About right number	33	44	44	27	38	38	23	35	32	30	40	40
Too few	42	42	37	44	43	37	36	38	36	42	42	37
Not sure	24	13	18	28	18	23	40	26	31	27	17	22
Quality of childcare available												
Very good	20	23	22	12	20	18	11	15	13	16	21	19
Fairly good	38	47	45	34	41	42	30	37	33	35	43	41
Fairly poor	9	9	8	10	9	9	10	8	8	10	9	9
Very poor	3	2	3	5	3	5	5	2	9	4	2	5
Not sure	30	19	22	39	28	26	44	37	38	35	25	27
Affordability of childcare available												
Very good	n/a	8	7	n/a	7	5	n/a	4	3	n/a	7	6
Fairly good		34	33		28	30		22	20		30	30
Fairly poor		27	24		24	21		22	18		25	22
Very poor		13	16		12	15		9	15		12	15
Not sure		19	20		29	28		43	43		26	27
Weighted base		*3077*	*3010*		*2788*	*2888*		*839*	*1178*		*6704*	*7075*
Unweighted base	*1994*	*3859*	*3784*	*1768*	*2521*	*2627*	*450*	*523*	*663*	*4212*	*6903*	*7074*

3.6.1 Summary

These figures suggest that any improvements in the formal childcare market do not imply that it is now fulfilling the needs of all parents in terms of its availability, quality or cost.

3.7 Concluding comments

The purpose of this chapter was to review what has changed in the past decade in order to draw some conclusions about whether previous government policies and changes in elder population profiles are having an effect on whether parents use informal childcare to facilitate their paid work. As we said at the start of the chapter, we are not implying that we can make causal links between trends across childcare use, parental work patterns and the availability of formal and informal childcare. However, our analyses – and the evidence we report from others - are useful in helping us to understand how different factors may have worked together or against each other over the past decade to arrive at current levels of demand and use for informal and formal childcare.

The increase in numbers of working lone parents and dual earner couple families implies that there has been a rise in demand for both full and part-time childcare, across all age groups and all socio-economic groups. Certainly, this has translated into an increase in the numbers of children in both formal and informal childcare. The relative rise of both formal and informal childcare use suggests that there may be shortcomings in the supply, cost and quality of formal childcare and/or that some parents choose to use informal childcare for reasons unconnected with the availability of formal childcare. On the available figures on the number of childcare places, it is hard to be confident that the number of formal childcare places has expanded sufficiently to meet levels of demand. However, parents' perceptions of the local formal childcare market suggest that many parents do not feel that it adequately meets their childcare needs.

Moreover, many parents use a combination of informal and formal childcare (including early years education) and, so, a rise in the use one will not necessarily lead to a fall in use of the other. We do not have robust trend data on whether the packages of childcare that families use have changed over this period[29], but do report on the high proportions of families doing this in 2008 in Chapter 4. We do know that there has been a decrease in the amount of time that children spend in informal care, implying that it is now more often being used alongside formal childcare. We do not have trend data to address the second point about parental preferences. Rather this is an issue we look at it in detail in Chapter 6. The findings there would suggest that there is some truth in the fact that, whatever the formal childcare provision, some families will choose informal over formal childcare providers.

Lastly, whether some families are continuing to use informal childcare over formal provision through choice or necessity is only relevant if there continues to be sufficient 'supply' of informal childcare. We surmise that various demographic changes in the grandparent population have worked together to maintain the availability of grandparents are childcare providers, although predictions for the future are less clear.

[29] Earlier waves of the Childcare Survey did not include reasons for childcare use.

4 The current picture of informal childcare use among working families

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how families in England – and where available, the UK as a whole - use different types of informal childcare. As such, it takes a closer look at informal childcare than most studies about childcare provision. Most studies tend to focus more on formal childcare - given that has been the focus of virtually all of the previous government's policy in this area - with evidence about informal childcare provision taking a residual role. As well as providing a comprehensive picture of families' use of informal childcare, this chapter sets the context for later chapters on the particular issues faced by certain family types (eg those with disabled children, student parents, etc), choices relating to childcare, its relationship with children's educational and socio-emotional outcomes, and issues concerning cost and funding.

The foundations of this chapter are new analyses of the 2008 Childcare Survey, carried out for this study by researchers at NatCen[30]. Rather than rely solely on the published reports (eg Speight et al, 2009) based on these data, we have further quarried them to look in more detail at the ways that families use of different types of informal childcare. We look in particular at different configurations or 'packages' of childcare that families use, taking into account the mix of (both informal and formal) care[31].

Within England, the Childcare Survey is the key source of data on families' use of childcare. It uses robust sampling methods (selecting families from Child Benefit records), obtains high response rates, has a large sample size of families with children under 15. As such, for this chapter, our default has been to use evidence from this survey, supplementing with evidence from elsewhere only where it adds to the evidence base, and not where it simply duplicates. We restrict ourselves to UK (mainly English) evidence. In mapping out which families use different forms of childcare, it is neither appropriate nor helpful to draw on evidence from other countries, given the inextricable links between the use of informal childcare and either a country's policies around employment and childcare, or its societal and familial structures and expectations.

As we raise in Chapter 2, this report focuses on childcare used by working families (unless published evidence does not allow us to make this distinction). The Childcare Survey includes questions which allow us to pinpoint childcare that is used 'for work related reasons'. Wherever possible, this chapter focuses on this childcare, although in some places it is necessary for us to report on childcare used by working families (which may include some childcare used for reasons other than parental work).

[30] At the time of our analysis, these data were the most up-to-date publicly available data. A report on the 2009 Childcare Survey data is now published (Smith et al, 2010).

[31] Although others have provided profiles of families' use of formal and informal childcare (eg Paull and Taylor (2002) used data from the Family Resources Survey, we do not report on these, given we feel that the level of detail and recency of the Childcare Survey data will make it the most accurate source of up-to-date figures. However, we draw on Paull and Taylor's multivariate analysis which predicts the use of formal and informal provision.

Although the definition of 'work-related reasons' includes childcare used while parents look for work, we refer to it as 'childcare while parents work' in subsequent sections. By concentrating on childcare which facilitates parental work, we avoid including as 'childcare' early years education which is solely used for the child's educational development. So, when we concentrate on working families (as we do for most of the report) early years education is only counted if it is used (solely or as part of a package of care) while parents work[32].

Likewise (as described in Chapter 2), informal childcare is defined as childcare provided by relatives, friends and neighbours, and excludes care provided by both resident and non-resident parents. Where we draw on published evidence which uses different definitions of either childcare for working parents or informal childcare, we highlight this in the text.

In the subsequent sections, we describe families' use of informal childcare, structured around the following questions –

- What proportion of working families use different types of informal childcare to facilitate parental work (Section 4.2)?
- How does this vary across children of different age groups? Within different age groups, how is it used in conjunction with other forms of childcare (Section 4.3)?
- How much time – and when - do children spend with informal childcare providers (Section 4.4)?
- Do working lone parent and dual earner couple families use informal childcare in the same ways (Section 4.5)?
- Do lower income working families and those from lower socio-economic groups use informal childcare differently to higher income families (Section 4.6)?
- Does it make a difference what age parents are, what their educational qualifications are and where they live (Section 4.7)?

4.2 Overall proportions of families using different types of informal childcare

In the 2008 Childcare Survey, in a given term-time week[33], a third (36 per cent) of all families (both working and non-working) with children under 15 had used childcare (see Table 4.1). Among these, more families called on grandparents as childcare providers than on any other individual or organisation, with grandparents looking after nearly two million (1.97m) children in that week. Sixteen per cent of families had a child's grandparent looking after them while parents worked, twice as many families as those using the two most common formal childcare providers (day nurseries (used by seven per cent) and out of school clubs (used by eight per cent)).

[32] Note that although the Childcare Survey interview prompts parents to include all periods when the child is not with their parents. In this way, it endeavours to ensure that times not necessarily counted as 'childcare' by all parents (eg early years provision; ad hoc arrangements with informal providers) are captured.

[33] The survey asks about childcare used in the most recent term-time week (usually the previous week).

Other informal childcare providers play a much smaller role, with four per cent of families having used a friend or neighbour to look after children while parents worked, two per cent a sibling and three per cent another relative.

Table 4.1 Use of childcare providers in past week, 2008

Base: All families with children 0-14

Provider	% families using provider for work related reasons
Any childcare	**36**
Informal childcare	**22**
Grandparent	16
Older sibling	2
Another relative	3
Friend or neighbour	4
Formal childcare	**22**
Day nursery	7
Nursery class/school	3
Reception class	1
Playgroup	1
Childminder	5
Other individual provider (nanny, au pair, babysitter)	1
Out of school club	8
No childcare	**64**
Weighted base	*7077*
Unweighted base	*7076*

In Chapter 3, Table 3.3 showed that informal childcare accounted for 41 per cent of all time that children spent in childcare in that week. Grandparents provided a quarter (27 per cent) of all childcare time.

Table 4.2 focuses on the childcare that families' use to help them work, showing the proportion of families using childcare for work related reasons who use various different forms of childcare. As with Table 4.1, equal proportions used informal and formal childcare - six in ten (61 per cent) families using childcare for work related reasons used informal childcare and six in ten (61 per cent) used formal childcare. More than twice as many families left their children with grandparents as with any other childcare provider. Forty four percent of families using childcare for work-related reasons had left their children with their grandparents for this reason. Around one in ten of these families had left their children with other relatives or friends.

Table 4.2 Use of childcare providers for work related reasons in past week, 2008

Base: All families with children 0-14 using childcare for work related reasons

Provider	% families using provider for work related reasons
Informal childcare	**61**
Grandparent	44
Older sibling	7
Another relative	9
Friend or neighbour	10
Formal childcare	**61**
Day nursery	19
Nursery class/school	8
Reception class	4
Playgroup	4
Childminder	13
Other individual provider (nanny, au pair, babysitter)	4
Out of school club	22
Weighted base	*2533*
Unweighted base	*2460*

Table 4.3 looks at the same issue from the perspective of the amount of time that children spend with different providers. Although families are as likely to use informal as formal childcare, in terms of the amount of time spent with providers, informal childcare accounts for less than half (42 per cent) of all childcare time while parents work. However, looking at particular providers, grandparents cover more of the childcare hours than any other formal or informal provider. In terms of hours, grandparents cover 29 per cent of the childcare used while parents work.

Table 4.3 Proportion of time spent with different childcare providers for work related reasons in past week, 2008

Base: All children receiving childcare while parent(s) at work

% of time spent with each provider while parent(s) at work

Provider	% time
Informal childcare	**42**
Grandparent	29
Older sibling	4
Another relative	4
Friend or neighbour	5
Formal childcare	**56**
Early years	24
Out of school club	20
Childminder	9
Weighted base	*2121*
Unweighted base	*2214*

4.2.1 Summary

The vast majority of informal childcare is done by grandparents rather than other relatives, friends or neighbours. Grandparents are the main source of childcare across all ages. A greater proportion of parents turn to them than to any other informal provider; and children spend proportionately more time being looked after by grandparents than with any other formal or informal provider.

4.3 Using different type of informal childcare for children of different ages

Grandparents play a prominent childcare role throughout each stage of childhood. They are used as carers while parents work more often than any other formal or informal childcare provider for pre-school, primary and secondary school children. In a given term-time week, 14 per cent of pre-school children, 11 per cent of primary school children and eight per cent of secondary school children under 15 were looked after by their grandparents while their parents work (Table 4.4).

Although much smaller numbers in aggregate, other informal carers are also important at all stages, with some indication that siblings become more important as children get older. However, these small numbers mean that our analysis (and indeed the published literature) focuses largely on grandparents.

Use of childcare providers for work related reasons in past week, by child's age, 2008

Base: All children 0-14

Provider	0-2 % using provider for work related reasons	3-4 % using provider for work related reasons	All pre-school % using provider for work related reasons	All primary school % using provider for work related reasons	All secondary school % using provider for work related reasons	All children % using provider for work related reasons
Any childcare	**29**	**36**	**32**	**26**	**16**	**26**
Informal childcare	**16**	**17**	**17**	**16**	**13**	**15**
Grandparent	14	14	14	11	8	11
Older sibling	*	*	*	1	3	1
Another relative	3	2	2	2	1	2
Friend or neighbour	1	2	1	3	*2*	2
Formal childcare	**20**	**28**	**23**	**14**	***3***	**15**
Day nursery	13	10	11	*	0	4
Nursery class/school	2	9	5	*	0	2
Reception class	0	3	1	1	0	1
Playgroup	1	4	2	*	0	1
Childminder	4	5	4	4	*	3
Other individual provider (nanny, au pair, babysitter)	1	1	1	1	*	1
Out of school club	*	3	1	9	3	5
No childcare	**71**	**44**	**68**	**74**	**84**	**74**
Weighted base	*2541*	*1972*	*4513*	*7308*	*2791*	*14612*
Unweighted base	*2701*	*2495*	*5196*	*7188*	*2627*	*15011*

The figures above show the relative importance of grandparents against other childcare providers – and informal providers against formal providers – among families as a whole. However, to understand how working families use different forms of childcare, we ran the same tables twice more with different bases. The first of these (Table 4.5) is based on all lone parent working families plus all couple families where both parents work (ie the potential pool of families needing childcare to help parents work). The usefulness of this table is that it allows us to see what proportions of families use no childcare – of particular interest for secondary school children. The second (Table 4.6) is based on all families using childcare to help parents work, so that we can show the relative proportions of formal and informal childcare use among these families.

Table 4.5 shows that, among working families, the proportion of children in working families in childcare decreases by age – from 73 per cent among pre-school children to 25 per cent among secondary school children. The decrease will be due largely to children being left alone (outside of school hours) rather than requiring supervision. The table shows that for pre-school children, formal care in fact 'trumps' informal care (though substantial portions will use both). As children get older, informal childcare play a more substantial role relative to formal care (where school is not counted as care). There is a 48 percentage point drop between preschool and secondary school age in the proportion of children spending time in formal childcare. This compares to only a 17 percentage point drop in the proportions spending time with informal childcarers. For primary school age

children, formal care is still important in after school care, but informal care is the norm for secondary school age children.

Table 4.5 Use of childcare providers for work related reasons in past week, by child's age, 2008

Base: All children 0-14 in working families

Provider	0-2	3-4	All pre-school	All primary school	All secondary school	All children
	% using provider for work related reasons	% using provider for work related reasons	% using provider for work related reasons	% using provider for work related reasons	% using provider for work related reasons	% using provider for work related reasons
Any childcare	**70**	**75**	**73**	**46**	**25**	**48**
Informal childcare	**38**	**36**	**37**	**28**	**20**	**29**
Grandparent	33	30	32	20	12	21
Older sibling	*	1	1	2	5	2
Another relative	6	4	5	4	2	4
Friend or neighbour	3	4	3	6	3	5
Formal childcare	**48**	**59**	**53**	**25**	**5**	**28**
Day nursery	32	21	27	*	0	7
Nursery class/school	4	19	11	1	0	3
Reception class	0	7	3	*	0	2
Playgroup	2	9	5	*	0	1
Childminder	9	10	9	7	1	6
Other individual provider (nanny, au pair, babysitter)	3	3	2	3	1	2
Out of school club	*	5	3	16	4	10
None	30	25	27	54	75	52
Weighted base	*975*	*886*	*1861*	*3906*	*1694*	*7461*
Unweighted base	*1071*	*1147*	*2218*	*3804*	*1568*	*7590*

In Table 4.6 we look at what happens for children who are in some form of childcare while their parents work. The table shows the proportion of children in childcare for work-related reasons who spend time with different forms of childcare – and how that varies by age. It highlights the fact that – if parents are choosing to use any childcare for their older children, then they increasingly rely on informal carers as their children get older. Among children in childcare for work related reasons, there is a 31 percentage point **increase** in the proportion of preschool to secondary school children in informal childcare, mirrored by a 50 percentage point drop in the proportions in formal childcare across the age groups. Grandparents are the key carers across all the age groups. However, the higher proportions of children in informal childcare once they reach secondary school age is not accounted for by the relatively small increase in the proportion spending time with grandparents, and largely accounted for by a big increase in the proportions being looked after by older siblings, friends and neighbours.

Use of childcare providers for work related reasons in past week, by child's age, 2008

Base: All children 0-14 using childcare for work related reasons

Provider	0-2 % using provider for work related reasons	3-4 % using provider for work related reasons	All pre school % using provider for work related reasons	All primary school % using provider for work related reasons	All secondary school % using provider for work related reasons	All children % using provider for work related reasons
Informal childcare	**54**	**48**	**51**	**60**	**82**	**59**
Grandparent	47	39	43	43	49	44
Older sibling	*	1	1	5	22	5
Another relative	9	6	7	8	7	8
Friend or neighbour	4	5	5	13	12	9
Formal childcare	**67**	**78**	**72**	**54**	**22**	**57**
Day nursery	44	26	35	*	0	14
Nursery class/school	6	26	16	*	0	6
Reception class	0	9	4	4	0	3
Playgroup	3	12	17	*	0	3
Childminder	13	12	13	14	2	12
Other individual provider (nanny, au pair, babysitter)	3	4	3	5	3	4
Out of school club	*	7	4	35	17	21
Weighted base	*741*	*719*	*1460*	*1891*	*436*	*3787*
Unweighted base	*826*	*928*	*1754*	*1820*	*401*	*3975*

Again, we can look at this issue in terms of the proportionate amount of time that children spend with different providers (Table 4.7). As a proportion of all time spent in childcare, informal childcare accounts for the biggest proportion among secondary school children (62 per cent of all care). Although grandparents account for 33 per cent of this care, it is at this age that we see the importance of older siblings. They provide 17 per cent of the childcare time for secondary school children while their parents work.

Informal childcare providers in general, and grandparents in particular, account for a substantial proportion of all childcare time for the under 3s and primary school children. Their involvement is least when children are receiving their hours of free early years education.

Proportion of time spent with different childcare providers for work related reasons in past week, 2008

Base: All children receiving care from provider whilst parent(s) at work

% of time spent with each provider, whilst parent(s) working

	0-2	3-4	All pre-school	All primary school	All secondary school	All children
Informal childcare	**41**	**25**	**33**	**43**	**62**	**42**
Grandparent	35	21	28	28	33	29
Older sibling	*	1	1	2	17	4
Another relative	5	2	3	4	5	4
Friend or neighbour	2	2	2	8	7	5
Formal childcare	**58**	**75**	**66**	**55**	**31**	**56**
Early years	45	65	55	7	*	24
Out of school club	*	2	1	34	27	20
Childminder	10	7	8	11	2	9
Weighted base	*416*	*389*	*805*	*991*	*325*	*2121*
Unweighted base	*462*	*596*	*1058*	*874*	*282*	*2214*

4.3.1 Using informal childcare alongside formal childcare and school

Something that clearly changes as children get older is the way in which grandparents and other informal carers are involved alongside other forms of childcare. Among pre-school children in childcare while their parents work (Table 4.8), around half of those being looked after by their grandparents spend at least some of their time with formal childcare providers as well. A quarter (27 per cent) of pre-school children are looked after solely by informal childcare providers – largely (20 per cent) grandparents - while another quarter (23 per cent) are with informal carers (20 per cent with grandparents) for some of the time and formal carers for other periods. Half (49 per cent) are only with formal providers, largely (35 per cent) in centre-based care. Where parents have chosen to mix formal and informal childcare providers, in most cases this was a combination of using a centre-based provider and being with a grandparent. Among this age group, it was relatively unusual for children to be with more than one informal provider. However, a small minority (two per cent) were with a combination of grandparents and other informal providers.

The youngest children (under threes) were more likely than children aged three and four to be looked after only by informal providers - 24 per cent and 17 per cent respectively were looked after solely by their grandparents. Age three sees an increase in the proportion of children either only in formal provision or in a mix of formal and informal care. However, this proportion is lower than might be expected given the free entitlement to part-time centre based provision from this age given that official estimates are that take-up of the free entitlement is close to 100 per cent.[34]

[34] Official estimates of take-up: DCSF (2009) *Statistical First Release: Provision for children under five years of age in England: January 2009*, SFR/2009, DCSF; *http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000848/SFR11_2009.pdf*.There are several reasons for the discrepancy. First, the Childcare Survey is measuring use amongst all three year-olds, and three year-olds

Table 4.8 Childcare packages used by pre-school age children, 2008

Base: preschool age children receiving childcare for work related reasons

Childcare package	0-2 %	3-4 %	All pre-school %
Informal only	**32**	**22**	**27**
Grandparent only	24	17	20
Sibling only	*	1	*
Other relative only	4	2	3
Friend/neighbour only	1	2	1
Grandparent + other informal	3	1	2
Other mix informal	*	0	*
Formal + Informal	**22**	**25**	**23**
Centre based + Grandparents	16	16	16
Individual + Grandparents	3	1	2
Out of school + Grandparents	0	*	*
Other mix formal + informal	2	8	5
Formal only	**45**	**52**	**49**
Centre based only	33	37	35
Individual only	11	5	8
Out of school only	*	2	1
Centre based + Individual	1	5	3
Out of school + Individual	0	1	*
Other mix formal	*	2	1
Other	**1**	**1**	**1**
Weighted base	*741*	*719*	*1460*
Unweighted base	*826*	*928*	*1754*

For school-age children, the older a child is, the more likely they are to be looked after solely by informal providers while their parents work – and thus less likely to be in formal care (Tables 4.9 and 4.10). Between the ages of five and seven, similar proportions of children are looked after solely by informal carers (39 per cent) or solely by formal carers (43 per cent), with 16 per cent looked after by a mixture of both. Between the ages of eight and 11, the proportion looked after solely by informal carers reaches a half (48 per cent) and by age 12 to three quarters (75 per cent). Proportions looked after by grandparents grow as children get older. However, once children reach secondary school age, siblings are also significant carers, with 16 per cent of secondary school children in childcare while parents are working being looked after by their siblings.

have to wait, on average, for 2 months after their birthday before becoming entitled to these places. Second, the Childcare Survey asks about "childcare for work related reasons", and respondents might consider that their child's attendance at a nursery class is not for work related reasons. Third, the Childcare Survey asks about childcare used in a particular week, and some children who usually make use of their free entitlement may not have done in the reference week.

Table 4.9 Childcare packages used by primary school age children, 2008

Base: primary school-age children using childcare for work related reasons

Childcare package	5-7 %	8-11 %	All primary school %
Informal only	**39**	**48**	**44**
Grandparent only	25	29	27
Sibling only	1	2	2
Other relative only	3	5	4
Friend/neighbour only	5	7	6
Grandparent + other informal	4	5	5
Other mix informal	*	*	*
Formal + Informal	**16**	**15**	**15**
Centre based + Grandparents	2	0	1
Individual + Grandparents	2	2	2
Out of school + Grandparents	6	8	7
Other mix formal + informal	6	5	5
Formal only	**43**	**34**	**38**
Centre based only	5	*	2
Individual only	13	12	12
Out of school only	20	20	20
Centre based + Individual	1	0	*
Out of school + Individual	2	2	2
Other mix formal	3	0	1
Other	**3**	**2**	**2**
Weighted base	*769*	*1095*	*1891*
Unweighted base	*787*	*1033*	*1820*

Table 4.10 Childcare packages used by 12 to 14 year olds, 2008

Base: 12 to 14 year olds using childcare for work related reasons

Childcare package	%
Informal only	**75**
Grandparent only	40
Sibling only	16
Other relative only	5
Friend/neighbour only	7
Grandparent + other informal	6
Other mix informal	1
Formal + Informal	**5**
Centre based + Grandparents	0
Individual + Grandparents	0
Out of school + Grandparents	3
Other mix formal + informal	2
Formal only	**16**
Centre based only	1
Individual only	4
Out of school only	11
Centre based + Individual	0
Out of school + Individual	*
Other mix formal	0
Other	**2**
Weighted base	*436*
Unweighted base	*401*

4.3.2 Coordinating childcare

The numbers using 'packages' of care involving formal and informal providers and the use of informal providers for school-age would suggest that many parents are drawing on the help of informal providers to complete parts of a childcare jigsaw and, indeed, provide the link between different types of care. Skinner (2003) uses qualitative data to map out the complexities of the arrangements required for many parents. She shows the reliance of many parents on informal providers either to take the child from one place to another or pick up and look after the child, particularly part-time working mothers. Bell et al's (2005) qualitative findings among working lone parents stressed the importance of informal providers in providing transportation and wraparound care.

Morrissey's (2008) paper using NICHD Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development[35] on preschool children is unusual in that it explore the motivations behind using packages of childcare rather than, for most, the main source of childcare. Morrissey cites others' findings which suggest that 'purposeful child-care patchworks can provide supportive environments and meet their developmental needs; in contrast, disorganised or haphazard combinations created to meet employment demands may be unstable, inconsistent and stressful, leading to poorer child outcomes'. In her analysis, she looks at two potential motivations for using multiple arrangements:

[35] For further information: http://www.nichd.nih.gov/research/supported/seccyd.cfm.

preference to expose children to multiple caregivers and peer groups for 'enrichment', or a necessary accommodation to meet practical constraints. Given the US context, we do not use the data to talk about the prevalence of different forms of arrangements – for that we have used the 2008 Childcare Survey. Rather, we look at associations. She found that children in informal care were more likely than others to be in a package rather the sole childcare, which she sees as suggesting that informal childcare does not meet both parents' employment demands and educational preferences. This is not a surprising finding given the age of the children in her survey, most of which will be in some early years education. Mothers who were less satisfied with their children's primary arrangement were more likely to use a secondary arrangement at a later time, presumably supplementing the care with more satisfactory arrangement.

Land (2002, cited in Skinner and Finch, 2006) argued that expansion of formal childcare would not necessarily reduce the need or wish for informal childcare. Wheelock and Jones (2002), Skinner (2003) and Bell et al (2005) all found that informal childcare was used as a jigsaw of care, described by the previous government (HM Treasury 2004 cited in Skinner and Finch, 2006)) as the 'glue' holding complex childcare arrangements together. Skinner and Finch refer to these as the hidden roles for informal care in supporting formal arrangements.

4.3.3 Summary

Informal childcare is important across all stages of childhood. Although the proportion of children in childcare decreases with age, the relative proportions using informal childcare and formal childcare increase with age. That said, grandparents continue to be important carers for older children. However, other informal providers such as older siblings start to play a larger role.

Informal childcare is frequently used as part of a wider package of childcare including formal providers as well. This is especially the case for preschool children – and in particular three and four year olds. Most packages do not include more than one informal provider; rather they tend to combine group-based formal childcare with grandparental care. As Morrissey showed, some parents are combining childcare in order to provide the necessary care to fit with their working patterns; others choose to use more than one provider in order to provide children with a more varied or better experience.

4.4 Amount of time spent with different providers

Up to now, we have talked about the use of different forms of childcare in a binary fashion – eg does a child go to his grandparents or not? And we have showed the relative proportions of time spent with formal and informal childcare providers. What we turn to now are questions around *how much* time children are spending with their grandparents or other carers while their parents work. Retrospective diary data in the Childcare Survey allows us to look both at the number of days in a given week and the number of hours that children spend with different providers. The pictures for those who have and have not started school are very different. And the patterns of use of formal and informal providers also show stark variations.

Taking firstly children under 3 (Tables 4.11 and 4.12), children being looked after by grandparents or other informal providers (the picture is similar for both) spend fewer days per week with them than children do in formal provision. And the days they spend with grandparents are marginally shorter (median 7.5 hours compared to 8.3 hours) though still a full day. As a result, the median hours per

week spent with informal providers are only just over half as many as are spent with formal providers (13 hours spent with grandparents compared to 23.5 hours in formal care). Whatever the distribution by families, the total amount of childcare that is accounted for by informal care is much smaller than that accounted for by formal care.

The median number of hours that three and four year olds spend with their grandparents or other informal providers also shows children are spending time with grandparents alongside part time formal early years provision. Many more children spend three or more days with formal providers than they do with informal providers, with more than half of children with their grandparents only one or two days a week. On average, children of this age spend 4.5 hours a day with their grandparents or 9 hours per week.

These findings are pertinent to later discussions in Chapter 8 on the impact of different childcare arrangements on children's development. Preschool children looked after by grandparents are with them for significant chunks of time, but often this is smaller than the amount of time they spend in formal care. This means that the environment provided by grandparents is highly likely to have implications for young children's development.

Days of childcare used whilst parent(s) working, pre-school children, 2008

Base: All pre-school children receiving care from provider whilst parent(s) at work

Days of childcare received	Age of child and provider type								All pre-school			
	0-2											
	Any	Formal	Informal	Grand parent	Any	Formal	Informal	Grand Parent	Any	Formal	Informal	Grand parent
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
1 day	11	12	32	35	7	7	29	32	9	9	31	34
2 days	18	25	27	26	13	16	28	29	16	20	27	27
3 days	27	28	17	16	19	18	18	16	23	22	18	16
4 days	18	13	11	9	16	17	9	9	17	15	10	9
5 days	25	21	13	13	42	42	14	12	33	33	13	12
6 days	*	0	0	0	2	*	2	2	1	*	1	1
7 days	*	*	*	0	*	0	*	1	*	*	*	*
Median days per week	2	3	3	2	4	4	2	2	4	3	2	2
Weighted base	440	302	243	210	417	371	183	153	858	673	426	363
Unweighted base	488	338	267	229	639	564	284	240	1127	902	551	469

Table 4.12 Hours of childcare used whilst parent(s) working, pre-school children, 2008

Base: All pre-school children receiving care from provider whilst parent(s) at work

Hours of childcare received per week	Age of child and provider type 0-2				Age of child and provider type 3-4				All pre-school			
	Any	Formal	Informal	Grand parent	Any	Formal	Informal	Grand Parent	Any	Formal	Informal	Grand parent
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
< 10 hrs	14	17	35	36	14	17	51	52	14	17	42	43
10-15hrs	10	12	20	22	14	18	23	22	12	15	21	22
16-29 hrs	39	41	31	28	35	31	22	22	37	35	27	25
30 hrs+	37	31	14	14	38	34	4	5	37	32	10	10
Median hours per day	8.2	8.3	7.2	7.5	7.0	6.3	4.2	4.5	7.7	7.1	5.8	6.0
Median hours per week	25.6	23.5	14.1	13.0	25.0	21.5	9.4	9.0	25.5	22.5	11.0	11.0
Weighted base	440	302	243	210	417	371	183	153	858	673	426	363
Unweighted base	488	338	267	229	639	564	284	240	1127	902	551	469

Once children reach school age, the number of hours they spend in any childcare decreases (Tables 4.13 to 4.16). Children in informal care are using an average of four or five hours per week – or around two hours per day. So, while informal carers are playing a key role in plugging the gap between the start or end of school and parents coming home, we might feel less concerned about the educational environment provided by informal carers. However, there are different issues in play here, such as the safe environment that informal carers can provide and the support they can give in facilitating homework and after school 'positive' and/or physical activity.

Table 4.13 Days of childcare used whilst parent(s) working, primary school children, 2008

Base: All primary school age children receiving care from provider whilst parent(s) at work

Days of childcare received	Age of child and provider type								All primary school			
	5-7				8-11							
	Any %	Formal %	Informal %	Grand parent %	Any %	Formal %	Informal %	Grand Parent %	Any %	Formal %	Informal %	Grand Parent %
1	21	21	38	38	21	30	31	35	21	26	34	36
2	15	15	23	23	18	19	21	25	17	17	22	24
3	13	14	12	11	15	13	15	12	14	13	14	12
4	14	13	8	10	15	14	11	10	15	14	10	10
5	35	35	17	17	30	24	20	17	32	29	19	17
6	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	*	1	1
7	*	0	1	0	*	0	0	0	*	0	*	0
Median days per week	4	3	2	2	3	3	2	2	3	3	2	2
Weighted base	436	318	201	143	578	370	332	222	1014	688	533	364
Unweighted base	374	269	175	124	520	328	301	202	894	597	476	326

Table 4.14 Hours of childcare used whilst parent(s) working, primary-school children, 2008

Base: All pre-school children receiving care from provider whilst parent(s) at work

Hours of childcare received per week	Age of child and provider type								All primary school			
	5-7				8-11							
	Any %	Formal %	Informal %	Grand parent %	Any %	Formal %	Informal %	Grand Parent %	Any %	Formal %	Informal %	Grand Parent %
< 10 hrs	55	56	77	73	70	83	79	72	64	71	76	72
10-15hrs	18	16	14	17	17	10	11	15	18	13	14	15
16-29 hrs	10	10	6	6	8	4	6	11	9	7	7	9
30 hrs+	16	18	4	4	4	2	4	2	9	10	3	3
Median hours per day	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.5	2	1.5	2	2.3	2.3	2.0	2.1	2.3
Median hours per week	8.7	8.0	5.0	5.8	6.0	4.0	4.5	4.7	7.0	5.5	4.5	5.0
Weighted base	436	318	201	143	578	370	332	222	1014	688	533	364
Unweighted base	374	269	175	124	520	328	301	202	894	597	476	326

Table 4.15 Days and hours of childcare used whilst parent(s) working, secondary school children, 2008

Base: All secondary school age children receiving care from provider whilst parent(s) at work

	Age of child 12-14			
Days of childcare received	Any %	Formal %	Informal %	Grand Parent %
1	29	45	33	36
2	21	23	16	19
3	18	17	16	20
4	10	5	13	7
5	19	10	20	15
6	2	0	1	2
7	1	0	0	1
Median days per week	3	2	3	2
Weighted base	*335*	*138*	*223*	*124*
Unweighted base	*290*	*120*	*193*	*108*

Table 4.16 Hours of childcare used whilst parent(s) working, secondary school children, 2008

Base: All secondary school age children receiving care from provider whilst parent(s) at work

	Age of child 12-14			
Hours of childcare received per week	Any %	Formal %	Informal %	Grand Parent %
< 10 hrs	78	90	79	76
10-15hrs	10	3	11	12
16-29 hrs	6	3	6	6
30 hrs+	6	4	4	6
Median hours per day	2.0	1.2	2.0	2.2
Median hours per week	4.0	2.0	4.8	4.0
Weighted base	*335*	*138*	*223*	*124*
Unweighted base	*290*	*120*	*193*	*108*

4.4.1 Summary

Preschool children spend far fewer hours with informal providers than they do with formal providers, reflecting both the ways in which informal childcare is often used alongside formal care – particularly in children's early years –and the fact that part-time working parents are more likely to rely solely on informal childcare. This information is key when considering the relationship between children's educational and socio-emotional development and their childcare provision in Chapter 8. Although reliance on grandparents as a sole provider of childcare increases as children get older, they are not spending many hours a day or week with them.

Gray (2005) used the 2000 Time Use Survey to look at this issue. She found that grandparents provided an average of 8.57 hours of childcare each week to children under 12 if mothers were working.

These data simply quantify the periods of time that children are spending with their childcare providers. It does not provide any insight into the type of activities they do together and what implications that might have for the quality of care. Ideally, we might want to know – within the hours that children are with informal providers – how much time is spent on various activities. This is something that we return to in Chapters 8 and 10.

4.5 Working lone parents and dual earner couple families

We report in a number of different ways on how working lone parents and dual earner couple families use informal childcare. (Given that single earner couple households do not need childcare in order for the sole earner to work, they are excluded from our analysis.) The first way (shown in Tables 4.17 (couple households) and 4.18 (lone parents)) is to look at the proportions of working parents in each group using different types of childcare. This allows us to account for working families using no childcare. The second way (shown in Table 4.19) is to look at the packages of childcare used by families who use some form of childcare, to look in more detail at how childcare is used differently by lone parents and couple families working different numbers of hours. The third way (in Tables 4.20 and 4.21) is to take account of the number of hours that children spend with different providers, and look at the relative amount of time that children from lone and couple parent families spend in formal and informal childcare.

Looking at Tables 4.17 and 4.18 (which show the proportion of working families using childcare) the first thing to note is that working lone parents are no more likely than dual earner couple parents to use either formal or informal childcare for their preschool children (the differences are not statistically significant). Similarly, they are no more likely to use formal childcare for their school-age children. Where the difference between working lone parents and dual earner couple parents does lie is in their increased propensity to use informal childcare for their school-age children (38 per cent compared to 31 per cent of children).

For preschool children in dual earner and working lone parent families, full-time or part-time work does not make a great difference to arrangements with grandparents or other informal carers. Once children are at primary school, they are more likely to be looked after by their grandparents if their lone parent works full-time or both of their parents work full-time (for example, 22 per cent of children in full-time dual earner families compared to 11 per cent of children in couple families who have one parent who works fewer than 16 hours a week). This reflects the pattern of childcare use more generally, with many families with a part-timer worker more able to cope without reliance on any form of childcare.

Lone parents' reliance on grandparental childcare is borne out in a number of qualitative studies (Bell et al, 2005; Ridge and Millar, 2008). Ridge and Millar stress the importance of the flexibility and reliability that grandparents provide over formal childcare arrangements, including their ability to look after children at odd hours or as ad hoc arrangements.

Table 4.16 Use of childcare for work related reasons, by household work status and child's age, 2008 : Couple households

Base: All children 0-14 in couple households where both parents work

% using provider for work related reasons

	Pre school				School-age			
Childcare provider	Both FT	One PT (16-29hrs)	One PT (<16hrs)	All working families	Both FT	One PT (16-29hrs)	One PT (<16hrs)	All working families
Any childcare	**81**	**73**	**56**	**72**	**51**	**35**	**21**	**38**
Informal childcare	**36**	**38**	**35**	**37**	**31**	**23**	**16**	**24**
Grandparent	32	33	29	32	22	16	11	17
Older sibling	*	1	*	*	5	1	2	3
Another relative	5	5	4	5	3	2	2	3
Friend or neighbour	3	3	3	3	6	5	2	5
Formal childcare	**66**	**53**	**31**	**52**	**28**	**15**	**7**	**18**
Day nursery	33	28	9	25	*	0	0	*
Nursery class/school	14	11	8	11	*	*	0	*
Reception class	4	3	2	3	1	1	2	1
Playgroup	5	6	6	6	0	0	0	0
Childminder	13	8	7	9	7	4	1	4
Other individual provider (nanny, au pair, babysitter)	4	2	2	3	4	1	1	2
Out of school club	5	2	1	3	18	10	4	12
No childcare	**19**	**27**	**44**	**28**	**49**	**65**	**79**	**62**
Weighted base	*483*	*733*	*331*	*1568*	*1573*	*1989*	*770*	*4432*
Unweighted base	*527*	*888*	*422*	*1865*	*1467*	*1926*	*784*	*4272*

Table 4.17 Use of childcare for work related reasons, by household work status and child's age, 2008 : Lone parent households

Base: All children 0-14 in working lone parent households

% using provider for work related reasons

	Pre school				School-age			
Childcare provider	FT	PT (16-29hrs)	PT (<16hrs)	All working families	FT	One PT (16-29hrs)	One PT (<16hrs)	All working families
Any childcare	**81**	**81**	**54**	**78**	**61**	**41**	**20**	**47**
Informal childcare	**39**	**42**	**34**	**40**	**38**	**29**	**15**	**31**
Grandparent	27	35	24	32	24	19	11	21
Older sibling	2	1	2	1	4	5	0	4
Another relative	10	7	2	7	6	5	2	5
Friend or neighbour	2	5	8	4	7	6	2	6
Formal childcare	**72**	**58**	**21**	**59**	**33**	**15**	**5**	**22**
Day nursery	42	33	5	33	0	0	0	0
Nursery class/school	12	9	8	10	*	0	0	*
Reception class	6	3	0	3	1	1	0	1
Playgroup	3	5	0	4	0	*	0	*
Childminder	12	13	4	12	9	5	0	6
Other individual provider (nanny, au pair, babysitter)	1	1	4	1	3	1	0	2
Out of school club	4	1	0	1	23	9	5	15
No childcare	**19**	**19**	**46**	**22**	**39**	**59**	**80**	**53**
Weighted base	*85*	*181*	*27*	*293*	*493*	*570*	*105*	*1168*
Unweighted base	*101*	*220*	*32*	*353*	*457*	*545*	*98*	*1100*

Speight et al (2009), using the same data, ran multivariate logistic regressions (based on all families, not just working families) to test for the independent associations between *formal* childcare use and socio-demographics. They found that, controlling for income, children from dual earner couple families were more likely than other couple families to use formal childcare, but that, in turn, working lone parents were more likely than dual earner couple parents to use formal childcare. They do not include the use of informal childcare in their models. Paull and Taylor (2002) found the same, using data from the Family Resources Survey. They found that lone parents were more likely to use formal childcare (which in their case included a mix of formal and informal) than just their partnered counterparts. (They are also more likely to use some form of childcare over none.)

So are the patterns in 4.17 and 4.18 reflected when we look at the packages of care used by these groups of families (Table 4.19)? How do lone parents and couples combine different types of care? We might expect lone parents to rely more on multiple types of childcare, given a reduced ability to shift parent with another partner. In fact this is not the case. Overall two thirds of children of working lone parents spent time with informal carers either with (18 per cent) or without (43 per cent) some formal childcare as well. These proportions were very similar to proportions for children in dual earner couple households.

Table 4.18 Childcare packages used, by household work status, 2008

Base: Children using childcare for work related reasons *Survey*

	Couples				Lone parents			
Childcare package	Both FT %	I FT, 1PT (16-29hrs) %	1FT, 1PT (<16hrs) %	All %	FT %	PT (16-29hrs) %	PT (<16hrs) %	All %
Informal only	**36**	**42**	**56**	**41**	**34**	**49**	**66**	**43**
Grandparent only	21	29	39	26	20	28	45	25
Sibling only	4	1	3	3	3	4	0	3
Other relative only	1	4	6	3	5	4	6	5
Friend/neighbour only	4	5	4	4	4	6	13	5
Grandparent + other informal	5	3	3	4	2	7	2	5
Other mix informal	1	*	1	*	1	*	0	*
Formal + Informal	**20**	**18**	**`13**	**17**	**23**	**14**	**0**	**18**
Centre based + Grandparents	6	9	7	7	4	6	0	4
Individual + Grandparents	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2
Out of school + Grandparents	7	3	1	4	7	1	0	7
Other mix formal + informal	5	5	3	5	8	5	0	8
Formal only	**43**	**39**	**31**	**40**	**38**	**35**	**31**	**37**
Centre based only	12	17	16	16	8	13	10	11
Individual only	12	9	7	10	11	9	6	10
Out of school only	13	11	5	11	16	10	15	13
Centre based + Individual	2	1	1	1	1	2	0	1
Out of school + Individual	2	1	1	1	2	1	0	1
Other mix formal	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1
Other	**2**	**1**	*****	**2**	**5**	**1**	**3**	**3**
Weighted base	*1192*	*1230*	*348*	*2997*	*368*	*378*	*36*	*790*
Unweighted base	*1176*	*1347*	*399*	*3162*	*366*	*404*	*35*	*813*

Tables 4.19 (couple parents) and 4.20 (lone parents) show the proportion of time that children spend with different providers while their parents are working – split into the hours that their parents work. They highlight a disproportionate reliance on informal childcare among parents working fewer each week, for both pre-school and school age children. For instance, in couple families, informal childcare accounts for a quarter (27 per cent) of all pre-school childcare time for families where both parents work full-time. This compares to 35 per cent of time in families with one parent who works between 16 and 29 hours each week. The second key point to take from these tables is that, among all groups of working lone and couple parents, the proportionate reliance on informal childcare increases as the children get older. So, the broad pattern of a bigger proportion of childcare time being accounted for by informal childcare, is the same regardless of parents working hours.

Table 4.19 Proportion of time spent with different childcare providers for work related reasons in past week, 2008: couple families

Base: All children receiving care from provider whilst parent(s) at work in working couple families

% of time spent with each provider, whilst parent(s) working

Use of childcare	Couple – both FT	Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (16-29 hrs)	Couple – 1 FT, 1 PT (<16 hrs)	All in couple families
Pre-school				
Any informal	**27**	**35**	**40**	**33**
Grandparent	23	29	35	28
Sibling	*	1	1	*
Other relative	3	3	2	3
Friend/neighbour	1	2	3	2
Any formal	**71**	**65**	**60**	**67**
Early years	57	56	52	56
Out of school	1	1	1	1
Childminder	10	7	6	8
Weighted base	*233*	*306*	*100*	*646*
Unweighted base	*287*	*407*	*146*	*850*
Primary school				
Any informal	**38**	**47**	**46**	**42**
Grandparent	28	30	28	28
Sibling	3	2	1	2
Other relative	3	4	6	3
Friend/neighbour	5	11	11	8
Any formal	**60**	**51**	**49**	**56**
Early years	5	7	21	8
Out of school	36	35	20	34
Childminder	14	8	4	10
Weighted base	*355*	*307*	*60*	*737*
Unweighted base	*311*	*275*	*53*	*652*
Secondary school				
Any informal	**57**	**58**	**76**	**59**
Grandparent	26	38	41	30
Sibling	19	11	35	19
Other relative	3	4	0	3
Friend/neighbour	8	5	0	7
Any formal	**37**	**32**	**18**	**34**
Early years	*	0	0	*
Out of school	33	26	18	30
Childminder	2	2	0	2
Weighted base	*148*	*64*	*17*	*230*
Unweighted base	*130*	*57*	*15*	*203*

Table 4.20 Proportion of time spent with different childcare providers for work related reasons in past we 2008: lone parent families

Base: All children receiving care from provider whilst parent(s) at work in working lone parent families

% of time spent with each provider, whilst parent(s) working

Use of childcare	Full time	PT (16-29 hrs)	PT (<16 hrs)	All in lone parents families
Pre-school				
Any informal	**26**	**37**	**n/a**	**36**
Grandparent	20	29	n/a	28
Sibling	2	1	n/a	1
Other relative	4	5	n/a	5
Friend/neighbour	*	3	n/a	2
Any formal	**74**	**62**	**n/a**	**64**
Early years	61	51	n/a	53
Out of school	1	1	n/a	1
Childminder	11	10	n/a	10
Weighted base	*49*	*99*	*11*	*159*
Unweighted base	*65*	*128*	*15*	*208*
Primary school				
Any informal	**40**	**52**	n/a	**44**
Grandparent	25	34	n/a	28
Sibling	2	4	n/a	3
Other relative	7	7	n/a	7
Friend/neighbour	5	6	n/a	6
Any formal	**57**	**46**	n/a	**53**
Early years	3	6	n/a	5
Out of school	36	26	n/a	32
Childminder	14	12	n/a	12
Weighted base	*143*	*99*	*12*	*254*
Unweighted base	*125*	*88*	*9*	*222*
Secondary school				
Any informal	**60**	**86**	n/a	**68**
Grandparent	40	39	n/a	39
Sibling	6	25	n/a	13
Other relative	7	10	n/a	8
Friend/neighbour	7	12	n/a	9
Any formal	**36**	**7**	n/a	**24**
Early years	0	0	n/a	0
Out of school	31	7	n/a	21
Childminder	5	0	n/a	3
Weighted base	*52*	*38*	*5*	*95*
Unweighted base	*42*	*33*	*4*	*79*

n/a sample too small to report percentages

Raeymaeckers et al (2008a; 2008b) used data from the European Community Household Panel to evaluate the effect of formal and informal childcare support systems on the post-divorce labour supply of divorced mothers. Their findings imply the importance of combinations of formal and informal childcare for lone mothers: "formal childcare solutions reinforce the effect of the use of informal support networks on the labour supply of divorced women. This is in accordance with

earlier research stating that informal networks are of complementary importance". Looking at data from 13 countries including the UK they found that informal childcare played a role in enabling divorced mothers to use paid childcare in order to increase their working hours.

Their analyses included a range of country-level indicators on the availability of formal and informal childcare provision. They found that the macro-level availability of formal and informal childcare has an important influence on the childcare options of divorced mothers. They found that not only were divorced mothers more likely to use paid childcare following divorce when formal childcare arrangements are more extensive, but the availability of formal provision has the largest effect on the likelihood of increased use of unpaid childcare (compared to no childcare). Their findings may be suggesting that the presence of formal childcare makes work more possible for these mothers, but that informal childcare is required as well to make their working arrangements feasible. These findings support the English trends we reported in Chapter 3, where an increase over time in formal provision has, if anything, increased the proportions of families using informal childcare.

4.5.1 Summary

There is some evidence that working lone parents – particularly those with school-age children – rely more on informal childcare than couple parents. However, among families who use childcare for work related reasons (the base of our analysis) the differences are not as stark as one might expect. It seems likely that working lone parents are relying on informal childcare in periods where couple parents are using sharing childcare between them. There is evidence from Raeymaeckers that working lone parents benefit when they can combine informal and formal childcare provision.

4.6 Families with different income levels and from different socio-economic groups

Much of the literature on childcare assumes that the cost of formal childcare will lead some families – primarily poorer families – to choose informal childcare over formal childcare. However, as we describe in Chapter 6, families choose to use informal childcare for a much more complex set of reasons and, as such, it is not clear that we should expect families who use informal childcare to be those more economically disadvantaged. We explore whether working families of different income levels and from different socio-economic backgrounds use different combinations of informal and formal childcare, and whether these are key drivers which predict whether families are likely to use informal childcare. Of course, we must bear in mind that our own analysis[36] is restricted to working families, and therefore does not include some more likely to be in the lower socio-economic groups.

What Table 4.21 below highlights is the wide range of packages used by families within each of the three income bands. In each of the low, middle and high income bands, significant proportions of children are in only informal, only formal or a combined package of care. So, it certainly does not seem to be the case that families choose purely on the basis of their ability to pay for formal childcare. However, even though patterns are mixed in each income category, there *is* a relationship between using informal childcare and income. Pre-school children in the *lowest* income band are more likely than other preschool children (39 per cent compared to 29 per cent of those in the middle income band and 20 per cent of those in the highest income band) to spend all their childcare

[36] But not necessarily that included in other evidence.

hours with informal carers. However, note that the same proportion of children spent all their childcare hours with their grandparents as do children in the middle income (both 24 per cent). However, children in the lowest income band are more likely than others to spend time with other informal childcare providers. This is either in combination with spending some time with their grandparents (six per cent) or spending all their hours with other relatives (six per cent). Across the lowest and middle income groups, children are equally likely to be in a package involving only formal childcare (43 per cent and 45 per cent respectively). The difference between these two groups is that while 10 per cent of the lowest income children are in an informal childcare package that involves informal carers other than a grandparent, more children in the middle income group are in a package of care involving both formal and informal childcare – largely grandparents and a centre-based provider. Preschool children in the highest income group are less likely to be in informal childcare – either alone (eg 14 per cent are looked after solely by their grandparents) or in combination with formal childcare. Over half (56 per cent) are only in formal childcare. This raises questions about how to ensure that children from less well-off families have access to some of the advantages that good quality formal care can bring, which is an issue we take up in Chapter 8.

For school-age children, informal childcare packages are the most common for children across all three income bands, although, again, the proportions decrease as income increases (58 per cent of those in the lowest income band are in informal childcare for all their childcare hours compared to 43 per cent of those in the highest income band). We should note that these tables do not show how many children are in no childcare at all while their parents work. The higher the income, the more likely children are to be looked after by individual formal providers.

Table 4.21 Childcare packages used, by household income and age of child

Base: Children using childcare for work related reasons

	Child pre-school age				Child school-age			
	Income £20K	Income £20K-£45K	Income £45K+	All	Income £20K	Income £20K-£45K	Income £45K+	All
Childcare package	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Informal only	**39**	**29**	**20**	**27**	**58**	**53**	**43**	**50**
Grandparent only	24	24	14	20	32	31	26	30
Sibling only	*	1	0	*	6	4	4	4
Other relative only	6	2	2	3	9	5	2	4
Friend/neighbour only	2	1	2	1	7	7	5	6
Grandparent + other informal	6	1	2	2	4	6	5	5
Other mix informal	*	*	0	*	1	1	*	1
Formal + Informal	**17**	**25**	**22**	**23**	**12**	**13**	**15**	**13**
Centre based + Grandparents	12	17	16	16	*	1	1	1
Individual + Grandparents	0	2	3	2	1	2	2	2
Out of school + Grandparents	*	*	*	*	5	6	6	6
Other mix formal + informal	5	6	4	5	5	4	5	5
Formal only	**43**	**45**	**56**	**49**	**27**	**31**	**41**	**34**
Centre based only	33	33	38	35	5	2	1	2
Individual only	7	8	9	8	5	9	16	11
Out of school only	1	1	1	1	15	18	19	18
Centre based + Individual	1	3	5	3	1	*	*	*
Out of school + Individual	0	0	1	*	1	1	3	2
Other mix formal	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
Other	**1**	*****	**1**	**1**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**3**
Weighted base	*232*	*627*	*532*	*1460*	*372*	*964*	*866*	*2327*
Unweighted base	*277*	*770*	*618*	*1754*	*342*	*941*	*817*	*2221*

As mentioned above, Speight et al (2009), using the same data, ran multivariate logistic regressions (based on all families, not just working families) to test for the independent associations between *formal* childcare use and socio-demographics. They found that the increased propensity for higher income families to use formal childcare was not purely due to an association with working status: controlling for working status, higher income families were more likely to use formal childcare. Their models do not allow us to look at the association between income and the use of informal or packages of childcare. This finding is backed up by Paull and Taylor's (2002) analysis of the Family Resources Survey. Notably, their analysis found that the association was particularly linked to maternal income rather than the family's income overall.

Gray (2005) found that grandparental care was more important for lower income mothers. She reports that grandparents make a greater difference to part-time workers, helping them to work longer hours and earn more money. Again, looking at very young children under a year old, Dex and Ward (2007) found that mothers in administrative and clerical, skilled manual or personal and sales were more likely to use grandparents as childcare than those in semi-skilled and unskilled (who relied more on fathers) or managerial and professional positions (who relied more of formal childcare).

4.6.1 Summary

Although significant proportions of higher income families use informal care, a greater proportion of low income families use informal care, and more do so as their sole form of childcare (though formal centre-based care is the commonest form of pre-school care for all income groups). This fact is linked to the discussions about the reasons why different families use informal childcare in Chapter 6 and the links between children's outcomes and the type and quality of childcare they receive in Chapter 8.

4.7 Maternal age, qualifications and where they live

Children of younger mothers (under 30) were more likely to be looked after by their grandparents than children with older mothers (Table 4.21). Bearing in mind that, on average, older mothers are likely to have older children, separate results are presented for pre-school and school-age children. For example, 35 per cent of pre-school children with a mother under 30 were in informal care only, compared to 19 per cent of pre-school children whose mother was over 40. This association can partly be explained by the fact that older mothers are more likely to work full time and to be higher earners, both factors associated with the greater use of formal childcare. There may also be issues around the fact that older mothers are also more likely to be associated with older grandmothers, who are potentially less likely to want or be able to take on a major childcare role.

Table 4.2 Childcare packages used, by age of mother and child

Base: Children using childcare for work related reasons

	Child pre-school age				Child school-age			
	Mother <30	Mother 30-39	Mother 40+	All	Mother <30	Mother 30-39	Mother 40+	All
Childcare package	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Informal only	**35**	**26**	**19**	**27**	**53**	**54**	**46**	**50**
Grandparent only	29	19	13	20	31	36	23	30
Sibling only	0	*	2	*	0	3	7	4
Other relative only	3	3	2	3	10	4	3	4
Friend/neighbour only	0	2	1	1	5	6	7	6
Grandparent + other informal	4	2	1	2	7	5	5	5
Other mix informal	1	*	0	*	0	*	1	1
Formal + Informal	**25**	**24**	**18**	**23**	**16**	**13**	**14**	**13**
Centre based + Grandparents	17	17	9	16	2	1	0	1
Individual + Grandparents	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
Out of school + Grandparents	0	*	0	*	10	6	6	6
Other mix formal + informal	6	4	6	5	4	4	6	5
Formal only	**39**	**49**	**61**	**49**	**27**	**32**	**36**	**34**
Centre based only	28	37	35	35	4	2	1	2
Individual only	8	7	12	8	7	9	13	11
Out of school only	1	*	3	1	12	18	18	18
Centre based + Individual	2	3	7	3	2	*	*	*
Out of school + Individual	0	0	2	*	1	1	2	2
Other mix formal	*	1	2	1	2	1	1	1
Other	**1**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**4**	**2**	**4**	**3**
Weighted base	*321*	*911*	*218*	*1460*	*147*	*1095*	*1075*	*2327*
Unweighted base	*381*	*1101*	*260*	*1754*	*152*	*1069*	*992*	*2221*

Unpicking the relationship between mothers' education levels and their use of informal childcare is not straightforward (Table 4.22). Reflecting the differences in income levels seen above, preschool children whose mothers have Higher Education qualifications are least likely to be looked after by their grandparents (either solely or in combination with other childcare) than other preschool children, although three in ten still do. Those most likely to be are those whose mothers have A levels or GCSEs (or equivalent) – around half of children in these groups are with their grandparents at least some of the time. Preschool children whose mothers have no qualifications or qualifications below GCSE are more likely than others to rely on siblings and relatives other than grandparents than other groups. The pattern is similar among mothers of school-age children. Among both age groups, those whose mothers are more highly qualified are more likely than others to be with an individual formal childcare provider. The differences in the use of formal centre-based providers and out of school clubs are less stark. These findings are important to bear in mind in our later discussions on the impact on children's educational outcomes of being looked after by grandparents and other informal carers.

Gray (2005) found that, within the Time Use Survey, working mothers with higher educational qualifications were less likely to get help from grandparents than those with lower qualifications (28 per cent compared to 35 per cent).

Table 4.22 Childcare packages used, by mother's education and age of child

Base: Children using childcare for work related reasons

	Child pre-school age				Child school-age			
	HE qual	A level	GCSE	None/ lower than GCSE	HE qual	A level	GCSE	None/ lower than GCSE
Childcare package	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Informal only	**19**	**27**	**35**	**31**	**36**	**52**	**58**	**60**
Grandparent only	14	20	28	20	22	29	37	31
Sibling only	*	0	*	1	3	5	4	7
Other relative only	1	4	3	5	1	4	5	8
Friend/neighbour only	2	1	1	2	6	6	6	6
Grandparent + other informal	1	1	3	3	4	6	4	7
Other mix informal	0	*	*	0	0	*	1	2
Formal + Informal	**22**	**28**	**25**	**21**	**16**	**15**	**11**	**9**
Centre based + Grandparents	14	20	18	13	*	*	1	1
Individual + Grandparents	2	3	2	1	2	3	1	1
Out of school + Grandparents	*	*	*	0	7	7	6	3
Other mix formal + informal	5	4	5	7	7	5	3	4
Formal only	**58**	**45**	**40**	**47**	**45**	**29**	**29**	**28**
Centre based only	40	31	30	34	1	1	2	5
Individual only	11	6	7	9	19	8	7	5
Out of school only	1	3	1	*	19	17	18	18
Centre based + Individual	4	3	2	2	*	*	*	0
Out of school + Individual	1	0	0	0	4	2	1	*
Other mix formal	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	*
Other	**1**	*****	*****	**1**	**3**	**4**	**2**	**3**
Weighted base	*505*	*246*	*461*	*202*	*768*	*437*	*697*	*323*
Unweighted base	*589*	*303*	*567*	*243*	*720*	*426*	*672*	*308*

Paull and Taylor (2002) found that – controlling for other socio-demographics with multivariate logistic regressions, younger mothers with preschool children were more likely than older mothers with preschool children to use only informal childcare (rather than just formal or a mix of the two), as were mothers with fewer educational qualifications.

Table 4.23 shows that children living in London were less likely than children in other areas to be looked after by informal providers (with 33 per cent with only informal providers and 49 per cent only with formal providers). In contrast, children living in urban areas other than London were the most likely to be in informal childcare (44 per cent were only with informal providers). These differences remain even if we take differences in household income into account. They can perhaps be explained by ethnic diversity and/or how close people live to other family members. Many people in London will have moved away from where they grew up and so tend not to have relatives close by

to use as a source of childcare. They may also be associated with the fact that part-time work is not as prevalent in London as it is elsewhere.

Table 4.23 Childcare packages used, by urban vs rural location

Base: Children using childcare for work related reasons

Childcare package	London	Other urban	Rural	All
	%	%	%	%
Informal only	**33**	**44**	**37**	**41**
Grandparent only	16	28	25	26
Sibling only	3	3	2	3
Other relative only	6	4	1	4
Friend/neighbour only	6	4	5	4
Grandparent + other informal	3	4	4	4
Other mix informal	*	*	*	*
Formal + Informal	**15**	**17**	**19**	**17**
Centre based + Grandparents	4	7	7	7
Individual + Grandparents	2	2	2	2
Out of school + Grandparents	3	4	4	4
Other mix formal + informal	6	4	6	5
Formal only	**49**	**37**	**43**	**40**
Centre based only	20	14	14	15
Individual only	15	8	13	10
Out of school only	8	12	11	12
Centre based + Individual	3	1	1	1
Out of school + Individual	2	1	2	1
Other mix formal	1	1	2	1
Other	**3**	**2**	**1**	**2**
Weighted base	*496*	*2613*	*674*	*3787*
Unweighted base	*426*	*2822*	*723*	*3975*

Speight et al (2009), using the same data, ran multivariate logistic regressions (based on all families, not just working families) to test for the independent associations between *formal* childcare use and socio-demographics. They found that those living in the 20 per cent most deprived areas were less likely to use formal childcare for either pre-school or school-age children, even after taking account of differences in income and work status. Similarly when Sylva et al (2007) looked at families' main form of childcare when a child was three and 10 months (using the Families, Children and Childcare Study), families were more likely to use a grandparent or other relative than non-familial care if they were from a lower socio-economic background.

4.7.1 Summary

While substantial proportions of families in all socio-demographic groups use informal childcare, there are links between using informal childcare and mothers being younger, less qualified, from lower socio-economic groups and living in urban areas outside of London. Less educated mothers rely on a wider set of informal providers than more educated mothers, who, if they are using informal childcare, tend to rely on the child's grandparents.

4.8 Informal childcare in the school holidays

Once children are school-age, families' need for childcare during term time decreases, with many working hours covered within the school day. As we reported earlier, large numbers of children continue to be looked after by formal or informal providers after school, although older children increasingly look after themselves. The situation may be very different in the school holidays. If working parents cannot take leave during these times, they need to find childcare that covers the hours children usually spend in school. If this is formal childcare, this will be an additional cost to parents that they do not bear during term time. Moreover, some formal group childcare providers do not provide care during the school holidays. We therefore used data from the 2008 Childcare Survey to see whether families rely to a different degree on informal carers during the holidays[37][38].

Table 4.24 shows the packages of childcare that families use during the school holidays. It shows that families with school-age children rely more heavily on informal childcare during the school holidays. For comparison, the same table, but showing packages used in term time is in Appendix 3[39]. Among each age group, the proportions in informal care alone are about ten percentage points higher in the holidays compared to term time. The increases in are in children with grandparents and children being looked after by grandparents and other informal carers. The increase is all among families using only informal childcare, rather than packages of formal and informal care.

[37] Butt et al (2007) reported mixed evidence about trends in the availability of holiday provision, suggesting a rise in the proportion of childminders providing holiday care but an overall decrease according to some Children's Information Services. (They also suggest a decrease in the proportion of day nurseries, but this is not relevant to the school-age children.)

[38] Again, Paull and Taylor (2002) also report on similar analysis using data from the FRS.

[39] The tables on term-time care earlier in the chapter are run at child rather than household level and are therefore not directly comparable.

Table 4.24 Childcare packages used in school holidays, by age of children in household

Base: all families with school-age children and using childcare for work related reasons in holidays

Childcare package	5 to 7 %	8 to 11 %	12 to 14 %
Informal only	**41**	**55**	**68**
Grandparent only	24	32	32
Other relative only	3	4	5
Friend/neighbour only	*	3	6
Sibling only	2	3	3
Grandparent + other informal	10	11	18
Other mix informal	1	1	3
Formal + Informal	**24**	**19**	**13**
Centre based + Grandparents	5	1	1
Individual + Grandparents	6	4	2
Out of school club + grandparents	7	9	7
Other mix formal + informal	6	5	3
Formal only	**32**	**23**	**16**
Centre based only	7	2	2
Individual only	9	7	6
Out of school only	11	12	8
Centre based + Individual	1	*	*
Out of School + Individual	1	2	*
Other mix formal	2	1	*
Other	**3**	**3**	**3**
Weighted base	*736*	*927*	*584*
Unweighted base	*859*	*947*	*567*

During the holidays, working couples rely more heavily on informal carers than working lone parents (56 per cent use informal care only compared to 48 per cent of lone parents) (Table 4.25). Bell et al (2005) found some evidence of lone parents' children 'relocating' to an informal provider during the school holidays, although this was not necessarily seen as a positive experience for children. Lone parents reported finding school holidays a problem, with a paucity of formal holiday childcare available.

Table 4.25 Childcare packages used by families of school-age children in school holidays, by household type

Base: all families with school-age children and using childcare for work related reasons in holidays

Childcare package	Couple %	Lone parent %	All %
Informal only	**56**	**48**	**54**
Grandparent only	30	24	28
Other relative only	4	5	4
Friend/neighbour only	3	4	3
Sibling only	3	2	3
Grandparent + other informal	13	12	13
Other mix informal	2	2	2
Formal + Informal	**19**	**23**	**20**
Centre based + Grandparents	2	3	2
Individual + Grandparents	4	6	5
Out of school club + Grandparents[+]	8	8	8
Other mix formal + informal	4	6	5
Formal only	**23**	**25**	**23**
Centre based only	4	2	4
Individual only	6	9	7
Out of school only	10	11	10
Centre based + Individual	1	1	1
Out of School + Individual	1	2	1
Other mix formal	1	*	1
Other	**3**	**4**	**3**
Weighted base	1247	478	1725
Unweighted base	1236	404	1640

[+] Out of school club includes holiday clubs

Our next step was to see what proportion of families used informal childcare in the holidays, but not in term time. Table 4.26 groups families with school-age children according to how they use formal and informal care in the holidays and in term time. It highlights the high proportion of children in different childcare arrangements between term-time and school holidays. One in five 5 to 7 year olds is with informal childcare providers (either solely or in combination with other providers) in the holidays but not during term time. This proportion rises for older children – to a third of 12 to 14 year olds. In the main, these older children were not in any childcare during term time, either because they were with their parents or spending time alone. Very few children spent holiday periods with formal carers if they were with informal childcare providers during term-time. However, a substantial group of families who use formal and informal childcare in the term time use no childcare during the holidays.

Table 4.26 Holiday and term time childcare packages, by age of children in household

Base: all families with school-age children and using childcare for work related reasons

Childcare provision for work reasons	5 to 7+	8 to 11	12 to 14
	%	%	%
Term Informal: Holiday Informal	*10*	*15*	*17*
Term Informal: Holiday Formal	1	1	*
Term Informal: Holiday Mix	3	3	2
Term Informal: Holiday None	11	13	19
Term Formal: Holiday Informal	4	3	3
Term Formal: Holiday Formal	*12*	*8*	*5*
Term Formal: Holiday Mix	5	4	2
Term Formal: Holiday None	13	10	7
Term Mix: Holiday Informal	5	4	3
Term Mix: Holiday Formal	2	2	1
Term Mix: Holiday Mix	*5*	*3*	*2*
Term Mix: Holiday None	6	5	3
Term None: Holiday Informal	9	17	25
Term None: Holiday Formal	6	5	4
Term None: Holiday Mix	4	4	3
Term None: Holiday Other	1	1	2
Term Other: Holiday None	2	2	1
Term Other: Holiday Other	1	1	1
Weighted base	*1063*	*1305*	*836*
Unweighted base	*1304*	*1389*	*838*

+ Includes 4 year olds who are attending school full time/part time

Most parents using only informal childcare (not in combination with formal childcare) during the school holidays appear relatively content with their arrangements. Most are happy with the quality of their childcare, the hours it is available, its flexibility and cost (Tables 4.27 and 4.28). However, substantial minorities of people *do* have concerns over these issues. A third (32 per cent) agrees that they have difficulties finding affordable childcare in the holidays, and a similar proportion (28 per cent) have concerns over finding flexible arrangements. Parents using a combination of formal and informal care in the holidays seem to struggle more with their arrangements, having greater concerns over the flexibility and affordability of childcare than parents using either formal or informal care. Parents may have chosen the combination in order to 'make things work'. However, none of these questions take account of what parents' preferred packages of care would have been, making it difficult to disentangle whether their views are directly connected to the arrangements used or to what they would ideally have organised. Wheelock and Jones (2002) found that parents reported on the stress of organising school holiday provision, and there was some feeling of having to find childcare arrangements that were 'good enough' during these periods.

Table 4.27 Perceptions of holiday care, by whether use informal care in school holidays

Base: all families with school-age children and using childcare for work related reasons in holidays

	Type of childcare used for work reasons in school holiday			
	Informal only	Formal only	Formal + Informal	Any informal
	%	%	%	%
I am happy with the quality of childcare available to me during the school holiday				
Agree	70	77	69	70
Neither	12	7	11	12
Disagree	18	16	20	19
I have problems finding holiday care that is flexible enough to fit my needs				
Agree	28	29	43	32
Neither	13	12	11	12
Disagree	60	59	46	56
I have difficulty finding childcare that I can afford during the school holidays				
Agree	32	36	46	36
Neither	14	20	16	15
Disagree	53	44	39	49
Weighted base	927	402	341	*1292*
Unweighted base	825	430	338	*1182*

Table 4.28 Perceptions of holiday care, by whether use informal care in school holidays

Base: all families where mother works and using childcare for work related reasons in holidays

	Type of childcare used for work reasons in school holiday			
	Informal only	Formal only	Formal + Informal	Any informal
	%	%	%	%
I am able to find holiday care that fits in with my/(mine and my partner's) working hours				
Agree	70	71	67	69
Neither	11	9	10	10
Disagree	20	19	23	21
Weighted base	*850*	*345*	*315*	*1187*
Unweighted base	*751*	*370*	*309*	*1078*

4.8.1 Summary

Again, the subject of childcare provision during school holidays is an under-researched area, although one that has come further up the policy agenda since the focus on Extended Services. Families rely more on informal childcare during the school holidays than they do in term-time, either because they needed no term-time childcare (because of the hours covered by the school day) or because their formal provision is not available for any or all of the holiday hours required. Parents rely heavily on grandparents to provide this holiday care. Given that a substantial minority of parents have problems with finding suitable holiday childcare, a more nuanced picture of the issues faced by parents and informal childcare providers would be helpful.

4.9 Concluding comments

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a detailed account of who uses different types of informal childcare, and when and how they use it. We expect this to be a useful source of reference to others working on issues related to informal childcare. It is also an important backdrop to the following chapters on why parents choose to use informal childcare, grandparents' perspectives on their childcare role, issues related to childcare funding and the relationship between childcare and children's outcomes.

Perhaps the key point to take away from the preceding sections is that families who use informal childcare are not a homogeneous group and neither is there a 'model' way in which informal childcare is used. Informal – largely grandparental – childcare is common among families across all socio-demographic groups. That said, there is a greater propensity for families in lower socio-economic groups (measured via income, socio-economic group or maternal education) to use informal childcare. The implication of this is that parents do not (solely) choose informal childcare because it is low or no cost. Nor do they only use it because they have no other options open to them. It also highlights the importance of looking across socio-economic groups when we look in Chapter 8 at the associations between being with informal childcare providers (effectively grandparents) and educational and socio-emotional outcomes. 'Children with grandparents' cannot be directly compared with 'children with childminders', 'children in day nurseries' and so on. We need to take account of the socio-economic backgrounds of the children – and of their grandparents.

The variation in the numbers of days and hours that children spend with different childminders also relates to the discussion in Chapter 8 on children's outcomes. Not only does our evidence on the amount of variation highlight the importance of taking account of the amount of time children spend in childcare (as outcomes must surely vary according to the intensity of the provision). It also reminds us that the fact that, on average, children spend far less time with informal providers than they do with formal providers is also key.

In the following chapter, we focus on a number of groups of families who may have particular views of or needs from childcare that might influence their choice between different formal and informal providers. What role does informal childcare play for families with a disabled child or child with special educational needs; for student parents; for families working non-standard hours; for minority ethnic families?

5 Informal childcare for particular needs

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we focus on groups of families who come up in the literature as having particular needs from their childcare, with the potential to rely more often or more heavily on informal childcare than other families. Although these are all covered within a single chapter, their issues and needs from childcare are different to one another. The groups are –

- Families with disabled children or children with special educational needs (Section 5.2);
- Parents who work in non-standard times of the day or week (Section 5.3);
- Student parents (Section 5.4).
- Families from minority ethnic backgrounds (Section 5.5);

5.2 Families with disabled children or children with special educational needs

Several studies report on the difficulties that parents face when trying to find suitable childcare for children with special needs, because either they have learning difficulties or they are disabled (eg Kagan et al, 1999; Contact a Family, 2002). Exacerbating the difficulties caused by the particular needs of the child is the greater propensity for disabled children to live in disadvantaged circumstances (although in some respects it is hard to disentangle cause and effect). They are more likely to live in financially or materially deprived households and to live with lone parents (Read et al, 2007) – all groups more likely than other families to struggle to find affordable, suitable childcare. They are also more likely to live with a disabled parent (Bryson et al, 2004). Mothers with a disabled child or a child with special educational needs (SEN) are less likely to be working than mothers without children with these needs. The 2008 Childcare Survey found that 27 per cent of mothers with a preschool child with SEN were working compared to 44 per cent of mothers with a preschool child without SEN, and the pattern was not dissimilar for school-age children (47 per cent of mothers with a child with SEN and 59 per cent of mothers without a child with SEN). Likewise, mothers with a pre-school or school-age disabled child were less likely to be in work than mothers without a disabled child (pre-school 45 per cent compared to 54 per cent; school-age 48 per cent compared to 59 per cent). Other studies cite much lower levels of maternal work among families with a disabled child (eg the Family Fund Trust cites a figure of just 16 per cent). However, the differences in figures are likely to be due to the pool of families interviewed, with the Childcare Survey having a wider definition of disability than some other studies.

The previous government cited high levels of mothers with disabled children wanting to work (DCSF, 2007). Appropriate childcare is a significant barrier to parents with disabled children to taking up paid work (Kagan et al, 1999; Daycare Trust 2007a). Within the Aiming High for Disabled Children Strategy (HM Treasury; DCSF, 2007), the previous government committed to ensuring that disabled children have access to affordable, high quality formal childcare that meets their needs, either via the universal provision within the National Childcare Strategy or additional services tailored to their needs. This strategy is in line with calls from organisations representing families' interests (eg Council for Disabled Children 2008), who cite evidence that high quality childcare is a means of

including disabled children within their wider society and improving their lives. Several policy changes since 2006 may have improved the childcare opportunities for families with disabled children (eg Childcare Act 2006; training for providers (originally through the Transformation Fund); Direct Payments and more recently Individualised Budgets which can be spent on childcare; Disabled Children's Access to Childcare (DCATCH) pilot), and the impact of these on families' childcare will not be seen for a while. We must bear this in mind when reporting on the available evidence on childcare use and needs of families with disabled children.

Obviously, our focus is on how families with disabled children use *in*formal childcare and, in line with the rest of the report, focuses mainly on childcare used so that parents can work. So (bearing in mind that mothers with children with special needs are less likely to work), if they are working, are they more or less likely than other families to rely on different forms of informal care? Are parents' childcare preferences different if they have a child with particular needs? And is their access to formal and informal childcare providers any different to those of other parents? Unfortunately, the evidence is patchy. There is very little research into the role that informal childcare – particularly grandparents - plays in looking after disabled children, and much of what there is based on small scale qualitative work on particular groups, often done in the US (Mitchell and Sloper, 2002). There seems to be more written on the general emotional and practical support roles that grandparents can or cannot play (indeed, there is some research on the potential for grandparents to add to parents' stress). Because of difficulties in selecting random probability samples of families with children with special needs (no one administrative source covers the full range of needs and they are often hard to access), some have relied on non-representative samples of families. And representative surveys of parents, like the Childcare Survey series, tend to have insufficient numbers of parents with children with SEN or disabled children to go much beyond basic comparisons between 'disabled' and 'not disabled' or 'SEN' versus 'not'. Such analysis is crude, given the varying needs of children with different types and levels of disability or SEN. Another difficulty with relying on general parent surveys, like the Childcare Survey, is that their generic questions about childcare (eg needs, choices, difficulties) do not necessarily capture the particular issues for families with disabled children. In 2009, the Childcare Survey included for the first time a number of questions specifically focusing on the needs of disabled children (Smith et al, 2010). However, relatively small sample sizes mean that the report authors were able to report only on very top-line findings, and we can conclude little about reasons or issues around using informal childcare.

Given all of the above, what we report in the paragraphs below does not provide a satisfactorily rich picture of the role that informal childcare does or could play for parents with children with special needs. We provide what data we can on these parents' use of informal childcare, using data from the 2008 Childcare Survey and findings reported by Smith et al (2010) on the 2009 data. We also report on a small number of other studies that cover relevant ground. But, in Chapter 10, we give some thought to the evidence gaps which could be address via further research.

Despite the fact that its sample size makes it difficult to look in detail at different kinds of disability or need, the Childcare Survey is still currently the best survey data on the childcare that families use for children with SEN or disabled children. Using data from 2008, Table 5.1 splits children into those who have a disability and those who do not[40]. Among preschool children in childcare so that parents could work, disabled and non-disabled children are equally likely to be looked after by informal

[40] There were too few children with mental disabilities to look separately at mental and physical disabilities.

childcare providers[41]. Among *school-age* children in childcare so that parents could work, disabled children are more likely than their non-disabled counterparts to be looked after by informal carers, and have no formal carers. Disabled school-age children are significantly less likely than other school-age children to be with formal carers, especially in out of school clubs. We should note here that because the Childcare Survey includes children up to the age of 14, we cannot use it to explore issues raised by commentators that many disabled children will continue to require childcare (be it formal or informal) beyond the age that non-disabled children tend to use it.

Table 5.1 Childcare packages used, by whether child has a disability, 2008

Base: Children using childcare for work related reasons

	Pre-school			School-age		
	Yes, has disability	No disability	All	Yes, has disability	No disability	All
Childcare package	%	%	%	%	%	%
Informal only	**21**	**27**	**27**	**55**	**49**	**50**
Grandparent only	17	21	20	30	30	30
Sibling only	0	*	*	4	4	4
Other relative only	3	3	3	5	4	4
Friend/neighbour only	0	2	1	8	6	6
Grandparent + other informal	1	2	2	7	5	5
Other mix informal	1	*	*	1	1	1
Formal + Informal	**29**	**23**	**23**	**14**	**13**	**13**
Centre based + Grandparents	17	16	16	0	1	1
Individual + Grandparents	0	2	2	2	2	2
Out of school + Grandparents	0	*	*	8	6	6
Other mix formal + informal	12	5	5	5	5	5
Formal only	**49**	**49**	**49**	**29**	**34**	**34**
Centre based only	33	35	35	2	2	2
Individual only	8	8	8	15	11	11
Out of school only	4	1	1	12	19	18
Centre based + Individual	4	3	3	0	*	*
Out of school + Individual	0	*	*	1	2	2
Other mix formal	0	1	1	0	1	1
Other	**0**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**3**
Weighted base	*78*	*1382*	*1460*	*183*	*2135*	*2327*
Unweighted base	*95*	*1658*	*1754*	*177*	*2036*	*2221*

We also looked for any differences between the childcare used for children with and without special educational needs (Table 5.2). Among children in childcare while their parents are working, there are no significant differences in the proportions of school-age children in informal and formal childcare. We are not able to test whether this is the same for pre-school children, given the small numbers of pre-school children being identified as having SEN. Focusing on SEN rather than disabilities, Bryson et al (2004) combined data from the 1999 and 2001 Childcare Surveys in order to increase the sample size available for analysis. They found no significant differences in the proportions of children

[41] Differences in the proportions in 'informal only' or 'formal and informal' may well be accounted for by variations in the age profile of disabled and non-disabled preschool children.

receiving informal care across different types of special needs[42]. Speight et al (2009) again found no differences when they included SEN as a variable in multiple logistic regressions to predict use of formal childcare with the Childcare Survey data from 2008.

Table 5.2 Childcare packages used, by whether child has SEN

Base: School-age children using childcare for work related reasons

Childcare package	Yes, has SEN	No SEN	All
	%	%	%
Informal only	**50**	**50**	**50**
Grandparent only	30	30	30
Sibling only	4	4	4
Other relative only	2	4	4
Friend/neighbour only	6	6	6
Grandparent + other informal	7	5	5
Other mix informal	1	1	1
Formal + Informal	**14**	**13**	**13**
Centre based + Grandparents	1	1	1
Individual + Grandparents	3	2	2
Out of school + Grandparents	5	6	6
Other mix formal + informal	6	5	5
Formal only	**33**	**34**	**34**
Centre based only	2	2	2
Individual only	13	11	11
Out of school only	17	18	18
Centre based + Individual	0	*	*
Out of school + Individual	1	2	2
Other mix formal	0	1	1
Other	**6**	**5**	**5**
Weighted base	*195*	*2121*	*2327*
Unweighted base	*183*	*2028*	*2221*

These findings from the Childcare Survey – which indicate that children with special needs (including disability) with working parent are as or more likely than other children to be looked by informal carers is not necessarily borne out in other research. As mentioned earlier, this may be because of differences in the average level of need of children in different samples. Stiell et al (2006) report on a survey and in-depth interviews commissioned by Carers UK and carried out among carers of disabled children. The sample is not representative of families with disabled children as a whole and, as a result, we have not used the data to provide figures on prevalence. Nonetheless, it provides some useful indicators of the kinds of issues faced by families with disabled children concerning the relationship between childcare and work, and the role of informal childcare within it. Their evidence suggests that there is more informal care on hand – from family and friends – when children are younger, but less so when children are older or have more challenging behaviours and needs. And some parents talked of using this kind of informal support 'for emergencies' rather than as a regular arrangement. These findings were mirrored in a set of focus groups run by the Daycare Trust (Daycare Trust, 2007a). While some parents relied on familial informal care, many parents could not rely on informal care for 'high demand' children. Linked to this, Bryson et al (2004) found that, when

[42] Their base was all children rather than all children in childcare for work-related reasons.

asked about their ideal childcare arrangements, parents with children with statemented special needs were less likely than other parents to choose to draw on the help of grandparents. Griggs (2009) cites findings from Hillman that finding suitable formal childcare for children with autism can lead to a reliance on grandparents to provide childcare. Certainly Smith et al (2010) found that large proportions of parents with a child with a longstanding health condition or disability felt that local formal childcare provision did not adequately cater for their particular needs – those specific to their child's illness or disability, at the hours they require or at a distance that was suitable to travel. Moreover, they found that where parents were using formal childcare for their child, a third thought that the staff were not properly trained to deal with their child's condition.

5.2.1 Summary

Clearly, not enough is currently known to draw many conclusions on the role of informal childcare for families with children with SEN and disabled children. However, further robust research will be published in the coming year or two which will add to the evidence base. DfE are funding an evaluation of the Disabled Children's Access to Childcare (DCATCH) pilot, involving a random probability survey of families with disabled children. This will provide more detail on the numbers of families dealing with different types of childhood disability who use 'family and friend' childcare (and formal childcare), as well as some indication of how this might be affected by improved access to formal childcare. And, of course, there is the option of combining a number of years of the Childcare Survey (which has been an annual survey since 2006) in order to have a large enough sample to do a more detailed analysis of the role of different types of informal providers for these families.

5.3 Parents who work at non-standard times of the day or week

Several studies have reported on the fact that working outside of the traditional 9 to 5, Monday to Friday is now the norm for many families (Barnes and Bryson, 2004; Barnes et al, 2006; La Valle et al, 2002; Lyonette and Clark, 2009). Given that there is little formal childcare provision outside of standard working hours, we looked for evidence of whether and how informal childcare was used by parents at these times.

In the 2008 Childcare Survey, over 60 per cent of working mothers – both lone parents and those in couples – do some work outside of the standard hours typically covered by formal childcare providers (Table 5.3[43]). Forty six per cent of working lone mothers and 44 per cent of working mothers in couple families work at some point at the weekend. Similar proportions are working after 6 o'clock in the evening and around a quarter start work before 8 o'clock in the morning. Couple mothers are more likely than lone mothers to work in these early mornings. Although, on the face to it, lone mothers were as likely as couple mothers to work atypical hours, La Valle et al (2002[44]) found that lone mothers working atypical hours tended to be doing fewer hours than couple mothers who worked these hours.

[43] These questions were asked of respondents only; for clarity we have restricted the analysis to respondent mothers only (given very few were fathers).

[44] La Valle et al (2002) is perhaps the most comprehensive study on childcare at atypical times. They carried out a telephone survey of working families (selected from the 1999 wave of the Childcare Survey), as well as a set of in-depth interviews largely of parents who worked at atypical times.

Table 5.3 Mothers working at atypical times, 2008

Base: All working mothers in couple/lone parent families

	Working mothers in couple households	Working lone mothers
Any atypical	**64**	**61**
Before 8am	28	23
After 6pm	46	44
Weekends	44	46
Weighted base	*3452*	*982*
Unweighted base	*3300*	*790*

There is evidence that working atypical hours – particularly weekends – is associated with parents spending less time with their children – particularly on child-centred activities (Barnes et al, 2006). This makes the question important of how and with whom children are spending their time during these periods.

Much of the research evidence suggests many parents working non-standard hours 'shift-parent' thereby avoiding the need for non-parental childcare altogether. In exploring parents' attitudes and motivations, the role of informal childcare is not always explicitly discussed. However, while, for some, the ability to shift-parent is a primary reason for working non-standard hours (either because they think this is the best choice or to avoid childcare costs), we found little evidence about whether parents had the option of using informal childcare or whether they would have drawn on it if they did (La Valle et al 2002). Plus, for substantial proportions of lone parents working non-standard hours, shift-parenting with a parent in the same household is not an option. There is *some* discussion (La Valle et al, 2002; Statham and Mooney, 2003) about parents choosing these hours to avoid using formal childcare, which include a desire to use informal care from grandparents and other relatives. Certainly Statham and Mooney suggest that parents saw informal childcare providers – particularly grandparents – as the next best childcare after parents, especially when talking about evenings and weekends.

If parents working non-standard hours *are* using childcare, it is no surprise that they rely heavily on informal providers. La Valle et al (2002) found that parents who frequently worked atypical hours were more likely than others to use informal childcare when they worked: 55 per cent of dual worker families where only the mother worked atypical hours and 49 per cent when both worked atypical hours used informal care compared to 39 per cent where only the father worked atypical hours or 27 per cent when neither did. Use of informal childcare was more widespread among lone parents – 60 per cent of those doing atypical hours used informal care compared to 47 per cent if they did not work atypical hours. Butt et al (2007) cite previous research that parents working atypical hours are more likely to rely on informal childcare – possibly out of choice but also because of a lack of suitable formal childcare. Using 2004 Childcare Survey data, they found a very similar pattern to La Valle et al. Virtually all childcare in the evenings, weekends and nights was informal.

This is corroborated by 2008 Childcare Survey data (Table 5.4). The table highlights the very heavy reliance on informal childcare – particularly grandparents – for looking after pre-school and primary school children in the night time and at the weekend. Three quarters of preschool children who are

in childcare on a Saturday, a Sunday or at night are with their grandparents. The proportions of primary school children are not dissimilar. However, while more children are with informal than formal carers in the evenings, still a substantial proportion are looked after by formal carers, particularly younger children. Reliance on informal carers in the evenings increases as children get older. All this suggests that grandparent care is particularly important when formal childcare provision is not likely to be available (at weekends or evenings or overnight).

Table 5.4 Times of day when childcare used whilst parent(s) working, pre-school children

Base: All children using childcare whilst parent(s) at work at given time
% using provider

	Age of child											
	Pre-school				Primary				Secondary			
Time of day	Formal	Informal	Grandparent	*Wtd/unwtd base*	Formal	Informal	Grandparent	*Wtd/unwtd base*	Formal	Informal	Grandparent	*Wtd/unwtd base*
Early am	76	38	33	*506/644*	66	37	23	*445/388*	33	55	40	*55/48*
Daytime	82	43	41	*820/1079*	71	42	37	*636/557*	49	52	37	*140/122*
Late pm	68	49	43	*676/864*	65	51	38	*858/755*	42	66	37	*297/257*
Evening	50	60	47	*240/294*	41	62	46	*348/303*	14	80	42	*142/123*
Night	13	87	77	*29/39*	13	79	71	*47/40*	20	31	58	*28/24*
Saturday	12	91	74	*44/55*	16	87	69	*48/42*	10	69	46	*24/31*
Sunday	18	85	76	*19/25*	0	100	83	*13/11*	7	80	49	*15/13*

In the 2008 Childcare Survey, mothers who worked and used childcare during non-standard hours were asked whether these caused problems with their childcare arrangements (Table 5.5). Early mornings and evenings seem to cause the greatest problems, with around a third of mothers working these hours saying these hours caused problems arranging childcare. Those using informal childcare are far less likely to have problems with their childcare arrangements than those who had found formal childcare provision. This suggests that not only is informal childcare more available to parents, it is also more reliable. Speight et al (2009) reported that among parents working at the weekend, lone mothers were nearly twice as likely as couple mothers to say that this caused childcare problems (eg Saturdays 27 per cent of lone mothers and 15 per cent of couple mothers).

Table 5.5 Whether working at atypical times causes problems with childcare, by type of childcare used for work related reasons

Base: Mothers working at different atypical times and using childcare for work related reasons

% saying working at typical time cause problems with childcare	Informal only	Formal only	Mix Informal + formal	All
Before 8am usually or sometimes	24	36	36	32
Weighted base	*228*	*237*	*162*	*643*
Unweighted base	*193*	*221*	*161*	*591*
After 6pm usually or sometimes	19	39	40	32

Weighted base	*420*	*373*	*279*	*1102*
Unweighted base	*375*	*380*	*284*	*1964*
Saturday usually or sometimes	12	23	30	20
Weighted base	*413*	*295*	*225*	*956*
Unweighted base	*361*	*309*	*220*	*913*
Sunday usually or sometimes	10	23	32	19
Weighted base	*273*	*209*	*123*	*620*
Unweighted base	*234*	*220*	*125*	*597*

There is very little rich evidence about the role of informal childcare providers in facilitating parents' work in non-standard hours. We know little about informal providers' – particularly grandparents' – views on providing childcare support at these times. It is not clear to what extent informal childcare is being chosen in the absence of formal childcare provision. What is a given is that there *is* very little *formal* childcare provision to call on outside of standard working hours, so parents will often be choosing between informal childcare, shift parenting and, for older children, leaving them on their own. Statham and Mooney (2003) reviewed the evidence on the availability of childcare. They found little evidence – outside of the NHS – of formal providers offering childcare outside of standard hours. Where formal providers were open to the idea of working outside of standard hours, this was more likely to be in the early mornings than at other times and they found mixed evidence on the preparedness of childminders to offer services to fit the needs of working parents with irregular working hours.

There is a question mark over the level of demand for formal childcare provision outside of standard working hours. Statham and Mooney's survey of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) and childminders found some, but not a great deal, of demand for atypical hours childcare, and this was wanted more often during the week (either early morning or evening) rather than at the weekends or overnight. La Valle et al (2002) and Butt (2007) too found some unmet demand for formal childcare at these times.

5.3.1 Summary

The fact that informal childcare is so much more likely to be used to cover non-standard working hours is relevant to the discussions about parents' choices to use informal over formal childcare. In one way, it highlights the shortcomings of current policies for childcare, which do not really address the mismatch between parents' working hours and the availability of formal childcare (although we are not advocating 24/7 opening hours by childcare providers). However, it also feeds into discussions about parental choice and views (of both parents and grandparents) about what is the 'best' childcare for children in their traditional 'leisure' or 'family' time – formal childcare or time with grandparents or friends?

It is debateable whether there is a greater role of formal providers at these times. Statham and Mooney suggest that – among the formal childcare options – people are most likely to feel that childminders are the appropriate providers to cater for people's childcare needs in non-standard times. That said, there are real issues about the viability of this, including consideration of childminders' own work-life balance. Of course, as with other weekend and evening services, there would be a price-premium for parents, many of whom work in lower paid employment.

5.4 Student parents

5.4.1 Policy and research context

Although the 2006 Childcare Act places a duty on local authorities to secure sufficient childcare to enable parents not only to work but also to undertake training or study, this has not been mirrored this in terms of parents' access to subsidised childcare costs. They have not been eligible to claim the childcare element of the Working Tax Credit unless they are also working for at least 16 hours per week; and they cannot draw on employer-supported childcare, such as the childcare voucher scheme.

The free hours of early education for three, four and some two year olds are universally available. As such, student parents are able to take these up. Until September 2010, it had been hard to use these as 'childcare' outside of a wider package of childcare, as the hours had to be used in 2.5 hour sessions across the week. Since September 2010, parents have greater flexibility in how they use these hours, using individual sessions of up to 5 hours. In some cases, this might provide parents with a practical part-time childcare arrangement, although it is likely that many student parents will still need to enlist the help of other childcare providers for certain periods. (Note also section 5.5.2, the low proportion of student parents with pre-school children.)

There is some piecemeal support for student parents in England needing help with childcare costs (for a longer description, see Daycare Trust 2007b; National Union of Students (NUS), 2009). The following points specifically refer to help available to student towards childcare costs (rather than simply being a student grant) at the time of writing this review –

- Since 2001, the Childcare Grant provides means-tested support for full-time undergraduate Higher Education (HE) students, covering up to 85 per cent of their childcare costs spent on registered childcare providers;
- The Access to Learning Fund can be used to cover childcare costs for full-time and part-time HE students (both undergraduate and postgraduate). Students apply directly to their institution and funds are limited. The NUS report points to reductions in this Fund. Discretionary Support Funds play a similar role for Further Education (FE) students.
- Student parents under the age of 20 are eligible to claim help towards childcare costs (up to £160 per week, more in London) under the Care to Learn scheme.
- For training courses under the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), lone parents' childcare costs are met.

The above list highlights the fact that there is little non-discretionary support for student parents over the age of 20. What support there is focuses mainly on full-time HE students, and does not cover the full cost of any registered childcare. There is a lot of uncertainty around the support, with student parents not knowing when they apply for courses whether they will be able to get funding and/or on-site childcare places. Sometimes, the childcare funding does not cover personal study time (Daycare Trust, 2007b). None of the above help towards the costs of informal childcare provided by relatives, friends or neighbours.

Largely because of these funding issues, childcare for student parents is an issue that has received a fair amount of attention from interest groups in childcare and post-school education. For this review, we have looked for robust research to provide evidence on the prevalence of students using

different forms of childcare – with a particular focus on how they use informal childcare – and on the issues that student parents face when trying to make their childcare arrangements work. We looked for evidence about the demographics of which student parents use which forms of childcare, and about the extent to which students have choices and constraints related to childcare because of their family circumstances, their income levels and/or the times they need childcare. There is a paucity of good quality evidence on the issues. In the following sections, we draw on what evidence there is, comment on the gaps and provide suggestions for ways of plugging some of these.

5.4.2 Prevalence of student parents using different forms of childcare

Perhaps the first issue is to understand how many student parents there are in the population, and how many of these need childcare in order for them to carry out their studies. We have looked at this from two dimensions: what proportion of parents are students? And what proportion of students are parents?

According to the 2008 Childcare Survey (Speight et al, 2009; our own analysis), 15 per cent of the mothers[45] were enrolled on courses and studying. However, only around a quarter of student mothers said that studying was their 'main activity' (which may equate to meaning that they are enrolled on full-time courses). The following demographics provide interesting context to the evidence described below –

- Of the 15 per cent of student mothers two thirds (67 per cent) were working as well as studying; a third (31 per cent) worked full time. This may reflect the growth in distance learning courses, such as Open University qualifications;
- A higher proportion of lone mothers were studying than couple mothers (19 per cent and 13 per cent respectively). However, two thirds (66 per cent) of all student mothers were in two-parent families and a third (34 per cent) were lone mothers;
- Most (63 per cent) student mothers had only school-age children. Twenty one per cent had pre-school children only and 16 per cent had both pre-school and school-age children.
- In the main, student mothers were not young. Twenty one per cent were under 30, 43 per cent 30-39 and 36 per cent aged 40 and over.
- Although the Childcare Survey does not collect information on the qualifications that mothers are studying for, looking at the highest qualifications that these mothers already have indicates that they are working towards a range of qualification levels. Twenty four per cent are already educated to degree level or above, 20 per cent to A level or above, 31 per cent to GCSE or above, and 20 per cent had no existing qualifications or qualifications lower than GCSE level.

So, many student mothers will be juggling not only studying and their maternal role, but also their role as a paid worker. Most will have the support of a second parent at home, but a substantial proportion will not. And most, if they need childcare at all, will be looking for childcare suitable for school-age rather than preschool children.

In their report on student parents (NUS, 2009), the NUS looked at the prevalence figures from a number of student surveys based on random probability samples (eg Student Income and Expenditure Survey) and from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The figures showed that, in HE, very few full-time undergraduates are parents (between 5 and 8 per cent), but that parents make up a

[45] Student mothers may have been the respondent or the respondent's partner.

substantial proportion of all part-time undergraduates (around a third). In FE, the picture is quite different, with more FE students being parents than not. Figures from the Labour Force Survey suggest that, among HE and FE students, around a quarter of full-time students are parents and 40 per cent of part-time students are parents. These surveys suggest that the majority of student parents are women and mature students.

For evidence on the proportions of student parents using different forms of both formal and informal childcare, we looked at the student mothers in the Childcare Survey. We considered and decided against using data from a number of other surveys. The Student Income and Expenditure Survey asks student parents only about any formal, registered childcare that they use while studying. The LFS identifies student parents and collects data on formal and informal childcare used but does not allow us to identify whether the childcare used was in order to facilitate parents' study. The NUS study included data from an online survey of student parents, but the authors themselves point to the fact that the survey cannot be used to look at prevalence, because it does not properly represent the student parent population (for example, it under-represents FE students) and there are no national statistics against which to weight to the true population. From the methodology description in the report the sampling frame is not clear and the response rate is not cited. In contrast, from the Childcare Survey, we are able to identify the childcare used by student mothers in order to study (as opposed to childcare used for work or other reasons). As such, it provides a more accurate picture of the childcare used to facilitate parents' study. On the downside, the sample sizes of student parents are not huge (especially when we look at parents using childcare) and the survey does not allow us to look at students in different types of institutions.

We looked at the study-related childcare used by *all* student mothers (ie those 15 per cent of mothers involved in study, whether or not it was in combination with work), and that used by mothers who said that study was their main activity and student mothers who were not in paid work (45 per cent of all student mothers). In Table 5.6, we show not only the childcare used by student mothers to enable them to study, but also their use of childcare overall and for work-related reasons. Given that only a minority of student mothers were full-time students, it is helpful to see how their childcare for studying fits within a wider set of circumstances. The first thing to note is that only a quarter (22 per cent) of student mothers were using childcare to enable them to study (the proportion using it to enable them to work was twice this). Similar proportions use formal and informal childcare. Fifteen per cent of student mothers used informal childcare while they studied and 12 per cent used formal childcare (some will have used a mixture of both). Grandparents ranked highest as a childcare provider while mothers studied. So, although only eight per cent of student mothers drew on the help of grandparents to look after their children while they studied, this does amount to a third of all student mothers using any childcare to study.

Table 5.6 Childcare providers used for study reasons

Base: All student mothers

	% using provider for **any** reason	% using provider for **study** reasons	% using provider for **work** reasons
Any	**79**	**22**	**41**
Informal	**44**	**12**	**26**
Grandparents	*29*	8	17
Sibling	6	1	3
Other relative	8	2	4
Friend/neighbour	10	3	6
Formal	**63**	**15**	**25**
Day nursery	13	5	6
Nursery school/class	9	3	3
Reception class	10	2	2
Playgroup	6	1	1
Childminder	7	1	5
Other individual provider (Nanny, au pair, babysitter)	3	1	2
Out of school club	38	5	11
None	*21*	*78*	*59*
Weighted base	*1024*	*1024*	*1024*
Unweighted base	*1009*	*1009*	*1009*

Table 5.7 focuses on student mothers who say that studying is their 'main activity' and on those who are studying and **not** also in paid work. That is, we have tried to pinpoint those more traditionally regarded as 'student mothers', who are not combining it with paid work. The table shows the proportion of these mothers using childcare to facilitate their study. Although the proportions are higher than those of all student mothers, still only 37 per cent use childcare to study. More use formal (25 per cent) than informal childcare (20 per cent). Thirteen per cent of these student parents draw on the help of grandparents to provide childcare.

Table 5.7 Childcare providers used for study reasons

Base: All student mothers studying as main or only economic activity[46]

Childcare used	% using provider for **study** reasons
Any	**37**
Informal	**20**
Grandparents	13
Sibling	2
Other relative	4
Friend/neighbour	5
Formal	**25**
Day nursery	10
Nursery school/class	*4*
Reception class	*3*
Playgroup	*2*
Childminder	*2*
Other individual provider (Nanny, au pair, babysitter)	*1*
Out of school club	*8*
None	*63*
Weighted base	*458*
Unweighted base	*475*

The fact that so few student mothers used childcare to enable them to study limited our ability to look in more detail at the demographic profile of student mothers using different forms of childcare and the amount of childcare different student parents use and have to pay for[47]. We would have more power to do so if we combined a number of years of the survey (necessarily ignoring any changes in trends over time). Given that student parents are one of several foci of this report, we have not done this combined analysis here. However, this is something worth exploring in future research.

5.4.3 Reasons for choosing informal or formal childcare

Although the sample sizes in the 2008 Childcare Survey are too small to look at student mothers' given reasons for choosing particular providers, we did look at how student mothers responded to a question on what, in particular, about their childcare arrangements enabled them to study (Tables 5.8 and 5.9). Our particular interest is in any differences in the perceived roles of formal and informal childcare - and we have therefore looked separately at the responses of those using any informal care and those using only formal care. Because of the significant role played by partners in couple families, we looked separately at the responses of lone mothers and mothers in couple

[46] This includes all students who are not also working.

[47] There are better data on the cost of *formal* childcare for students in the Student Income and Expenditure Survey, but nothing on informal childcare. The (non-representative) NUS survey suggests that only a minority of student parents have any help towards their childcare costs and, among those that do, what they receive does not cover the full costs of the childcare. However, as mentioned before, results of this survey need to be treated with caution.

families. *Note that the numbers of student mothers in each group are small and that therefore the findings are indicative rather than definitive.*

Among student mothers in both couple and lone parent families, having school-age children (and therefore 'looked after' during school hours) was clearly a key factor helping them to study. Note that the tables include only mothers using some childcare, so the reference to school should be taken to mean that the school hours cover at least some of their study hours. Beyond this, those using informal childcare place great weight on the fact that they have relatives or friends around to help out, whereas those using formal childcare point to the quality of the care and its ability to fit the hours required for them to study.

Table 5.8 Aspects of childcare that enable study, by whether use informal care, 2008

Base: Couple households with mother studying using childcare for study related reasons

	Type of childcare used for study reasons	
	Any informal	Formal only
	%	%
Nature of childcare provision		
Reliable free/cheap care	[28]	[29]
Quality of care available	[27]	[63]
Care available fits in with study hours	[46]	[62]
Care available fits in with partner's working hours	[19]	[22]
Suitable alternatives to childcare available		
Children at school	[46]	[44]
Children old enough to look after themselves	[7]	[5]
Relatives help with childcare	[57]	[16]
Friends help with childcare	[18]	[2]
Co-ordinate study hours with partner	[46]	[44]
Partner helps	[36]	[19]
Child's father/mother helps	[n/a]	
Employer role		
College provides childcare	[3]	[7]
Partner's college provides childcare	[0]	[8]
Weighted base	*56*	*37*
Unweighted base	*57*	*53*

Table 5.9 Aspects of childcare that enable study, by whether use informal care, 2008

Base: Lone parent households with mother studying using childcare for study related reasons

	Type of childcare used for study reasons	
	Any informal	Formal only
	%	%
Nature of childcare provision		
Reliable free/cheap care	[49]	[47]
Quality of care available	[42]	[61]
Care available fits in with work hours	[45]	[64]
Care available fits in with partner's working hours	[n/a]	
Suitable alternatives to childcare available		
Children at school	[47]	[50]
Children old enough to look after themselves	[5]	[5]
Relatives help with childcare	[69]	[14]
Friends help with childcare	[19]	[6]
Co-ordinate working hours with partner	[n/a]	
Partner helps	[n/a]	
Child's father/mother helps	[6]	[10]
Employer role		
College provides childcare	[13]	[18]
Partner's college provides childcare	[n/a]	
Weighted base	*62*	*56*
Unweighted base	*54*	*59*

In our analysis, we have focused on parents using childcare to facilitate study, to look at whether informal or formal childcare play different roles. Speight et al (2009) used the same data, but looked at the responses of all student mothers (not just those using childcare to study). They could therefore pick up on the relative roles played by partners and school (often used by those not using childcare to facilitate their study) and formal/informal childcare. In two-parent families, partners played a key role in enabling mothers to study. Twenty three per cent of student mothers said that they could study because their partner helped with childcare and 17 per cent studied when their partner was not working. Maybe as a result of not living with a partner, lone parents were more reliant than couple mothers on their children being school-age or old enough to look after themselves (around half said this) and on the help of friends and family (mentioned by over a third). That said, informal care did play a substantial role for student mothers in couples, among whom around a quarter said that relatives and friends enabled them to study.

As we discuss further in Chapter 6, methodologically it is very difficult to ask people retrospectively to justify choices that they have made. It is particularly hard with issues such as choosing childcare, given how emotive some of these issues are. Mothers' responses to the above questions need to be taken in the same vein. There is a paucity of good quality research concerning student parents' childcare choices, and much of what there is is small-scale qualitative work with particular sub-groups of students. However, given that some common themes emerge across these studies, we

draw attention to them here. There is a clear evidence gap here about the issues faced by student parents and the decisions that they make. Such evidence might best be gathered using in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of students which covers a range of students in terms of the issues pertinent to their childcare choices: HE vs FE; full-time vs part-time; length of course; placements and study during non-standard hours; age of children; distance from institution to home.

The 2009 NUS report draws on findings from its online (non-representative) survey, as well as a series of focus groups with student parents. Because of the sampling strategy, we have not reported on the survey quantitatively. However, we have used for the evidence of the kinds of choices that student parents make regarding childcare. The qualitative and quantitative findings from that report suggest –

- That choosing formal childcare is not necessarily a viable option, even for students eligible for support towards childcare costs. Hidden costs, such as deposits and holiday retainers, can make it hard to opt for formal childcare, as these costs (as well as travel to the childcare) are not covered by most financial support schemes (although they are under Care to Learn).
- That student parents may decide in favour of childcare nearer home, rather than formal childcare on campus. There are several reasons for this including what they think is best for their child and what works well if they have placements away from their institution.
- That student parents need flexible childcare, so that they can respond to last-minute timetable changes and deal with one-off or occasional childcare arrangements (either because their child is off school or because of something they themselves need to do as part of their studies).
- That student parents sometimes need childcare outside of non-standard hours, especially if they are on placement.
- That, because most student parents have school-age children, they need 'wraparound' care to cover the before and after school period.

In addition to the financial constraints that many student parents feel, the above issues point to the other advantages of student parents drawing on the help of informal carers. They are remarkably similar to the issues faced by working parents, particularly low income working parents. However, one other key point highlighted in the NUS report was that parents reported that by choosing informal childcare, that this does not mean choosing a no-cost option. Although costs were a key issue in student parents' choices, informal childcare can involve travel costs, as well as costs in the form of 'thankyous' such as shopping, gifts and occasional payments. Student parents using informal care (grandparents or reciprocal arrangements with friend) sometimes reported viewing themselves as 'lucky'. However, they also talked in terms of feeling 'guilty' about their reliance on these networks of relatives and/or friends.

5.4.4 Summary

Student parents are no more a homogenous group than working parents (an issue which we raise earlier) and their use and needs for childcare reflect this. Given the high proportion of student parents on part-time courses, only a minority used any childcare at all. Those who did were equally likely to use formal or informal childcare, with patterns not dissimilar to those of working parents. There is a paucity of good quality research about student parents' childcare choices and, given a lack of government financial support for students' childcare costs, this would be an important area to

further explore. However, some common themes emerge relating to the benefits of informal childcare providing out of hours care; low or no cost support; childcare nearer home.

5.5 Minority ethnic families

There is a limited body of robust research on the propensity of families from different minority ethnic groups to use formal and informal childcare. Obtaining accurate and detailed quantitative data is hampered by relatively small sample sizes collected in surveys representative of all families (such as the Childcare Survey). This means that – while we found figures on the proportions of families from different groups using formal and informal childcare – we were unable to look more deeply into the relationship between parental work patterns and choice. A number of qualitative studies which focus specifically on families from different minority ethnic backgrounds provide a bit more insight into why they might choose to use formal, or indeed no non-parental childcare. However, given known differences in the work patterns and cultural expectations of different groups, these studies struggle to capture the nuanced differences between them. Moreover, there is very little information on parents' views on informal provision or their access to it. To do this topic justice would require a rather large qualitative study including sufficient numbers of working and non-working mothers and fathers within each of the major groups.

Perhaps our key interest is in whether using – or a desire to use or not use – informal childcare is bound up with cultural expectations or identities, or whether it is associated with the socio-demographic profile (eg income) of different minority ethnic groups. And, alongside that, whether different factors (eg distance) facilitated and hindered the use of informal childcare in some groups over others. However, most of the current evidence is looked at from the perspective of whether there are barriers to different minority ethnic groups which stop them from accessing or using *formal* childcare. So, commentators raise issues about the extent to which formal childcare has not traditionally catered adequately to the needs of children with particular language or cultural needs (Daycare Trust, 2006), but studies such as that by Pettigrew (2003) suggest that this is an issue for only a minority of parents. Or they focus on whether decisions about maternal work are at all connected with the availability of suitable childcare, or whether, for those who do not work, this is linked with cultural expectations about their role as a mother.

However, we would like to look at each of these two last points in relation to informal childcare, namely:

- To what extent do parents from different minority ethnic backgrounds value or prefer informal (familial) childcare over formal provision (or vice versa), and why?
- If parents from different minority ethnic backgrounds want to use informal childcare to facilitate them working, do they have access to informal childcare?

The evidence below does not allow us to answer these issues properly.

There is a little evidence that Asian women are more likely to perceive themselves in the traditional 'carer' role and hence may prefer not to use childcare outside of the home, whether formal or informal (Pettigrew, 2003). Pascal and Bertram (cited in Daycare Trust, 2006) found cultural preferences for very young children to be cared for within one's own family or community. Other research has found that Black families prefer care with an educational element, and therefore may be more likely to prefer centre-based care (Early and Burchinal cited in Kazimirski et al, 2005). However, most other research focuses on reasons against using formal childcare (affordability, trust,

lack of cultural identify) rather than a positive choice to use informal childcare (Griggs (2009)). Indeed, much of the discussion about the views of minority ethnic parents on formal and informal mirror those among wider groups of parents. We found no robust evidence on the propensity for parents to have relatives who live near enough to provide informal childcare if required, although qualitative studies (eg Pettigrew, 2003) do raise this as an issue for some parents.

While data on who uses informal and formal childcare is not necessarily a reflection on parental preferences, it provides some indication of the choices that working families have made. (Note we are not reporting here on the differential rates of employment across different minority ethnic groups.) According to the 2008 Childcare Survey (Table 5.10), among children who are in childcare while their parents to work, White and Asian children are most likely to be in informal childcare. White children are more likely than others to be looked after solely by their grandparent (28 per cent). Of course, this may reflect the availability of grandparents living locally, or indeed in the same country. However, given a greater propensity for Asian children to be looked after by a wider range of relatives, overall they rely more on solely informal care than either White or Black children (54 per cent compared to 42 per cent and 24 per cent). Asian children are less likely to be in formal care, and, where they are, it is almost always in group-based care and rarely with individual formal providers. Six in ten Black children rely solely on formal care.

Table 5.10 Childcare packages used, by mother's ethnic group

Base: Children using childcare for work related reasons

Childcare package	White	Black	Asian	Other	All
	%	%	%	%	%
Informal only	**42**	**24**	**54**	**32**	**41**
Grandparent only	28	12	20	14	26
Sibling only	3	2	4	2	3
Other relative only	3	6	14	4	4
Friend/neighbour only	4	2	6	12	4
Grandparent + other informal	4	2	7	1	4
Other mix informal	*	*	2	0	*
Formal + Informal	**18**	**14**	**13**	**21**	**17**
Centre based + Grandparents	7	2	6	8	7
Individual + Grandparents	2	2	2	3	2
Out of school + Grandparents	4	2	1	2	4
Other mix formal + informal	5	7	4	8	5
Formal only	**38**	**60**	**31**	**40**	**40**
Centre based only	13	25	18	21	15
Individual only	10	12	1	12	10
Out of school only	12	11	11	4	12
Centre based + Individual	1	4	0	1	1
Out of school + Individual	1	6	1	1	1
Other mix formal	1	2	1	0	1
Other	***2***	***2***	***1***	**8**	**2**
Weighted base	*3249*	*132*	*104*	*101*	*3787*
Unweighted base	*3430*	*129*	*107*	*101*	*3975*

Speight et al (2009), using the same data, ran multivariate logistic regressions (based on all families, not just working families) to test for the independent associations between *formal* childcare use and socio-demographics. So, they were looking at whether differences in childcare use between ethnic groups were a function of issues such as income levels, working patterns, family size or geographic region - or whether there were differences which could not be attributed to these socio-demographics (and were maybe to do with unmeasured differences in cultural norms or the local availability of family members). They found that there were differences between ethnic groups, having controlled for socio-demographic differences. Among school-age children, Bangladeshi and Pakistani children were less likely to receive formal provision than White children (respectively, 0.23 and 0.53 times as likely). Regression analysis by Kazimirski et al (2006) (later summarised in Daycare Trust, 2006) using data from the 2004 Childcare Survey found that White families were more likely to use informal childcare than minority ethnic families, particularly than Black Caribbean, Black African and Bangladeshi (but not Indian) families.

Kazimirski et al's evidence also highlights that there are a number of socio-demographic differences between different ethnic groups which are important in understanding differences in patterns of

childcare use. Lone parenthood is nearly five times more common in Black families than in Asian families (57 per cent compared to 12 per cent); and 27 per cent of White families were headed up by a lone parent. A greater proportion of Bangladeshi and Black African families were on very low incomes than families in other ethnic groups. For instance while 40 per cent of Bangladeshi families and 39 per cent of Black African families had an annual income of below £10,000, the equivalent percentages for White and Indian families were 15 and nine respectively. Black families and Asian families other than Indian families were most likely and White families least likely to live in a deprived area and 72 per cent of Black families lived in London.

5.5.1 Summary

The evidence on the role of informal childcare among different minority ethnic families is lacking. We know that there are differences in the propensity to use different types of formal and informal childcare, but understand little about the reasons behind it. That said, it is important to recognise that many of the difficulties that minority ethnic parents face when looking for childcare reflect those of all parents. The Daycare Trust (2006) carried out some qualitative work with minority ethnic parents and concluded 'most communities said that their childcare requirements were very similar to white families' requirements'. The main differences as they perceived them were about communication and the importance of culture being represented in childcare provision.

5.6 Concluding comments

The quality of evidence about particular sub-groups of the population – in this instance particular types of families or particular needs from childcare – often suffers, either because of difficulties in obtaining large enough or representative samples of people to survey or because of limited funds available for studies with a very specific focus. This was certainly the case with each of the population sub-groups on which we report in this chapter. So, although at the end of each sub-section we have drawn some broad conclusions about the role of informal childcare in each of these scenarios, we would not say that our findings are particularly robust. In Chapter 10, we return to this issue and make some suggestions about the relative priorities for any further research among these population sub-groups.

6 Why parents choose informal over formal childcare

6.1 Introduction

From early chapters, the evidence is clear that informal childcare will continue to play a key role in facilitating parental work, either alone or in combination with formal childcare. State intervention has had a major impact on parents' use of early years education and, latterly, after school facilities. And the formal sector has grown in terms of the numbers of childcare places available. However, many parents continue to use informal childcare. We know from Chapters 4 and 5 that families from different socio-demographic groups are more or less likely to use informal childcare, and that informal care provides a key role for many in completing a jigsaw, the other component parts of which are parental care, formal childcare, early years provision and school. In this chapter, we explore the *reasons* for these patterns of use. We look at the relative role of parental 'choice' and 'necessity', and discuss the extent to which these have been or could be influenced by state intervention in childcare and labour markets. Why do parents decide to use informal childcare in different situations? How often are these positive choices and how much a matter of need? Perhaps the key question is the extent to which the underlying reason for using informal childcare is because of shortcomings in the formal childcare market (because of expense, because of opening hours, because of availability) and to what extent parents would continue to choose informal childcare whatever the availability of formal childcare.

When looking at the evidence we must recognise that we are not looking at a choice between formal and informal childcare, as many families using a combination of both, with one complementing the other. The decision to use informal childcare alongside formal care may be a very different one to a decision to use it over formal care. And of course, decisions are different for preschool and school-age children, with the latter using childcare for short hours before or after school, or in the holidays.

Throughout the chapter, we reflect on the evidence there is to feed into two key areas of interest covered in later chapters. The first concerns the links between the quality of care provided and children's outcomes (Chapter 8). Waldfogel (2002) highlights the fact that the literature about childcare choice assumes that when parents make decisions they take account of the impact that their decisions will have on their children's outcomes: 'all else equal, we would expect parents to seek to make child care and employment arrangements that they believe will produce the best outcomes for their children.' Here we review the extent to which parents *do* choose on the basis of the quality of the care, what elements of quality they look for, and how far this is associated with the actual level of quality provided. So, do parents who choose on 'quality' actually pick 'quality' childcare?

The second area of interest concerns the choice of informal childcare on the basis that it is a low or no cost option. In Chapter 9 we look at the arguments for and against government funding of informal childcare. Here, we try to disentangle the extent to which parents' decisions to use informal childcare are led by economics. Certainly a number of commentators suggest that in developing the National Childcare Strategy, the previous government overestimated the extent to which parents make choices on the basis of cost. For instance, Wheelock and Jones (2002) describe the decisions

underpinning the National Childcare Strategy - 'essentially that of a tax credit-primed, regulated market-based provision' - as assuming that parents will take 'individualist, cost-benefit type decisions about how to maximise personal gain'. Their view is that, in fact, choices are constrained by 'personal principles'. Skinner and Finch (2006) also make the point that they felt the previous government was making a 'rationality mistake' assuming that parents make decisions based on cost-benefit calculations and fails to take account of the 'how the moral and normative assessments about children's and mother's needs are linked or balanced'. Duncan et al (2004) also suggest from their qualitative findings that, although more parents might use informal childcare if it were subsidised through the tax system, their childcare choices 'result from complex moral and emotional processes'.

We should stress that we have looked for evidence on the relative choice *between* formal and informal childcare providers, and not on the choice between using *no* childcare and different forms of childcare. This means that we are not drawing on literature about how the availability and cost of childcare affects the labour market entry of women (although we do refer to this when discussing funding models in Chapter 9) and on decisions that parents make about shift-working.

We draw on evidence from the 2008 Childcare Survey in addition to a number of largely qualitative studies which have explored parents' preferences for different forms of childcare. These findings can be looked in conjunction with findings in previous chapters, particularly Chapter 5 which reported on the views of particular groups of families such as those with disabled children, those from minority ethnic backgrounds and those where parents need childcare in non-standard working hours. All of the evidence suffers from reliance on parents' retrospectively reporting on the *choices* they have made more or less constrained by circumstances and availability. In whatever area of research, the issue of 'choice' is inherently and conceptually difficult to examine empirically, as it depends so much on the structures within which the choices are made (see Collins et al, 2006 for a discussion of this). In terms of childcare choices specifically, there are additional difficulties with the potential for parents to feel the need to rationalise their decision as a choice (in terms of the quality of care provided, be it about matters of trust or of child development) rather than necessity (eg convenience, cost).

Certainly, the evidence we report below does not enable us to comprehensively answer questions about the relative importance that parents place (or indeed are able to place given the constraints of their circumstances) on 'quality' versus 'economics' as discussed above. Here and in Chapter 10, we therefore give some thought to how further work could be done in this area, drawing on other research done on evaluating relative choices.

Several studies have looked at the reasons that parents give for choosing particular formal and informal providers. Their findings are relatively consistent, although there is variation in the extent to which importance is placed on informal childcare being low or no cost, with survey data tending to place it as higher priority than qualitative studies. While the fact that informal care is a low or no cost option is an important factor in parents' reasons for choosing informal providers, studies infrequently report that this is their sole or primary reason. Parents place great weight on the caring attributes of the carers (which is clearly a 'choice' or 'quality' rather than 'necessity' issue). Where parents are taking practical issues are taken into account, these are as likely to be issues of reliability, flexibility or convenience. As in other chapters, there is most evidence on reasons for choosing to use grandparents, and less on other types of informal carers.

In the next section, we report our recent analysis of data from the 2008 Childcare Survey. Section 6.3 summarises the (largely complementary) evidence from other studies. We discuss the implications and shortcomings of the available evidence in Section 6.4.

6.2 Evidence from the Childcare Survey

6.2.1 Parents' reasons for choosing providers

The Childcare Survey asks a series of questions of parents about why they chose their main formal or informal provider. We report on parents' reasons for choosing formal providers for comparison. These questions are subject to the limitations raised above of asking parents to retrospectively rationalise their choices. Despite this, parents' responses to these questions give at least some indication of the relative importance of the range of reasons parents may have for choosing an informal provider versus a formal provider. Also, because the questions focus on a single main provider, we do not capture anything about the reasons for choosing informal care in combination with formal care. In fact, an understanding of the reasons for choosing combinations of care is a large gap in the available evidence[48].

We used factor analysis to group what were quite a large number of reasons given by parents for choosing a particular provider. We wanted to distinguish between groups of reasons which reflected a positive choice to use a particular provider (with two of the three groups linked to parents' perceptions of the 'quality') and those that implied that the choice had been made on practical grounds (including cost). The factor analysis identified five groups of reasons which we summarise as –

- Professionalism/reputation of the provider
- The provider's caring role
- Capacity for children to socialise
- Cost
- Convenience and reliability

The first three groupings we categorise as 'positive choices', with the last two 'practical decisions'. Table 6.1 shows the proportions of parents citing reasons that fell into each of these five groups – for both formal and informal providers. We report separately on preschool and school-age children. Tables showing the full list of reasons given are in Appendix 3. Clearly, parents are saying that they are selecting formal and informal providers for quite different reasons. That said, the most frequently cited reason for choosing either type of provider focused on the attributes of the care (albeit that informal care was chosen for its caring role and formal care was chosen for its professionalism or reputation). And, for both groups, convenience and reliability was the second most cited reason, highlighting the ability of both types of provider to cater for families' different needs.

[48] Morrissey (2008) and Smith et al (2009) cited in Chapter 4 provides evidence on the predictors of using packages of care, but does not look into the reasons.

Looking at the reasons that parents give for using their informal providers, 'positively choosing' the provider for the caring environment that they can give a child is mentioned far more often than practical issues such as convenience, reliability and cost. Nine in ten parents say that the caring role was a contributing factor to their choice. Practical issues such as convenience and reliability are also clearly important: it appears that the flexibility that informal care can provide is rated more highly than the low/no cost involved. That said, cost is mentioned by informal childcare users twice as often as by users of formal childcare. Of course, it is not surprising that parents do not often mention issues such as socialisation and provider reputation in this context, while these are key drivers for parents choosing formal providers.

Table 6.1 **Reason**

Base: selected child uses formal/informal provider for work related reasons

	Choosing formal provider		**Choosing informal provider**	
	Pre-school	School-age	Pre-school	School-age
Reason	%	%	%	%
Professionalism/reputation	**82**	**63**	**10**	**9**
Provider's caring role	**56**	**54**	**93**	**87**
Socialisation of children	**59**	**34**	**6**	**6**
Cost	**24**	**21**	**51**	**41**
Convenience and reliability	**79**	**77**	**65**	**65**
Other reason	**7**	**13**	**6**	**9**
Weighted base	*613*	*567*	*138*	*441*
Unweighted base	*800*	*489*	*157*	*392*
%s sum to more than 100% as respondents could choose more than one reason				

Although the tables above only divide providers into 'formal' and 'informal', we did check for differences in the reasons for choosing particular types of providers. However, because grandparents account for such a large proportion of all informal care, there were insufficient numbers to look at any informal providers except grandparents and the reasons for choosing them reflect the figures in Table 6.1 for choosing informal providers. What is worthy of note is the comparison between reasons for choosing informal providers and for choosing *individual* formal providers (largely childminders). Eight in ten parents using childminders or other individual providers such as babysitters and nannies said that they chose them (at least in part) because of the caring role they fulfil. This is higher than for early years providers (50 per cent) or out of school clubs (44 per cent), and much closer to the nine in ten proportion of parents choosing informal providers saying that they chose them for their caring role. This is further evidence of the parallels between childminders and informal providers. Full tables are in Appendix 3.

Of course, asking parents to give any number of reasons for choosing their childcare does not require them to prioritise key reasons over those that might be of secondary importance. So it does not capture the relative choices made by parents. Although most parents say that they are choosing informal providers rather than just using them out of necessity, which was the driving force? Having asked parents about all the factors they took into account when selecting their provider, the Childcare Survey asks parents to pinpoint the *main* reason they did so (see Tables 1 to 6 in Appendix 3). For informal providers, virtually all parents cited either the provider's caring role or cost (in equal

proportions). So, while convenience and reliability were important, when asked to pinpoint a primary reason, they were lower down parents' lists of priorities – and cost came out as key.

We have some further evidence that cost *is* a key criterion for using informal childcare. The survey asks parents about the elements of their childcare arrangements that help enable them to work (Table 6.2 shows the responses from couple households and Table 6.3 shows the responses from lone parent households). Around 60 per cent of both couple parents and lone parents using only informal childcare cite the fact that their childcare is free or cheap. And 40 per cent of those using a mix of informal and formal childcare say this. These same questions imply that having 'quality' childcare is less of an issue for parents using informal childcare than for parents using formal childcare, at least for couple parents. Four in ten (42 per cent) couple parents using only informal childcare cite the quality of care as a facilitator to work, compared to 64 per cent using only formal childcare.

Table 6.2 Aspects of childcare that enable work, by whether use informal care, 2008

Base: Couple households with working mother using childcare for work related reasons

	Type of childcare used for work reasons			
	Informal only	Formal only	Formal + Informal	Any informal
	%	%	%	%
Nature of childcare provision				
Reliable free/cheap care	61	17	40	53
Quality of care available	42	64	62	50
Care available fits in with work hours	45	67	63	52
Care available fits in with partner's working hours	24	28	32	27
Suitable alternatives to childcare available				
Children at school	44	43	37	42
Children old enough to look after themselves	10	3	4	8
Relatives help with childcare	69	22	70	69
Friends help with childcare	18	8	17	18
Co-ordinate working hours with partner	13	7	7	11
Partner helps	18	19	17	18
Employer role				
Employer provides childcare	*	4	3	1
Partner's employer provides childcare	*	2	2	1
Tax credits	1	12	10	4
Weighted base	636	654	391	*1040*
Unweighted base	600	682	426	*1038*

%s sum to more than 100% as respondents could choose more than one answer

Tables don't show the (<5%) who say other/none of these reasons (but are included in base).

Table 6.3 Aspects of childcare that enable work, by whether use informal care, 2008

Base: Lone parent households with working mother using childcare for work related reasons

	Type of childcare used for work reasons			
	Informal only	Formal only	Formal + Informal	Any informal
	%	%	%	%
Nature of childcare provision				
Reliable free/cheap care	64	24	41	56
Quality of care available	53	63	65	57
Care available fits in with work hours	47	70	65	54
Care available fits in with partner's working hours				n/a
Suitable alternatives to childcare available				
Children at school	45	50	49	49
Children old enough to look after themselves	11	8	7	13
Relatives help with childcare	75	30	78	76
Friends help with childcare	16	13	19	18
Co-ordinate working hours with partner				n/a
Partner helps				n/a
Child's father/mother helps	18	20	19	19
Employer role				
Employer provides childcare	0	1	0	1
Partner's employer provides childcare				n/a
Tax credits	6	51	49	22
Weighted base	*241*	*201*	*138*	*387*
Unweighted base	*184*	*188*	*115*	*306*

%s sum to more than 100% as respondents could choose more than one answer
Tables don't show the (<5%) who say other/none of these reasons (but are included in base).

In earlier waves of the Childcare Survey, parents were asked about their 'ideal' childcare arrangements (Woodland et al, 2002), and this shows discrepancies between what people were using and what they saw as ideal. These data suggest that, in 2001, a proportion of parents were using informal childcare who would rather use formal childcare. Seventy two per cent of parents said that their ideal arrangement would be to use a formal provider (figures were not provided on the proportions choosing different forms of informal care). Three fifths of these parents had *not* used formal childcare in the past year, and these were more likely to be lone parents, low income and living in deprived areas.

6.2.2 Associations between perceptions of formal childcare available locally and using informal care

The Childcare Survey includes other questions which allow us to look in a different ways at whether parents' use of informal care is a reflection on their views on the accessibility and quality of *formal* childcare in their area. That is, was choosing informal childcare a case of *not* choosing formal childcare? Parents were asked whether they thought that there were sufficient childcare places available locally, and to rate the quality and affordability of the provision. We looked for evidence of whether parents using informal care hold more negative views than parents using formal care on any of these factors. Of course, we cannot infer that there is a causal link between their views on local formal childcare provision and their decision to use informal childcare. To an extent, any differences may be due to differences in the socio-demographic composition of families using informal and formal childcare. Plus, to a degree, differences will reflect different levels of awareness or knowledge about the formal care that is available locally. We can identify this latter point to a degree, because parents were given the option of saying that they did not know.

Table 6.4 shows the views of parents – comparing those using different packages of childcare to help them work - on these three issues. The first point to note is that parents using only informal care are less aware of these issues than those using formal childcare, with significantly higher proportions saying 'not sure' to each question. We might surmise that these parents have not taken these issues into account when selecting informal childcare over formal provision. This may be because they would never choose to use formal childcare, whatever its quality or cost – or that any cost would be too high.

As we are using this table to look at potential barriers to using formal childcare, we concentrate on the proportions responding negatively on each issue (too few places, very/fairly poor affordability and very/fairly poor quality). Neither availability nor quality appear to be barriers, with the proportions of informal childcare users rating the quality of formal provision as poor not significantly different to the views of formal childcare users. However, parents using a mixture of formal and informal childcare think that formal childcare is less affordable than those using only formal childcare. We cannot test for causality, but can suggest that cost, for some, means that they choose to combine formal and informal care.

Table 6.4 Perceptions of childcare provision, by whether use informal care, 2008

Base: Households using childcare for work related reasons

	Type of childcare used for work reasons			
	Informal only	Formal only	Formal + Informal	Any informal
	%	%	%	%
Whether sufficient places available				
Too many	1	1	1	1
About right number	42	40	39	41
Too few	35	45	43	38
Not sure	21	14	17	20
Affordability of childcare in area				
Very good	5	7	5	5
Fairly good	26	44	39	31
Fairly poor	23	25	30	26
Very poor	17	13	17	17
Not sure	29	10	10	21
Quality of childcare available				
Very good	18	25	22	20
Fairly good	41	51	51	45
Fairly poor	8	9	9	9
Very poor	4	3	5	4
Not sure	28	13	13	23
Weighted base	859	940	537	*1421*
Unweighted base	847	983	581	*1451*

Speight et al (2009) report on the unmet demand for after school clubs for school-age children among informal childcare users. Around a quarter of (working and non-working) parents who had used only informal childcare in the previous week said that they would use an after school club if it was available. This *may* imply that their informal provision is not fulfilling their childcare needs. However, from their figures we do not know what proportion of these parents would use out of school provision in order to facilitate working or increasing their working hours. And we know that, overall, the proportions of parents using out of school care for children's development rather than for work or study related reasons are quite high.

6.2.3 Summary

Although the questions asked in the Childcare Survey are a relatively blunt tool for exploring what could be quite complex and nuanced decisions concerning childcare choices, nonetheless these data imply that, while cost is clearly an important criterion for choosing informal over formal childcare, it is by no means the only, or often primary, factor. Other practical issues, such as the reliability and flexibility that informal providers can offer, are important, as are more emotionally-driven choices relating to the environment that informal providers – largely grandparents – can offer. A substantial minority of parents do appear to weigh up their informal childcare options with what would be available to them within the formal childcare market, with some of those using informal childcare doing so because of a lack of suitable formal childcare.

6.3 Other evidence on the choices that parents make between formal and informal childcare

6.3.1 Parents' reasons and the tensions between choice and necessity

The available data from the Childcare Survey lack the depth that we ideally want to understand the choices and constraints that parents' face when they are deciding on the 'best' childcare for their children. So, we look to the other available evidence, much of which is qualitative.

At this point, it is worth clarifying that, although we have been talking in terms of 'parents' choices' about childcare arrangements, several studies highlight the fact that, to a large extent, decisions related to the organisation of childcare arrangements are made by mothers (Wheelock and Jones, 2002; Skinner, 2003; Dench and Ogg, 2002). Wheelock and Jones (2002) describe this as 'a highly gendered management of the childcare jigsaw'. In turn, and probably as a result, maternal grandparents are more likely than paternal grandparents to be involved in childcare (Dench and Ogg, 2002; Wheelock and Jones, 2002).

Not unlike the survey findings above, Wheelock and Jones (2002) report that their study of informal childcare 'provides strong evidence that economic decisions about childcare are almost invariably determined at least in part by non-economic motives, but this does not mean that decisions are irrational or random'. Theirs is a single location study, and here we draw on their qualitative findings[49] among 30 (mainly) mothers and a set of focus groups with (largely grandparent) childcare providers[50]. Although parents talked in terms of the affordability of their childcare, the 'positive' benefits were clearly important, as was the flexibility that informal providers can offer. Mirroring the Childcare Survey data, they highlight the positive caring role of informal providers being in the best interests of children and their well-being. They talk about the positive gains of using relatives, particularly grandparents, as childcarers, talking in terms of trust (which included reliability, which we also view as a 'practical' consideration) and love - being 'the next best thing' to parents. What this study also highlighted was the benefits of informal care arrangements to the well-being of parents and of grandparents. For parents this was talked about in terms of them not having to worry when they go to work. And issues around closeness of families (or kinship) were important. The concept of grandparents doing things out of love rather than a contractual arrangement was a common theme and this is something we come back to in Chapters 7 and 9.

As in the Childcare Survey data, parents in Wheelock and Jones's study focused on the 'flexibility' that informal providers can offer, in terms of hours and times of days, as well as children's sickness, school holidays and family emergencies.

A range of other studies mirror these findings (Duncan et al, 2004; Rutter and Evans (2011b); Leach et al (2006) summarise these including a review by Pungello and Kurtz-Costes in 1999). Peyton et al (2001) summarise some of the evidence in this area, concluding that, although some results are conflicting, common themes are that parents tend to cite 'quality' characteristics as being more important than practical ones, although recognising that latter sometimes end up taking precedence. Other studies looked at parents' choices from different perspectives. Sylva et al (2007) comment on

[49] They also included a self-completion survey, but the response rate was very low.
[50] We report on the views of grandparents in Chapter 7.

the fact that previous research has found little evidence that there is any link between infant temperament and childcare choices made by parents. However, they cite some American studies which have shown (with varying results) both a greater and a lesser likelihood of choosing different forms of childcare for boys and girls. Gray (2005) cites work by Meltzer that reported on the reasons that parents gave for choosing grandparents over other familial childcare providers, which talked about the range of activities and level of stimulation that grandparents would provide over other relatives. Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) report on a longitudinal qualitative study of working and non-working mothers, with two interviews one year apart. Their findings indicated that few mothers feel they have a true choice in the childcare they use, being bound by different constraints (eg location, working hours, waiting lists). However, some of these constraints were their own attitudes or feelings towards different forms of childcare or working, rather than practical barriers.

Skinner and Finch (2006) and Bell et al (2005) report on a qualitative study of lone parents looking at issues around childcare and work, with Skinner and Finch taking a particular look at the role that informal childcare plays. A number of their findings mirror those already described above. They found that lone parents chose to use informal childcare because of issues of trust, familiarity and because it was generally free and flexible – making paid work more affordable and manageable. Although (as we know from Chapter 4) lone parents are more likely than couple parents to rely on informal childcare, among informal childcare users, their reasons matched those of couple families. So, this would suggest that although their propensity to use them is different, their underlying reasons are not. Their study highlighted an issue of 'shared understandings' (shared values), that grandparents would bring their children up with the same values of them. (In turn, lone parents sometimes voiced concerns that other informal carers would not have these shared values.)

Skinner and Finch (2006) and Bell et al (2005) add to the evidence about the potentially negative consequences that lone parents (and surely other parents) have to take into consideration when thinking about using informal childcare. This provides a reminder of the more nuanced choices that parents are making when deciding on whom to approach to provide childcare. Lone parents voiced concerns over family and friends feeling obliged to help (which, in turn, might compromise the quality of the care they provide). Feeling of guilt and concern about this meant that some lone parents used grandparents less than they would have liked to. There were some concerns over grandparents 'interfering' with their own childrearing practices. In assessing the 'quality' of the care that grandparents and other informal carers could give, some voiced concerns over an inability for them to provide activities or stimulation, plus a lack of opportunity for social interaction.

6.3.2 Associations with quality

A few studies attempt to make links between the reasons that parents give for choosing different childcare providers, satisfaction with the childcare they use, and the quality of care that children receive. (In Chapter 8, we report on the evidence around childcare quality and children's outcomes.) Overall, the evidence suggests that parents are more satisfied with the care by individual providers (both formal and informal) than group providers. Leach et al (2006) cite a study by Barnes et al which found that mothers of young children were more likely to be satisfied with individual (formal and informal) carers than those in group care *during a child's first year* (here we do not know about the quality of provision). Leach et al (2006) asked mothers of 10 month old babies in the Family, Children and Childcare Study to say (from a list slightly different to other studies) what their three most important factors were when selecting childcare. They also looked at maternal satisfaction with childcare when children were 10 and 18 months and objectively observed the quality of the

childcare provision. Eighty one per cent of mothers said 'a loving and caring environment' was one of the three most important factors, 68 per cent said a 'safe physical environment' and 48 per cent said providing 'worry free childcare'. Maternal satisfaction was most closely associated with the observed quality for grandparent care and childminders, and unrelated to the quality of nursery settings. This may be linked with parents having less knowledge of what goes on at nursery and more concern that children will not be able to form the kinds of relationship with group carers than they can with individuals. Some commentators (eg Shpancer 1998 cited in Peyton et al 2001) suggest that this is an effect of parents doing the best they can within market constraints, while others (eg Rassin et al 1991 cited in Peyton 2001) think it is a reflection on parents not being sufficiently knowledgeable about issues of childcare quality. Peyton et al (2001) found that parents who said that they chose their provider on the basis of 'quality' rather than 'practical' criteria did in fact chose higher quality care as objectively measured.

Peyton et al (2001) used a US longitudinal study to look at the extent to which the reasons parents gave for choosing their arrangements was related to the quality of childcare that children received. Mothers were offered a list of potential reasons and asked to pick one. These grouped into 'quality' (of care providers, of environment/equipment or program), 'practicalities' (cost hours location availability) or a preference for a specific type of care. Mothers choosing informal childcare were less likely than others to have chosen a provider on the grounds of quality. This is supported by a US study by Fuller et al (cited in NICHD 2004) which found that parents who value education highly were more likely than others to choose centre-based care. This is discouraging as the quality of the childcare that children were receiving was of higher quality on average among those families who had chosen because of quality or preference for provider, rather those led by practical constraints (although it is not clear how this relates within particular provider types).

6.3.3 Variation across demographic groups

We know from Chapter 4 that there are differences in the childcare packages used by families with different socio-demographic profiles. So, we looked for evidence of differences in the *processes* that different parents go through when selecting different forms of childcare - and what types and degrees of choice parents have[51]. In brief, there is some evidence that more 'advantaged' families are able to exercise more choice than those more 'disadvantaged'. In reviewing the evidence, Peyton et al (2001) found that lone parents are more likely to cite practical reasons for having their childcare arrangements than married parents, as are parents who work long hours. Those with higher education and higher income are more likely than other parents to cite reasons of quality. They also found that mothers who were stressed were more likely to think about practical concerns and mothers showing greater sensitivity for children were more likely to talk about quality. In their own analysis of the associations between childcare choices and quality, Peyton et al (2001) used multinomial logistic regressions which showed that families with low or moderate incomes were more likely than those with high incomes to choose care based on practicality. They were also more likely to pick a provider on the basis of having a preference for the provider type than because of quality. Mothers working full-time were less likely to choose on the basis of quality, again suggesting that they have less choice. As Peyton et al say their findings hold 'serious implications for children of

[51] Ideally we would have used the 2008 Childcare Survey looked at the reasons that parents from different socio-economic groups gave for using informal and formal childcare. However, given the focus on 'main childcare providers' there were too few parents using informal childcare to do more detailed sub-group analysis.

mothers constrained by limitations related to income, work hours or stressful family situations'. This analysis would be useful to replicate in a UK context.

In line with the work of Peyton et al, Himmelweit and Sigala (2004) cite evidence from Pungello and Kurtez-Costes which indicated that, for mothers who are not financially constrained, there is a significant relationship between their personal attitudes and the childcare they choose for their children, while this is not true for mothers who say that they need income from paid work.

6.3.4 Summary

Qualitative evidence provides a somewhat better picture of the ways in which parents consider and balance their childcare options, and the relative weight that they can place on practical constraints and preferred choices. However, it still provides no firm conclusions but rather highlights the diversity of families' decision-making processes. It also gives some idea of how families negotiate informal childcare arrangements and the tensions between the needs of children, parents and grandparents. There is some evidence that families from lower socio-economic backgrounds have fewer choices when it comes to arranging childcare. An interesting finding which would benefit from further exploration is a link between those parents who prioritise 'quality' over 'practicalities' and resultant higher quality provision.

6.4 Concluding comments

While cost is a key factor in parents' choices to use informal childcare, we cannot really quantify its relative importance over 'real choice' factors such as the quality of the role that they feel informal carers (largely grandparents) can play. And the evidence on whether the way that parents assess quality (which is often in terms of the quality of the caring environment) is related to the quality of care they receive is limited and mixed. There is little to nothing on the choices that parents make about using combinations of different forms of informal or formal childcare. This is the real situation for many parents, making it rather artificial to ask parents to explain why they chose to use particular individual providers who only make up part of a package. There is clearly a role for collecting additional evidence on parents' choices about childcare, an issue to which we return in Chapter 10.

7 Grandparents' perspectives

7.1 Introduction

Up until now, we have largely considered informal childcare from the perspectives of the families 'using' or 'receiving' the childcare. This reflects the fact that the most research on informal care has looked at the demand rather than the supply of the care. (This is in contrast to research on formal care where a fair amount has been done from providers' perspectives.) However, given the level of demand, that is the reliance on and preference for informal – largely grandparental – care by so many families, there are important questions about the way in which informal childcare is offered. In Chapter 3, we addressed a set of questions about whether the profile of grandparents who provide childcare for their grandchildren is likely to be affected by the average age of motherhood, by changes in older people's work patterns, and by the need for grandparents to care for their own parents (those forming the so-called 'sandwich generation'). Here we report on:

- The proportions and profile of grandparents who provide childcare for their grandchildren. What proportion of grandmothers and grandfathers look after their grandchildren, and for how much time? Does this vary depending on whether or not they are in paid work, on their age, on whether they are living as a couple or alone?

- The extent to which grandparents who are providing childcare choose to do so, and the extent to which they feel obliged to help out. How have arrangements been negotiated? What do grandparents 'get out of' looking after their grandchildren, and does doing it have any effect on their well-being? These issues are not only important for the quality of life of grandparent childcarers. They are also relevant to issues around the sustainability of these arrangements and to the quality of the care that they might provide.

Unfortunately, the evidence on these issues is limited. In this chapter, we patch together the little that is available, and in our concluding chapter (Chapter 10), we highlight the gaps which could usefully be plugged. We draw heavily on a paper by Gray (2005) (also reported in Chapter 3). We report on our own analysis of the 2009 British Social Attitudes Survey to provide a broad up-to-date profile of grandparents who provide childcare. And we supplement this with findings from a set of questions fielded on the 1998 British Social Attitudes Survey, which provide more detail (than was collected in 2009) on the type of childcare provided (Dench et al, 1999; Dench and Ogg, 2002). There are then a number of qualitative studies, notably a study by Wheelock and Jones (2002) and Arthur et al (2003)[52]. Apart from the odd mention of other informal carers, this chapter focuses almost entirely on grandparents. We focus on the availability of grandparental childcare in this chapter, without discussing the potential effect of government or employer subsidies for informal childcare. Rather, this is covered in Chapter 9.

In Section 7.2 we report on evidence about the profile of grandparents who provide childcare for their grandchildren. Section 7.3 includes evidence on how grandparents' report on their role as childcare providers: their reasons for doing so and issues around reciprocity.

[52] We have drawn on evidence from parents' perspectives from these in earlier chapters.

7.2 Profile of grandparents providing childcare for their grandchildren

The key point to make here is that there is very little up-to-date evidence on the prevalence and profile of grandparents who look after their grandchildren, and none which pinpoints childcare provided while parents work[53]. In 2009, a limited number of questions were asked in the British Social Attitudes Survey[54] which identify the proportion and profile of grandparents who 'ever' look after their grandchildren, and the average number of hours per week that they do so. We have done some analyses of these data, which provide a useful picture which we report below. However, the relatively small sample size has limited our ability to look at differences between grandparents in different socio-demographic groups. Also we should note that, compared to the level of detail we have on childcare use from parents' perspectives in the Childcare Survey, the question asked of grandparents about whether they look after grandchildren is relatively vague (and does not ask about childcare when parents are working). Moreover, we do not know the age of the grandchildren involved.

According to the 2009 British Social Attitudes Survey, nearly two thirds of grandparents look after their grandchildren[55]. For most grandparents, this involves only a small number of hours each week (Table 7.1). Four in ten (41 per cent) grandparents who look after their grandchildren do so for an average of fewer than five hours each week. But, for a substantial minority of grandparents, the commitment is much greater: a quarter (26 per cent) look after their grandchildren for 10 or more hours a week.

Grandmothers and grandfathers are equally likely to look after their grandchildren (64 per cent and 63 per cent respectively). However, where they are involved, grandmothers are more likely than grandfathers to be spending a greater number of hours per week. Half (49 per cent) of the grandfathers who look after their grandchildren do so for under five hours each week, compared to only a third (34 per cent) of grandmothers who look after their grandchildren. Three in ten (30 per cent) grandmothers who ever look after their grandchildren do so for more than 10 hours each week, compared to two in ten (22 per cent) grandfathers.

[53] A number of organisations such as the Daycare Trust, Grandparents Plus and the Family Matters Institute have carried out surveys among the grandparent population. However, the 2009 British Social Attitudes Survey is the only survey we found which is based on random probability sampling which provides us with good figures on prevalence or profile. Surveys such as the Understanding Society and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) ask whether respondents have grandchildren, but this includes adult grandchildren (and, in the case of ELSA, great-grandchildren). ELSA asks respondents (whether or not they have dependent age grandchildren) if they care for their grandchildren, but the question is asked only of people who say at an earlier more general question that they have caring responsibilities. Very low numbers of respondents report looking after their grandchildren but this is surely a function of the question wording, with people not counting childcare for grandchildren as a 'caring responsibility'. Given we cannot identify grandparents with dependent age children in ELSA, the findings would not have provided us with prevalence figures, but would have allowed us to look at issues such number of hours of childcare in relation to working patterns.

[54] These questions were funded by Grandparents Plus.

[55] The question asks if they 'ever' look after their grandchildren.

Table 7.1 Average number of hours per week that grandparents look after grandchildren

Base: All grandparents who ever look after grandchildren

	Grandfathers	Grandmothers	Grandparents
Fewer than 5 hours	49	34	41
5 to 9 hours	15	18	17
Varies but usually less than 10 hours each week	*12*	*14*	*13*
10 to 34 hours	15	21	18
35 hours a week or more	4	4	4
Varies but usually more than 10 hours each week	*3*	*4*	*4*
Lives with grandchild	2	3	3
Don't know	*0*	*1*	*1*
Weighted base	*226*	*286*	*509*
Unweighted base	*227*	*330*	*557*

Younger grandparents are more likely than older grandparents to look after their grandchildren[56]. For example, 74 per cent of grandmothers aged 55 to 64 look after their grandchildren, compared to 60 per cent of grandmothers aged 65 to 74. Moreover, among those who do so, older grandparents tend to look after the grandchildren for fewer hours each week. For example, 73 per cent of grandmothers aged 65 to 74 who look after their grandchildren do so for fewer than 10 hours each week, compared to 64 per cent of grandmothers aged 55 to 64. However, as we do not know the age of the grandchildren involved, we do not know whether these findings reflect the fact that younger grandparents are more likely to have younger grandchildren requiring more childcare.

The data suggest that, for many grandparents, their own paid work does not stop them from having a role in looking after their grandchildren. Working grandparents are among the most likely to look after their grandchildren (eg 73 per cent of working grandmothers do so), with those who are retired being the least likely (eg 57 per cent of retired grandmothers do so). (Of course, working grandparents are also likely to be younger grandparents.) Although the sample sizes limit our analysis, there is no suggestion that the proportion differs between full-time and part-time workers. Moreover, among those who do any childcare, working grandmothers are likely to do more hours: they twice as likely as those who are retired to look after grandchildren for between 10 and 34 hours each week.

Among both grandmothers and grandfathers, those who are married or living as married are more likely than others to look after their grandchildren.

In 1998, the British Social Attitudes survey included a more detailed set of questions on grandparenting[57], reported by Dench et al (1999) and Dench and Ogg (2002). The age of the data – collected at the start of the National Childcare Strategy – limits its relevance, especially given the rather large changes in the working patterns of mothers and older women since then. And small sample sizes (eg fewer than 150 grandparents saying that a child's mother was in work) also limit

[56] We do not know whether the hours are spent looking after one child, or more than one child (potentially on different days).

[57] ONS ran a module on 'kinship' on their random probability omnibus in 1999 (although we do not know the exact content of the module).

their analysis. Again, the questions on childcare are broad (eg about looking after grandchild during the day; taking or collecting from school at least once a week) and do not link directly to whether the parents are working. Nonetheless, the findings are of some interest, and we report them in the absence of more recent detailed data. We draw on their findings about grandparents' involvement with childcare which facilitates parents' work. It is notable that the pattern of supply broadly matches the pattern of use that we reported in Chapter 4.

According to the 1998 BSA survey, grandparents were more involved in childcare if mothers worked part-time rather than full-time. Thirty two per cent of grandparents looked after grandchildren under 13 if the child's mother worked part-time, but only 20 per cent did so if the mother worked full-time (and 15 per cent did so if the mother did not work). (Note that those looking after children of full-time working mothers did not necessarily do the full-time care, and hours of care are not available from the data.) Grandparents had the same level of involvement in coordinating between home and school whether mothers worked full or part-time (13 per cent of grandparents of with school-age children under 13 took them to or from school at least once a week if mothers work full-time and 12 per cent if she is part-time).[58]

Dench and Ogg (2002) report that the 1998 data suggest that it is much more common for grandmothers than grandfathers to take on (at least the primary) role of childcare provider, and this reflects the findings of others (Wheelock and Jones, 2002; Gray, 2005)[59]. Grandfathers are more likely to be involved in childcare if they live with the grandmother. And, as the proportion of grandfathers who say that they help with childcare is considerably higher than the proportion of parents who report the involvement of grandfathers, this suggests that they are 'helping' by dint of being around while grandmothers take on the primary childcare role. (This was further discussed in Chapter 6, which also reports on evidence of the relative role of maternal and paternal grandmothers.) They mention that grandparents have some differential propensity to help children who are lone parents over couples (although we did not pick this up as a statistically significant difference in the 2009 survey).

Those who have looked at the link between grandparents' own working status and the likelihood of them providing childcare for grandchildren have focused on the working status of grand*mothers*. Our analysis of the 2009 British Social Attitudes survey data, Dench and Ogg (2002) and Gray (2005) all found that there is a link, with working grandmothers more likely to do childcare than retired grandmothers. However, the exact details vary between surveys. We report above that working grandmothers were more likely than those who had retired to be looking after grandchildren (but not more likely than people who were not working for reasons other than retirement). We found no differences in the proportion of full and part-time working grandmothers looking after their grandchildren. Dench and Ogg found that, among grandmothers under 60, those who worked part-time were more involved with providing childcare for their grandchildren than either full-time workers or those not working. They did more day time and evening care, as well as school runs. However, although they report significant differences, the sample sizes are very small. Gray (2005) used data from the 2000 Time Use Survey (TUS). However, as the TUS cannot identify which older people are grandparents or whether children outside of the household are grandchildren or not,

[58] ONS's module on 'kinship' found that 27 per cent of grandmothers and 19 per cent of grandfathers help their eldest child with childcare (Gray 2005).

[59] This finding need not conflict with our 2009 finding that grandfathers are equally likely as grandmothers to 'ever' look after their grandchildren.

again, her results need to be treated with a degree of caution. Reporting on women who are of both working and grandparenting age (45 to 64), she found that they were almost twice as likely to help with childcare in other households if they themselves did not have a job. The differences between the datasets may be because of differences in the likelihood of grandmothers and other older women to be working, or a lack of power to detect significant differences due to relatively small sample sizes in the BSA surveys. This evidence is picked up in Chapter 9.

Dench and Ogg (2002) found some evidence that working grandmothers in non-manual jobs without managerial responsibility were more likely than professional working grandmothers to be involved in childcare (although this finding was not supported by our more limited 2009 data). This mirrors findings reported earlier about the likelihood of families of different social classes relying on grandparental care. As far as this pattern might relate to education levels, this may have implications for the quality of care provided (see Chapter 8). Griggs (2009) report that grandmothers from lower occupational class backgrounds were more likely than other grandmothers to give up work or reduce their working hours in order to do childcare.

7.3 Grandparents' views about providing childcare for their grandchildren

Of course, grandparents are not a homogenous group and this is reflected in the different views that they have about providing childcare for their grandchildren. In this section, we pull out the key themes across studies which have asked grandparents what they feel about their childcare role. We should note that many studies focus on grandparents who are providing childcare and therefore provide only a partial picture of all grandparents' views. There is less evidence on the views of those not providing childcare. As such, we are limited in our ability to consider the extent to which grandparents' views on their role might affect their likelihood to provide care. Moreover, the (largely qualitative) evidence allows us to highlight some of the factors and issues involved, but not to quantify or, indeed, discuss the relative priorities of these different factors. We divide the evidence into grandparents' views on (a) what is best for grandchildren (b) what is best for parents and (c) what is best for themselves. We then go on to look at issues around the negotiation between grandparents and parents about their childcare role.

First, we talk about those issues related to grandparents'[60] views about what is 'best' for their grandchildren. Typically, grandparents say they want to take on the childcare role because they feel that they can provide the best care or because they would rather take on the role than see their grandchildren being looked after by 'strangers' (Mooney and Statham, 2002[61]). Because the arrangement of childcare is often the domain of the mother, in turn, grandmothers who care for their grandchildren are far more likely to be maternal grandmothers. This leads to a shared set of values and 'ways of doing things' between mothers and daughters (Wheelock and Jones, 2002), and mirrors what some parents say about their reasons for choosing grandparental care, in Chapter 6. That said, grandparents could also see the benefit to children of some care outside of the family (Mooney and Statham, 2002).

[60] We use the term grandparents, although most evidence comes from grandmothers.
[61] Note the grandmothers in this study were all working.

Some grandparents view their role in terms of a 'job'. Being adaptable and flexible to accommodate parents' work needs was seen as an important role to grandparents (Wheelock and Jones, 2002). There is some evidence (eg Arthur et al, 2003) to suggest that grandparents make decisions based on the level of need of the parents and the shortcomings of formal childcare: because they were a lone parent, because formal childcare was unaffordable, because formal childcare was not available at the times required.

Childcare also contributed to grandparents' own feelings of well-being, bringing enjoyment and pleasure (Arthur et al 2003). Some described it as 'a second chance at parenting' but one without the need to do all the disciplining. For some grandfathers (of a generation less likely to be involved in their own children's upbringing), it was seen as their first chance at parenting (Wheelock and Jones, 2002). However, the authors highlight that while the role can contribute to the well-being of some grandparents, it may come with opportunity costs, in terms of their own work or social life.

Mooney and Statham (2002) highlight the conflicts that some working grandmothers felt, not wanting to give up work to look after their grandchildren. These are a generation where many women did not work while their own children were young, so often these grandmothers were women who had returned to work and wished to continue. Dench and Ogg (2002) found that grandparents involved in looking after the children of full-time working mothers found it 'a less satisfactory experience' than those helping part-time mothers, potentially because they feel more of a burden in the hours they are expected to work.

Arthur et al (2003), Bell et al (2005) and Skinner and Finch (2006) provide some detail around the negotiations that parents had gone through to arrive at arrangements for grandparent care. While some families engaged in open discussion and negotiation, it was clear that some arrangements were made on the basis of unspoken assumptions and implicit expectations (which could differ between the two different sides). Skinner and Finch talk in terms of two strands in expectations – one where parents seem to put the needs of grandparents above their own needs for childcare and one where their own childcare needs came first - and this is borne out in the descriptions by Bell et al (2005). Mooney and Statham (2002) also found some evidence of parents assuming that grandparents would help out with childcare, including if grandparents were working themselves. Negotiations could come with a level of tension, with anxieties around 'imposing' on grandparents and on 'interference' on the part of grandparents. Arthur et al (2003) reported that the better arrangements were those organised as a result of open negotiations rather than implicit assumption.

Some commentators reflect on the extent to which grandparental help with childcare is part of a wider picture of reciprocity across the generations. Are grandparents providing help in the absence and without expectation of anything in return? Or are there implicit or explicit forms of reciprocation going on? Arthur et al (2003) found 'fairly widespread resistance to the idea of intergenerational exchanges in relation to contact with grandchildren' particularly among grandmothers. Grandmothers talked in relation to spending time with grandchildren and helping out their children, without 'reward' (including financial payment). Parents tended to feel a stronger sense of 'debt' and want to repay grandparents for their help, though this was rarely a monetary payment, and more a sense of a need for reciprocal help and support. Wheelock and Jones (2002) paint a similar picture, finding that most grandparents wanted no 'reward' for what they were doing, although some parents did pay or make payments in kind. They describe the grandparenting role as a 'gift of caring time given by grandparents to parents providing family based life-cycle insurance'. Skinner and Finch (2006) summarise this as grandparents looking after their grandchildren because

of its intrinsic value, reporting that it is parents who are more likely to look at its extrinsic value and ask what the care is 'worth'. Recent qualitative interviews with grandparents by the Daycare Trust (Rutter and Evans, 2011b) also highlighted the reticence of many grandparents against the idea of being paid for their help.

Skinner and Finch (2006) and Bell et al (2005) also looked at the negotiations that parents had with other informal childcare providers. They found that these negotiations came with more explicit expectations around reciprocity, often in the form of doing things 'in return', although they were more in favour of paying these people than they were of paying grandparents. Their findings reflect the cited work by Finch and Mason that distinguishes between the 'balanced reciprocity' found between two people without a very close relationship and 'generalised reciprocity' found among close family members.

7.4 Concluding comments

Our key conclusion here is that there are many gaps in the evidence, limiting we learn about informal childcare from the perspectives of its providers. The body of qualitative evidence provides a fair picture of grandparents' views on the childcare roles that they fulfil. What is largely missing is any detailed, robust up-to-date data on the prevalence and profile of grandparents providing childcare, including hours of care, especially in relation to grandparents' other work. The 2009 British Social Attitudes survey gives us some idea, but a more detailed picture would be very useful. Given that the proportion of grandparents in paid work is likely to continue to grow, as is the proportion of grandparents also needing to look after their own parents, it is important to have much better data on the ways that these two activities interact with grandparent childcare in order to look at the sustainability of families' arrangements.

The available evidence suggests that most grandparents look after their grandchildren without monetary payment, and without the desire for payment. However, for some grandparents, the provision of childcare comes with a degree of implicit expectation about their relationship with their child or grandchild. While we cannot say the extent to which paid work is a barrier for *some* to providing a childcaring role, the evidence is clear that large numbers of grandparents do combine their own paid work and time looking after grandchildren. However, given the limited evidence available, whether this puts pay to concerns that the 'supply' of grandparental care will decrease as the age of (particularly women's) retirement age increases is something requiring further investigation.

8 Informal childcare and children's educational and socio-emotional development

8.1 Introduction

Underlying the previous government's strategy to develop and facilitate access to formal, largely group-based childcare and early years provision has been a belief that this will improve the life chances of young children relative to children not taking up these opportunities. It draws on much cited evidence (from the UK most notably the body of work based on the UK Effective Provision of Preschool Education Study, for example Sylva et al 2004) on the effects of good quality early years provision on children's educational development. EPPE has shown that time spent in high quality formal group early years settings (compared to no provision) can enhance children's development, particularly for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds. There is now some UK evidence from EPPE of the longevity of its impact (Sammons et al, 2007). In line with the EPPE findings, Smith et al's (2009b) evaluation for DfE of the Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children found positive benefits of *good quality*, part-time provision for two year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds[62].

However, given it is clear from the evidence presented in earlier chapters that large numbers of families will continue to use grandparents and other forms of informal childcare (either in conjunction with or instead of formal provision), there are therefore important questions to address around how exposure to different forms of *in*formal childcare is associated with children's educational and socio-emotional development. We need to understand how this varies across types of care, intensities of exposure to different forms of care, the ages of the children and the socio-demographic profiles of the families.

We recognise that the issues about the potential benefits, or drawbacks, of informal provision are arguably different to those around formal provision – at least for children aged three and over. The vast majority of three and four year olds spend a substantial number of hours in early years provision (at the time of writing, 15 hours of free early years provision are available for this age group). And older children are in school for the bulk of the term-time day. Thus, for these children, time spent with informal providers is usually *in addition to* educational provision and socialising with children of the same age. What these children need, and what their parents want, from informal provision may not be the same as we expect from early years providers and schools – or from a childcare environment which is *not* experienced alongside hours of education. For these children, the impact of informal childcare needs to be understood in combination with the impact of their time in education. And certainly, we might expect informal childcare to play a more important role in children's development prior to preschool.

Indeed, it may well be for reasons such as these that most of the existing literature focuses on the associations between provision for pre-school children and children's outcomes – including much on childcare for the under threes. Even where researchers focus on older children (eg Bernal and

[62] Note, they found no significant impact from the overall provision, but found a positive impact on vocabulary development in children in higher quality settings.

Keane, 2006), in the main they are looking at the associations between preschool care and later outcomes – that is, are any effects of preschool provision long-lasting into later childhood? The content of this chapter reflects the content of the existing literature[63].

We draw on the available evidence from the UK on the associations between being in informal childcare and children's outcomes. Where appropriate, we also draw on evidence from the US: despite differences in the organisation of formal childcare and in maternal employment patterns between the US and the UK, we judge that it is nonetheless appropriate to use US evidence to look at the *associations* between child outcomes and the use of formal and informal childcare. Where we draw on US evidence, we do so with some regard to the fact that we cannot account for less observable differences between the two countries, and we treat these findings with a degree of caution. Ideally, where we have found evidence only from US sources, it would be good to be able to replicate this in the UK to see if the evidence holds true in the UK context. UK evidence on the link between outcomes and the use of informal childcare during the preschool years comes largely from four studies: the Millennium Cohort Study, the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), the Family, Children and Child Care Project, and Growing Up in Scotland (GUS)[64]. Other studies, such as EPPE and the evaluation of early years education for two year olds provide evidence of the impact on formal childcare, but do not focus on how that compares to informal childcare use. Much of the US evidence draws on the NICHD Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development[65].

In addition to reporting on the existing evidence, we report on our own analysis of the Millennium Cohort Study, which expands upon work published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (Goodman and Gregg, 2010; Dearden, Sibieta and Sylva, 2011). This work examined the socio-economic differences in child outcomes across different ages, and the extent to which different factors (including use of formal childcare) could explain these differences. We build on this by focusing on the effects of informal childcare relative to formal centre-based childcare up to age 3, considering both the effects of using informal childcare in isolation and the effects of combining informal childcare with centre-based childcare. We also examine the effects of the intensity of usage at ages 3-4 and differences in effects according to mothers' education.

In Section 8.3 we focus on the links between being in informal childcare and children's short, medium and, where available, long-term *educational* outcomes, whereas Section 8.4 focuses on children's

[63] This is not to say that there are not a set of interesting questions about the effect of different informal childcare providers looking after children outside of school hours. There may be associations between how children are looked after after school and educational outcomes – to the extent that different childcare providers support children with their homework. There are also issues around socio-emotional development – whether children are being supervised, being supported, and so on. This latter point is particularly pertinent when considering whether children are in informal care, formal care or looking after themselves. Waldfogel (2006) discusses evidence from the US which points towards the advantages of formal after-school care in comparison with self-care. However, she highlights, as we found, a lack of research about the impact of school children being in different forms of informal childcare. This would be useful further research in the UK.

[64] For further information on these studies: Family, Children and Child Care Project, http://www.iscfsi.bbk.ac.uk/projects/families-children-and-child-care; Growing up in Scotland, http://www.crfr.ac.uk/gus/; Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, http://www.bristol.ac.uk/alspac/; the MCS is described in Chapter 2.

[65] For further information: http://www.nichd.nih.gov/research/supported/seccyd.cfm. We note that attrition has resulted in some biases in the sample composition of this study towards more advantaged families.

socio-emotional development. Because of the known associations between children's outcomes and the quality of the formal provision, in Section 8.5, we review the limited evidence that exists on the quality of informal provision, and where available, its links with outcomes.

8.2 Measurement issues

At this point, we should raise a few methodological issues about the implications of the fact that most of the available evidence is based on non-experimental, longitudinal cohort studies. This means that we can report on *associations* between informal childcare and children's outcomes, but cannot provide hard evidence about causation: we cannot attribute with certainty particular outcomes as being a direct result of the childcare provision[66]. The shortcomings of relying on non-experimental cohort studies to look at the effects of childcare on child outcomes are discussed in some length by Duncan and Gibson-Davis (2006). They highlight three measurement problems: (a) the risks of not being able to identify and account for the full range of factors affecting parents' selection of different forms of care (also discussed in Chapter 6); (b) non-representativeness caused by attrition; and (c) difficulties in measuring and taking account of the quality of childcare. They raise concerns over the extent to which these can fully overcome the issues because of unobserved selection factors and multi-collinearity[67]. Others, such as Burchinal and Nelson (2000) raise similar issues: they query whether and how it is possible to take account of family selection effects in cohort studies: this has the potential to bias any estimates of the effects of informal childcare on child outcomes.

Understanding family selection effects for informal care is made harder by shared environments and genetics. The evidence about the strength of the association between family characteristics and the quality of childcare, and its consequential bias on any estimates of the effects of informal childcare, is thus unsurprisingly mixed. Lamb (1998) (cited in Burchinal and Nelson, 2000) found that child and family characteristics accounted for 26 per cent of the variance in observed quality of relative care, and 11 per cent of non-relative care (which could be formal or informal). Whereas evidence from the US NICHD Study of Early Child care (1996) (again cited in Burchinal and Nelson, 2000) found that the correlations between family characteristics and the quality of formal and informal childcare were 'modest to moderate'. However, it may or may not be appropriate to extrapolate whether this would apply within the UK if this were tested. Given the methodological challenges, Duncan and Gibson-Davis (2006) suggest that looking for convergence among estimates obtained from different methods may be the best approach.

The picture is further complicated by the need to take account of the specificity of any associations between childcare and child outcomes, as discussed by Belsky et al (2007). That is, research findings will vary depending on the quality of the childcare, the number of hours attended (or indeed, we would add life-stage and combinations of childcare). They will also be affected by the outcome measures used, for both educational and socio-emotional development. The evidence from the

[66] There are no experimental studies in the UK, such as the US Perry Preschool randomised control trial of early years' provision, which measure the impact. The evaluation of the Early Education Pilot for Two Year Old Children used a quasi-experimental design to measure medium-term outcomes at a single point in time, but focused on a particular age group and did not look in any detail at informal childcare.

[67] They refer to different mechanisms to try to overcome these - eg change models, and sibling models and regression discontinuity modelling - some of which have been tried by the NICHD team and others.

literature and our own analysis *is* mixed, and sometimes conflicting. We concur with Belsky et al that this can be at least partly explained by variation in the extent to which the analysis does or can take account of childcare quality (particularly informal childcare) and the patterns or intensity of the care. And certainly by the different outcome measures used in different studies. In the following sections we report the evidence and, taking Duncan and Gibson-Davis' suggestion of looking for convergence, attempt to draw conclusions bearing in mind the different methods and measures used.

8.3 Educational outcomes for pre-school children in informal childcare

8.3.1 Evidence from the UK

The UK evidence around the link between informal childcare and educational outcomes is not clear cut, with longitudinal studies of children pointing to there being positive, negative and no associations. As discussed in Section 8.2, variation in results will be partly explained by the use of different educational outcome measures across the studies, by the extent to which researchers take account of the amount of time children spend in different forms or care, their socio-demographics, and so forth. However, from the overall pattern of results, it seems clear that - if there are associations between using informal childcare and children's educational development - they are unlikely to be very large. In itself, this point is an important finding.

However, what we would like from the evidence is to understand better – where there are associations – what influences whether informal care is associated with better or worse outcomes for children, either in comparison with formal childcare or parental care. What variation is there between grandparents, other relatives and care from friends or neighbours? And is there variation between children of different ages and from different family backgrounds (including socio-economic background and education levels of grandparent carers)? Does it make a difference how many hours are spent with the carer and whether children receive other care during the week?[68] We need to recognize that – once children are three and four – they are highly likely to be in formal early years provision for around 15 hours per week. Take up of this free entitlement is almost universal (although the small proportions who do not take it up come disproportionately from the most disadvantaged families) (Speight et al, 2009). This means that when children are in informal childcare, this is often in combination with formal early years provision (see Chapter 4 for more details). So, what we are likely to be estimating for most of this age group is the *combined* effect of early years provision and (different forms of) informal care against the *combined* effect of early years provision and either parental or other formal care. In the paragraphs below, we report on the UK evidence, drawing attention to the evidence that can be used to address our questions above.

Using data from the Millennium Cohort Study, Hansen and Hawkes (2009) measured the associations between the types of childcare used by *working* mothers for children when they were aged 9 months and their development at age 3. Their analysis focused on the main source of childcare used. So, they

[68] Note that Sylva et al (2004) found that part-time formal early years provision provided the same benefits as full-time provision, suggesting that (whoever the provider) only a number of hours in the day need be spent on activities to encourage children's educational or socio-emotional development.

were comparing children whose main childcare provider[69] was: formal group care; formal non-group care; mothers' partners; grandparents; other informal care. However, they did not examine the association of outcomes with different lengths of exposure to different forms of childcare. Nor did it examine the effects of childcare used up to the time when children were aged 3. (We report on their findings on children's socio-emotional development in Section 8.4.)

Hansen and Hawkes looked at two dimensions of educational development: vocabulary, measured using the naming vocabulary subscale of the British Ability Scales (BAS), and school readiness, measured via six subtests of the Revised Bracken Concept Scale. Using age standardized scores, they found that children being looked after by grandparents as their main source of care scored *well* on the vocabulary test, as did children whose main source of care, as defined above, was formal group care. Children in *other* informal childcare scored less well, as did children looked after by fathers or mothers' partners. However, being looked after by grandparents stood children in *less* good stead in terms of school readiness than children in formal (group or non-group) childcare who were significantly further ahead on the Bracken Scale (with those in group care furthest ahead). We should note that being cared for by grandparents did not significantly put children at a disadvantage in school readiness compared to children not in formal childcare, but rather that it provided no advantage, while formal childcare did.

In an attempt to see whether such differences were due to the use of different forms of childcare, or to variations in the socio-demographic profiles of families using different forms of childcare, Hansen and Hawkes ran regression models to hold other factors constant when looking at the effects of type of care. That is, they looked first at the independent then combined effect of the child's characteristics (eg gender, position in the family), maternal work patterns and family characteristics (eg mother's educational qualifications and age, presence of father). It appears that – controlling for family characteristics – children being looked after by their grandparents score more highly in terms of vocabulary than those in formal group childcare. The same is not true for school readiness where, controlling for the same factors as above, being in non-group childcare and all forms of informal childcare were associated with being *less* school ready than children who had been in formal group childcare.

Splitting the children into groups according to levels of 'disadvantage' (measured according to maternal qualifications, one versus two parent households and benefit claiming) and comparing those in grandparental care to those in any other care, Hansen and Hawkes found that *the association between grandparental care and high vocabulary scores only held true for the children from the more advantaged backgrounds*. Being in grandparental care did not disadvantage the less advantaged families in terms of vocabulary scores compared to other children, but did not put them at a significantly ahead. For school readiness, Hansen and Hawkes compare children in formal group care with all other children, which means that we cannot disentangle the specific situation for children looked after by grandparents. *However, what we can see is that formal group care appears to hold greater advantages to 'disadvantaged' children in terms of school readiness compared to vocabulary learning.* It proves better than other forms of care for children whose parents are on benefits and younger mothers.

Intuitively, Hansen and Hawkes's findings make sense. Grandparents have (often) one on one time with their grandchildren in which to talk and interact, while not always having the resources or skills

[69] Nominated by parents as the main provider during the survey interview.

to develop their grandchildren in preparation for a school environment the ways that trained childcare staff or richer group interactions can. We discuss this further when considering issues around the quality of care in Section 8.5. Their evidence suggests in terms of vocabulary development, if you are from an advantaged background, grandparents are likely to be better carers than formal carers, maybe because of differences in their education levels or potentially through differences in type of engagement that both groups have with the children in their care. But perhaps of greater importance, given that those from disadvantaged backgrounds may have less choice of their type provider, is that **there is little evidence to suggest that being cared for by grandparents puts children at a significant disadvantage in terms of their vocabulary development** , though it may not confer the advantages that formal care might bring.

The Centre for Market and Public Organisation Research Team (2006) used data from ALSPAC to look at the association between different forms of childcare and children's educational outcomes. They used a different outcome measure to those used by Hansen and Hawkes – school entry assessment at age 4 or 5. Perhaps more importantly they took account of the amount of time that children were spending with particular carers. This analysis identified a link between children under two spending long periods of time (20 or more hours per week) with family friends or relatives[70] and *negative* outcomes on the school entry assessment. This would seem to mirror Hansen and Hawkes' finding (albeit at age 3) on school readiness. Of note is that this association held even when taking into account centre-based care received after the age of three. Further analysis took account of parental education levels. Although there was an association between the type of childcare that parents chose or used and their own education levels, among children in particular childcare settings, the education levels of their parents were not associated with the children's outcomes.

A Scottish study, Growing Up in Scotland found little if any difference in the cognitive ability (measured via BASII assessments picture similarities and vocabulary) of children who had been in informal, formal care or in a mixture, comparing children aged 34 months according to their childcare arrangements at ten months (Bradshaw and Wasoff, 2009). However, these results had not controlled for the socio-demographic differences in families using informal and formal care and their report did not break down informal childcare into more detailed categories, so is likely to hide differences between types of informal carers. A particular focus of Bradshaw and Wasoff's report was the use of multiple providers – an issue highly linked with informal care given that in most cases using more than one provider involves at least one informal carer (see Chapter 4). Again, they found no association between a child being with multiple providers and their cognitive development (compared age 1 and age 3).

We now report on our own analysis using the MCS data, which draws heavily on the methodology of Goodman and Gregg (2010) and Dearden, Sibieta and Sylva (2011). We examine the association between different types of childcare used up to age 3 and children's cognitive outcomes at ages 3 and 5. Like many of the papers reviewed that use survey data, this analysis is unable to confirm casual impacts since we are not able to say whether variation in the usage of different forms of childcare is exogenous or not – that is, there could be an unobserved third factor determining both use of different forms of childcare and educational outcomes.

[70] Their analysis did not split out friends and relatives, but they do report that apart from very short hours, three quarters of this care is provided by grandparents. Even so, given that Hansen and Hawkes had different results depending on the type of informal carer, we should bear in mind that these aggregated results may hide difference between different types of informal care.

The cognitive outcomes we have examined at age 3 are the same as those used by Hansen and Hawkes: the British Ability Scales (BAS) vocabulary component and the Bracken School Readiness Score (henceforth referred to as BAS and Bracken, respectively). These are all measured in percentile rank terms. Like Hansen and Hawkes, we only looked at children whose mothers were in paid work. While Hansen and Hawkes looked at the childcare used in the first year of the child's life, we have taken account of childcare used between the ages of 1 and 3, comparing the outcomes of children spending time at or with:

- Grandparents
- Other informal care (other relatives or other non-relatives[71])
- Registered childminders
- Centre-based childcare (including crèches, day nurseries, nursery schools and playgroups)

In earlier chapters (largely in Chapter 4), we have shown the ways in which parents combine different types of childcare into a 'package' which best meets their needs. 'Childcare' for many parents is not an individual provider but rather a jigsaw – either in order to have arrangements which fit parents' working hours or to provide the child with a mix of environments, usually including a formal education element. In order to reflect the reality of some children's experience of more than one of the childcare types above, we add the following four combinations:

- Grandparents and centre-based childcare
- Other informal care and centre-based childcare
- Childminders and centre-based childcare
- All other combinations of childcare

Data constraints mean that it would be difficult to disentangle the implications of using a combination of childcare did so simultaneously (using two different types of childcare at the same time) or sequentially (using two different types of childcare at different points in time). Combinations not involving centre-based childcare are relatively rare, as are those involving three or more types of childcare. For most of the analysis, we have categorised children according to childcare arrangements lasting three or more months. So, those in the 'no childcare' group include both those who relied solely on parental care and those who experienced some type of childcare for less than three months.

Throughout the analysis we have restricted attention to children aged 39 months or less at the time of the second sweep of the MCS. This assumption, combined with the restriction to childcare lasting three or more months, ensures that we are examining childcare *prior* to the entitlement to free early years provision for three and four year olds (given attendance in early years provision is close to universal after this age). To check the robustness of these results, we also examined how the results change when we restricted our analysis to childcare lasting *six* or more months.

Ideally, when measuring differences in the outcomes of children in different childcare arrangements, we would have liked to take account of the amount of time that children spend with different

[71] Unfortunately, as well as friends or neighbours looking after your children in their house, this includes nannies and au pairs and is therefore a mix of formal and informal care. The questionnaire combines these types of care with friends who look after your children in your own house.

childcare providers. The EPPE study shows a correlation between children's outcomes and the hours spent in centre-based care (up to a certain number of hours), so we may well hypothesise similar patterns of different types of childcare. Unfortunately, there is not enough data within the MCS to accurately take account of hours spent in different settings. Instead, we have used mothers' working hours as a rough proxy for the amount of time children may spend in childcare. (For instance, we know that there is a correlation between using *combinations* of childcare and parents' working hours, with those working full-time more likely to combine different forms.) , So, we examined whether the pattern of results varied according to whether mothers worked part-time (defined as less working more or less than 30 hours per week).

Our analysis thus differs from Hansen and Hawkes in a number of respects. Firstly, we examine the association between outcomes and childcare between age 1 and age 3, rather than childcare at 9 months. Secondly, we are able to look in more detail at the different combinations of childcare that families make use of. Thirdly, our analysis also differs in that we will examine cognitive outcomes at age 5, as well as at age 3. Fourthly, we check on differences in results according to mothers' working hours.

Table 8.1 shows the proportions of children in the (weighted) sample who have experienced each of the eight different combinations of childcare listed above by the time of the second sweep of the MCS. The first two columns show the proportions of all working mothers who have used these childcare types for three or more months (column 1) and for six or more months (column 2). As can be seen, sole reliance on centre-based care is by far the most commonly used non-parental childcare combination in this sample. The next most commonly used combination is grandparent care combined with centre-based care, followed by sole reliance on grandparent care. This pattern across types of non-parental childcare types is true whether we use a cut-off value of three or six months. Almost all non-parental childcare types become less common when we increase the cut-off value to six months (the only exceptions being sole reliance on other informal and childminders, as a result of fewer seen to use combinations of two or more types). The group experiencing low or no non-parental childcare accounts for about 22 per cent of the sample based on a cut-off of three months, but becomes the most common group when we use six months as the cut-off value (29 per cent of the sample).

In column 3, we examine the patterns of childcare usage amongst mothers only working part-time at the time of the second sweep of the MCS (only shown for childcare combinations lasting three or more months). Here, we observe that the patterns of usage amongst mothers working part-time are remarkably similar to the full sample of working mothers. Therefore, there does not seem to be a strong difference in childcare usage patterns according to whether mothers worked full-time or part-time.

Table 8.1 Non-Parental Childcare Amongst Working Mothers (by age 3)			
	All Working Mothers		Mothers Working Part-Time
	%	%	%
Childcare Use by Age 3 (MCS 2)			
Minimum Length of Childcare (months)	3	6	3
Centre-Based Childcare (only)	31	26	31
Grandparents (only)	15	18	15
Other Informal Care (only)	3	4	3
Childminder (only)	2	2	2
Grand-Parents and Centre-Based Childcare	18	14	19
Other Informal and Centre-Based Childcare	3	2	3
Childminder and Centre-Based Childcare	2	1	2
Other Combination	4	3	4
Low/No Childcare	22	29	21
All Children of Working Mothers	*5536*	*5536*	*3818*

In Tables 8.2 and 8.3, we show the association between these childcare types and children's cognitive outcomes at age 3. The first two columns of Table 8.2 show the association between these eight childcare combinations and BAS scores at age 3, relative to sole reliance on centre-based care (the omitted category) – with column (1) showing a cut-off value of three months for the minimum length of childcare and column (2) showing a cut-off of six months. Choosing centre-based care as the omitted category allows us to directly compare other types of childcare with centre-based childcare (the care, when high quality, most commonly associated with better child outcomes).

In this table and all other regressions, we control for other child and family characteristics, including: socio-economic position[72]; parental education; child's age; child's gender; child's ethnicity; work status of father; mother's age (sq); lone parent status; marital status; and number of siblings. In doing so, we are attempting to control for other factors that might affect outcomes and might be correlated with use of different forms of childcare. However, the absence of a formal 'comparison group' means we cannot be confident that we have controlled for all potential influences, which is why these results might not reflect causal effects.

In this and all other regressions, we measure outcomes in percentile point rank terms. This means that an estimate of x for the effect of a particular childcare type can be interpreted as 'children using

[72] We use quintiles of an index of socio-economic position. This index is constructed using principal component analysis of equivalised income across different sweeps of the data, housing tenure, social class and whether the family experience any financial difficulties. The data is weighted to take account of the survey design and non-response, which explains why there are a greater number of families in the poorer quintiles (they were oversampled for the MCS). See Goodman and Gregg (2010) or Dearden, Sibieta and Sylva (2010) for more details.

this type of childcare score x percentile points higher in the distribution of this outcome, conditional on all other factors.'

The significant positive difference (shown in columns 1 and 2 of Table 8.2) between the BAS scores of children who have experienced only grandparent care and those who have only experienced centre-based care mirrors Hansen and Hawkes' findings about childcare used in the first year, that **there is little evidence to suggest that being cared for by grandparents puts children at a significant disadvantage in terms of their vocabulary development.** Here we see that their findings extend to care between the ages 1 and 3.

The increase the size of the positive association with grandparent care only if we restrict our analysis to childcare used for at least six months may suggest that longer exposure to grandparent care increases the size of the positive difference relative to centre-based childcare. However, the increase in the magnitude of the difference is small and unlikely to be statistically significant.

There is no significant difference for any other childcare combination relative to centre-based childcare – meaning that there is no evidence to suggest that children in these arrangements are significantly behind or further ahead in terms of their vocabulary development. However, it is notable that the estimated difference for the combination of centre-based childcare and grandparent care lies somewhere in between the value for centre-based childcare only and grandparent care only.

Table 8.2 Cognitive Outcomes and Non-Parental Childcare (BAS percentile, age 3)					
				Mother's Education	
	All Working Mothers	**All Working Mothers**	***Part-time Working Mothers***	***Low***	***High***
Minimum Length of Childcare (months)	*3*	*6*	*3*	*3*	*3*
Childcare Use by Age 3 (MCS 2)					
Centre-Based Childcare (only)	n/a	n/a		n/a	n/a
(omitted category)					
Grandparents (only)	2.713*	4.116**	1.736	0.259	4.498**
	[1.146]	[1.169]	[1.427]	[1.803]	[1.599]
Other Informal Care (only)	1.179	2.886	1.165	1.664	0.111
	[1.863]	[2.015]	[2.301]	[3.019]	[2.553]
Childminder	2.813	4.542	1.757	-6.587	6.914*
	[2.603]	[2.610]	[3.433]	[3.829]	[3.124]
Grand-Parents and Centre-Based Childcare	1.196	1.712	0.761	-1.623	3.039
	[1.234]	[1.400]	[1.378]	[1.893]	[1.641]
Other Informal and Centre-Based Childcare	-1.158	-2.889	-2.942	2.153	-3.661
	[2.222]	[2.279]	[2.677]	[3.465]	[2.737]
Childminder and Centre-Based Childcare	3.732	4.979	3.316	6.361	3.91
	[2.741]	[3.243]	[3.106]	[6.634]	[3.089]
Other Combination	2.038	3.094	1.717	-0.0225	3.518
	[2.104]	[2.277]	[2.446]	[3.028]	[2.679]
Low/No Childcare	0.0012	1.357	0.101	0.000	2.331
	[1.121]	[1.095]	[1.392]	[1.719]	[1.452]
Observations	5,536	5,536	3,818	2,143	3,393
R-squared	0.131	0.133	0.145	0.147	0.102
Other Controls included: socio-economic position, parental education, child age, male/female, child ethnicity, work status of father, mother's age (sq), lone parent status, marital status, number of siblings					

** and * indicate significance at the 1% and 5% levels respectively. Standard errors are shown in brackets. BAS Score are measured in percentile point rank terms.

In column (3) we show whether the relationships are different for children of mothers working part-time. This naturally restricts the sample as compared with columns (1) and (2). However, the pattern of results is identical to those seen in columns (1) and (2). The only differences are that the magnitudes of the estimated effects are smaller and the estimated effect of grandparents is no longer significant. As one would expect mothers working part-time to be using childcare at a lower intensity, this might be further evidence to suggest that intensity matters. However, again it should be noted that the change in magnitude is not that large and is unlikely to be statistically significant.

In the next two columns we split the full sample into two groups depending on the mothers' highest qualification. The first group contains those with low levels of education (those with qualifications

equivalent to NVQ level 2 or below, i.e. those with qualifications equivalent to 5 GCSEs at A*-C or below). The second group contains those with high levels of education (those with A-level equivalent qualifications or higher). These results allows us to see whether the estimated effects of childcare differ by mothers' education, a proxy for grandparents' education if, as seems likely, education levels are correlated across generations. Broadly speaking, as in the first three columns, few of the differences are statistically significant (relative to centre-based care) – that is, we have not identified many statistically significant advantages or disadvantages of the different forms of care compared to centre-based care. However, there are two exceptions. The first exception is that the positive effects of grandparent care appear to be concentrated amongst those with higher levels of education (a finding mirrored by Hansen and Hawkes). Indeed, it is only statistically significant amongst the high education group. However, for those with lower levels of education, using grandparental care does not appear to put them at a *dis*advantage in relation to children in centre-based care. The second statistically significant finding is a positive effect of childminders (relative to centre-based care) amongst those with high levels of education. This may relate to more highly educated parents' choice of childminder, or the networks available to them in comparison to less educated parents.

Table 8.3 repeats this analysis for the Bracken school readiness score. Again, the outcome is measured in percentile rank terms. Here we observe that most children using most childcare arrangements are estimated to have a *lower* level of school readiness relative to those using centre-based childcare only. The only exception is 'other' informal childcare. This pattern of results is repeated for a cut-off value of six months for the length of particular childcare types, and for childcare amongst mothers working part-time. However, none of the differences between childcare arrangements are statistically significant. **So, although our results are similar to what Hansen and Hawkes found for centre-based care at nine months, we no longer find a positive association with centre-based childcare on school readiness to be statistically significant.** Breaking the results down by mother's education, few of the estimated coefficients are statistically significant.

Table 8.3 Cognitive Outcomes and Non-Parental Childcare (Bracken percentile, age 3)					
				Mother's Education	
	All Working Mothers	**All Working Mothers**	***Part-time Working Mothers***	***Low***	***High***
Minimum Length of Childcare (months)	3	6	3	3	3
Childcare Use by Age 3 (MCS 2)					
Centre-Based Childcare (only)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
(omitted category)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Grandparents (only)	-2.003	-0.682	-1.651	-2.937	-0.767
	[1.301]	[1.322]	[1.481]	[1.878]	[1.802]
Other Informal Care (only)	1.608	1.838	2.386	3.014	0.409
	[1.988]	[2.127]	[2.554]	[3.332]	[2.748]
Childminder	-3.55	-2.416	-4.428	-5.145	-2.832
	[2.911]	[2.726]	[3.701]	[6.025]	[3.245]
Grand-Parents and Centre-Based Childcare	-0.589	0.899	0.306	-0.194	-0.551
	[1.203]	[1.346]	[1.372]	[1.928]	[1.468]
Other Informal and Centre-Based Childcare	-1.188	-2.688	0.927	1.689	-2.912
	[2.405]	[2.617]	[2.668]	[3.514]	[3.201]
Childminder and Centre-Based Childcare	-3.511	-1.531	-2.289	3.566	-4.709
	[2.791]	[3.478]	[3.138]	[5.270]	[3.100]
Other Combination	-2.48	-1.507	0.17	-1.971	-2.022
	[2.326]	[2.654]	[2.709]	[3.674]	[2.727]
Low/No Childcare	-0.943	0.456	0.232	-1.866	0.193
	[1.085]	[1.137]	[1.372]	[1.803]	[1.391]
Observations	5,536	5,536	3,818	2,143	3,393
R-squared	0.163	0.163	0.182	0.143	0.131
Other Controls included: socio-economic position, parental education, child age, male/female, child ethnicity, work status of father, mother's age (sq), lone parent status, marital status, number of siblings					

** and * indicate significance at the 1% and 5% levels respectively. Standard errors are shown in brackets. Bracken scores are measured in percentile point rank terms.

The MCS also measured BAS vocabulary scores at age 5, which allows us to examine whether there are longer lasting associations between childcare usage at age 3 and cognitive outcomes. We are also now able to take account of childcare usage between ages 3 and 5. Since use of centre-based childcare is near universal amongst this age group, we cannot estimate the differences relative to centre-based childcare for this age-group. However, we are able to examine the associations with centre-based childcare used on a *full-time* basis for this age group. Again it is important to note that these results are unlikely to be causal, as we are unable to take account of potential endogeneity.

Table 8.4 thus repeats the analysis using BAS vocabulary scores at age 5, with column (1) using a cut-off value of three or more months for length of childcare and column (2) a value of six or more

months. Although all 3 and 4 year olds would be entitled to free centre-based childcare over this time frame, only 90 per cent of the sample report having used some form of centre-based childcare. The 10 per cent not taking up the early years entitlement are likely to be skewed demographically, we thus restrict our analysis to the other 90 per cent. Although not shown here, the pattern of results is not sensitive to this change in the estimation sample.

Table 8.4 Cognitive Outcomes and Non-Parental Childcare (BAS percentile, age 5)					
				Mother's Education	
	All Working Mothers	**All Working Mothers**	***Part-time Working Mothers***	***Low***	***High***
Minimum Length of Childcare (months)	3	6	3	3	3
Childcare Use by Age 3 (MCS 2)					
Centre-Based Childcare (only)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
(omitted category)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Grandparents (only)	0.615	0.828	-0.0824	0.167	1.673
	[1.327]	[1.356]	[1.548]	[1.996]	[1.696]
Other Informal Care (only)	2.598	0.704	3.225	6.823*	-1.377
	[2.505]	[2.509]	[3.289]	[3.073]	[3.787]
Childminder	6.911*	6.867*	6.944	5.639	6.975*
	[2.992]	[2.831]	[4.029]	[5.826]	[3.422]
Grand-Parents and Centre-Based Childcare	-0.206	0.188	-0.776	0.282	-0.353
	[1.131]	[1.285]	[1.368]	[1.950]	[1.320]
Other Informal and Centre-Based Childcare	-2.796	-2.549	-1.188	1.116	-5.636
	[2.292]	[2.702]	[2.633]	[3.435]	[3.171]
Childminder and Centre-Based Childcare	2.771	2.322	3.833	15.76*	0.498
	[2.912]	[3.475]	[3.358]	[7.127]	[3.283]
Other Combination	5.382*	5.633*	5.538*	3.9	6.793*
	[2.092]	[2.202]	[2.778]	[3.642]	[2.669]
Low/No Childcare	0.592	0.413	0.734	0.105	1.119
	[1.127]	[1.179]	[1.272]	[1.868]	[1.324]
Childcare Use Age 3-5 (MCS2-MCS3)					
Centre Based Childcare (Part-Time)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
(omitted category)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Centre-Based Childcare (Full-Time)	0.229	0.205	-0.0626	-1.586	1.184
	[1.081]	[1.082]	[1.477]	[1.853]	[1.306]
Observations	5,065	5,065	3,542	1,957	3,108
R-squared	0.119	0.119	0.126	0.113	0.108
Other Controls included: socio-economic position, parental education, child age, male/female, child ethnicity, work status of father, mother's age (sq), lone parent status, marital status, number of siblings					

** and * indicate significance at the 1% and 5% levels respectively. Standard errors are shown in brackets.

The results show little significant association of childcare usage at age 3 with age 5 BAS scores, relative to sole reliance on centre-based childcare. So, it appears that after two years of early years provision, any association with childcare used in earlier years has disappeared. In particular, there are no significant differences between the three main combinations (centre-based childcare, grandparent care and the combination of these two). This is true across the three estimation samples (all working mothers, using a 6 months cut off value and part-time working mothers only). However, there does appear to be a positive significant difference for childminders and for the other combinations group, relative to sole reliance on centre-based care. The difference for childminders is no longer significant for the part-time mothers sample, but the magnitude of the estimated difference is largely unchanged. As this is true only for more educated mothers, this may relate to our earlier point about the choice and availability of childminders to this group.

There is no significant difference for usage of full-time centre-based childcare between ages 3 and 5 (relative to part-time care).

At the start of this section, we said that we were looking for UK evidence of how being in informal childcare was associated with children's educational development. Within this broad remit, we wanted to factor in different types of informal childcare, different ages of preschool children, different combinations and intensities of childcare, and different family backgrounds, including grandparents' education levels. On some of these factors the evidence was very limited. Only our own analysis took some account of the length of time that children were spending with different providers (in terms of whether childcare was experienced for more than three or more than six months, full-time versus part-time for childcare at ages 3 and 4, and whether mothers worked full or part-time). There are some inconsistencies in the findings across different studies. Nonetheless, if we take the advice of Duncan and Gibson-Davis (2006) and look for convergence, we suggest that there is little strong evidence to suggest that children are substantially advantaged or disadvantaged by being looked after by their grandparents or other informal childcarers. Furthermore, there is tentative evidence to suggest that care by grandparents offers greater benefits for children from advantaged or more educated backgrounds.

8.3.2 Evidence from the US

Mirroring the overall picture from the UK, the evidence from the US is rather mixed, and any significant effects were usually small and not necessarily borne out in other research. Of particular interest to us – as it is a gap in the UK literature – is the evidence on any longer term associations between preschool childcare choices and development into the teenage years (although this is likely to change in the coming years in the UK as the recent EPPE cohort members age). The US evidence also more often attempts to take account of the quality of the childcare – including informal childcare. This is something we look at in more detail in Section 8.5.

The NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (2004) compared children's outcomes at age 4 and a half years by looking at the type, quality and amount of childcare they received at five points from 6 months to 4 and a half years. They also tried to take account of changes in the patterns of childcare use over time (eg from informal care to centre based care). They found that, controlling for family demographics and quality (the latter is something that we cannot currently do with UK data), the number of hours spent in relative care was *not* associated – either positively or negatively - with any differences in children's cognitive or social outcomes compared to children who did not receive

childcare from relatives. This is consistent with our findings for the UK using the MCS, which showed little lasting association of childcare at age 3 with cognitive outcomes at age 5.

Blau (1999) used the National Longitudinal Study of Youth to look at the longer term effects of formal and informal childcare providers (looking across characteristics such as group size, staff-child ratio, training, etc) and found little variation in the effects of different forms of early childcare and later development for different groups of children. He summarized 'there seems to be little association on average between child care inputs experienced in the first three years of life and subsequent [educational?] child development, controlling for family background and the home environment'. He looked for differences in effects for different groups of children by looking at interactions between child care and age, ethnicity and long-run poverty status. That said, in contrast, work by Bernal and Keane (2006) using the same study found that the use of relative care among single parents led to significant reductions in children's achievement. They found that these negative outcomes among children of mothers across the education range. They also found that informal care under the age of one did not affect outcomes, but informal care used after this age did.

8.4 Socio-emotional development for pre-school children in informal childcare

8.4.1 Evidence from the UK

While there seem to be little evidence of educational effects of different types of childcare, there is some evidence – from several studies – that informal childcare is linked with small but significant negative behavioural outcomes, particularly related to peer problems.

In their 2009 paper, Hansen and Hawkes looked not only at 3 year olds' educational outcomes, but also their socio-emotional development, rated by parents using Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties scales. Five sub-scales measuring conduct problems, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, peer problems and pro-social behaviour are combined to make a 'problem behaviour' score. Before controlling for differences in the socio-demographic profile of children in different forms of childcare, three year old children being looked after mainly by their grandparents at 9 months exhibited more behavioural problems, while those in formal (group and non-group) care exhibited fewer. Regression models controlling for differences in the child's characteristics (eg gender, position in the family), maternal work patterns and family characteristics (eg mother's educational qualifications and age, presence of father) show that this relationship holds even when controlling for differences in the users of different forms of childcare. However, further investigation found that these differences were being driven largely by one of the five SDQ sub-scales measuring peer problems. Hansen and Hawkes think that their results match those found elsewhere (eg they cite Melhuish 1991) which found that formal group care is associated with greater social competence with peers. What this research shows is that peer relationships are worse among children looked after by grandparents than children in group care settings.

Splitting the children into groups according to levels of 'disadvantage' (measured according to maternal qualifications, one versus two parent households and benefit claiming) and comparing those in grandparental care to those in any other care, Hansen and Hawkes found that the association between grandparental care and behavioural difficulties was very high for boys. However, the picture is complex. For some of the advantaged groups such as those in households

not on benefits, in couple families and those with older mothers and mothers educated beyond 5 GCSE grades A to C, behavioural problems were less common among children with grandparents than in other forms of childcare. So the slightly increased tendency to behavioural problems arising from grandparental care tends to be concentrated in disadvantaged families, lone parent families and so on.

The Centre for Market and Public Organisation Research Team (2006) study referred to in Section 8.3) also looked at the association between different forms of childcare and children's behaviour. They identified a link between children under two spending long periods of time (20 or more hours per week) with family friends or relatives[73] and *negative* behavioural outcomes, holding even when taking into account centre-based care received after the age of three. That said, negative behavioural outcomes were present for children in centre based care as well as informal carers. However, this analysis did not control for the different socio-demographic profiles of users of different forms of childcare. Further analysis took account of parental education levels. Although there was an association between the type of childcare that parents chose or used and their own education levels, among children in particular childcare settings, the education levels of their parents were not associated with the children's outcomes.

A paper by Fergusson, Maughan and Golding (2008) also using data from ALSPAC explored associations between grandparent care in the first two years of life and behavioural and/or emotional difficulties at age 4, using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Looking at the number of points at which grandparents were involved in a child's care (at 8, 15 and 24 months), they found small but significant differences in the scores, with greater numbers of occasions in grandparent care associated with greater behavioural problems. Controlling for predictors of using grandparental care, the key associations were between grandparent care at all three occasions and raise rates of hyperactivity and problems with peer relationships compared to those with no grandparental care. The authors point to the fact that these differences are small, and for the need to see whether these differences persist over time.

Bradshaw and Wasoff (2009) found no associations between type of childcare used at age 3 and children's social, emotional or behavioural development at age 5 (measured using Goodman's strengths and difficulties questionnaire). However, they did find some link between long hours (40+ per week) in childcare and detrimental behaviour, particularly for girls and children of young mothers. This is something that could be explored further, given that young mothers are more likely to use informal childcare that other mothers.

Here we repeat our own analysis of the MCS data, focusing on socio-emotional development at ages 3 and 5. We use the Strengths and Difficulties (SDQs) questionnaire as our outcome measure (described earlier). This is again measured using percentile ranks and ordered such that higher scores represent fewer behavioural difficulties. The estimated differences at age 3 are shown in Table 8.5. The specification is identical to that used in Tables 8.2 and 8.3 for cognitive outcomes at age 3.

[73] Their analysis did not split out friends and relatives, but they do report that apart from very short hours, three quarters of this care is provided by grandparents. Even so, given that Hansen and Hawkes had different results depending on the type of informal carer, we should bear in mind that these aggregated results may hide difference between different types of informal care.

As can be seen, *overall* there appears to be no significant association of sole reliance on grandparent care usage at age 3 with socio-emotional development, relative to sole reliance on centre-based care. However, when we examine the results according to mother's education, we find a high *positive* difference amongst the high education group and *negative* difference amongst the low education group. **So, children of more highly educated mothers tend being looked after by grandparents tend to experience higher levels of socio-emotional development, on average, in comparison to those experiencing centre-based care only, but the reverse is true for children of less educated mothers.**

Table 8.5 Socio-emotional development and non-parental childcare (SDQ, age 3)					
				Mother's Education	
	All Working Mothers	**All Working Mothers**	***Part-time Working Mothers***	***Low***	***High***
Minimum Length of Childcare (months)	*3*	*6*	*3*	*3*	*3*
Childcare Use by Age 3 (MCS 2)					
Centre-Based Childcare (only)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
(omitted category)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Grandparents (only)	0.115	-0.18	1.203	-4.059*	3.283*
	[1.146]	[1.298]	[1.375]	[1.770]	[1.520]
Other Informal Care (only)	-1.407	-1.424	0.369	-2.61	-0.322
	[2.077]	[2.052]	[2.447]	[3.358]	[3.160]
Childminder	-1.089	-4.355	0.0844	-9.065	1.987
	[3.051]	[2.713]	[3.917]	[5.516]	[3.390]
Grand-Parents and Centre-Based Childcare	-3.431**	-2.779*	-0.246	-5.389*	-2.373
	[1.154]	[1.356]	[1.396]	[2.134]	[1.541]
Other Informal and Centre-Based Childcare	-2.104	-1.872	-1.161	-7.900*	1.339
	[2.372]	[2.415]	[2.978]	[3.954]	[3.109]
Childminder and Centre-Based Childcare	-3.386	1.38	-2.011	1.505	-3.489
	[2.846]	[3.491]	[3.401]	[5.703]	[3.230]
Other Combination	-3.02	-3.776	-1.71	-4.875	-1.881
	[2.064]	[2.226]	[2.219]	[3.233]	[2.788]
Low/No Childcare	0.186	0.714	0.673	-1.227	0.8
	[1.196]	[1.188]	[1.489]	[1.851]	[1.483]
Observations	5,536	5,536	3,818	2,143	3,393
R-squared	0.089	0.088	0.097	0.085	0.067
Other Controls included: socio-economic position, parental education, child age, male/female, child ethnicity, work status of father, mother's age (sq), lone parent status, marital status, number of siblings					

** and * indicate significance at the 1% and 5% levels respectively. Standard errors are shown in brackets. SDQs are measured in percentile rank terms.

Table 8.6 repeats the analysis for SDQs at age 5 to examine whether there are any longer lasting associations, or contemporaneous ones. Here, the main difference we observe is a positive, significant difference for grandparent care versus centre-based care. Like at age 3, this appears to be concentrated amongst the high education group. There are few other clear results for the longer run associations with childcare before age 3. However, there is a significant negative association between the use of *full-time* centre-based childcare between ages 3 and 5 and socio-emotional development at age 5 (relative to part-time care).

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Table 8.6 Socio-emotional development and non-parental childcare (SDQ, age 5)					
				Mother's Education	
	All Working Mothers	**All Working Mothers**	***Part-time Working Mothers***	***Low***	***High***
Minimum Length of Childcare (months)	*3*	*6*	*3*	*3*	*3*
Childcare Use by Age 3 (MCS 2)					
Centre-Based Childcare (only)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
(omitted category)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Grandparents (only)	2.524*	1.692	3.600*	0.576	4.103*
	[1.284]	[1.169]	[1.636]	[2.145]	[1.700]
Other Informal Care (only)	2.553	4.201	1.999	4.781	2.443
	[2.386]	[2.248]	[2.849]	[3.044]	[3.407]
Childminder	0.465	-2.543	1.21	2.289	1.073
	[2.945]	[2.812]	[3.649]	[6.948]	[3.192]
Grand-Parents and Centre-Based Childcare	-1.488	-1.531	0.872	-3.985*	0.285
	[1.244]	[1.356]	[1.463]	[1.799]	[1.713]
Other Informal and Centre-Based Childcare	3.659	2.899	5.816*	1.177	4.982
	[2.177]	[2.440]	[2.656]	[3.419]	[2.918]
Childminder and Centre-Based Childcare	-5.819	-4.965	-5.309	5.6	-7.444*
	[3.383]	[3.438]	[3.897]	[8.046]	[3.638]
Other Combination	0.3	-1.241	2.804	-0.17	0.363
	[2.042]	[2.302]	[2.423]	[3.207]	[2.690]
Low/No Childcare	1.595	0.975	1.207	0.00505	2.689
	[1.149]	[1.103]	[1.454]	[2.014]	[1.569]
Childcare Use Age 3-5 (MCS2-MCS3)					
Centre Based Childcare (Part-Time)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
(omitted category)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Centre-Based Childcare (Full-Time)	-2.697*	-2.730*	-2.346	-5.046**	-1.392
	[1.079]	[1.083]	[1.441]	[1.647]	[1.366]
Observations	5,065	5,065	3,542	1,957	3,108
R-squared	0.096	0.096	0.1	0.102	0.086
Other Controls included: socio-economic position, parental education, child age, male/female, child ethnicity, work status of father, mother's age (sq), lone parent status, marital status, number of siblings					

** and * indicate significance at the 1% and 5% levels respectively. Standard errors are shown in brackets.

Therefore, although there seems to be some evidence in the literature that care by grandparents at an early age is associated with worse socio-emotional development, particularly in terms of peer relationship problems, our own analysis suggests that this association does not hold for care by grandparents up to age 3 in terms of socio-emotional development at ages 3 and 5 (although there was some evidence that the combination of grandparent care and centre-based was worse relative

to sole reliance on grandparent care). Indeed, our analysis suggests there may be a positive association with grandparent care, particularly for those from educated backgrounds. There does appear to be clear evidence that *full-time* centre-based childcare is negatively associated with socio-emotional development.

Recently, researchers have looked at outcomes other than educational and socio-emotional outcomes. Two papers by Pearce et al (2010a; 2010b) look at associations between different forms of childcare and children's weight and unintentional injuries. 25.4 per cent of children looked after by their grandparents were classified as obese, compared to 24.6 per cent of children in other informal care, 23.2 per cent of children in formal care and 22.2 per cent of children looked after by their parents. Using MCS data at ages 9 months and 3 years, they found that children from advantaged groups (mothers in managerial/professional occupations, educated to degree level or above or living as part of a couple) who were looked after by informal carers were more likely to be overweight at age 3 than children [74]from similar backgrounds who were looked after by their own parents. A comparison across different informal carers and different amounts of time with these showed that children who were looked after grandparents either full or part time (adjusted risk ratios 1.15 and 1.34 respectively) were at greater risk than children looked after by their parents, whereas for other types of informal care, the risk was only present if children were looked after full-time (adjusted risk ratio 1.4). No such relationship was found for children in formal care. Given that the MCS did not include information on diet or physical activity, the authors have limited capacity to delve into the reasons for their findings. However, as they say, it points to a potential need to provide advice and training on diet and exercise for young children in grandparents' care.

The same team found evidence that, among children under three, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in informal childcare had an increased risk of injury compared to similar children looked after by their own parents (37.4 per cent of children in informal care compared to 34.8 per cent, representing an adjusted risk ratio of 1.05). Interpretation of these results is difficult, given that it isn't known whether the injuries occurred when in childcare. However, since the injuries are defined by parents as having taken the child to a GP or hospital Accident and Emergency, and given that parents from higher socio-economic groups are more likely to do this, the survey may be underreporting the difference. It has also not taken into account different packages of care and does not distinguish between different forms of informal childcare. However, the authors hypothesise that the differences may reflect differences in the quality of care received by children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This point is picked up in Section 8.5 below.

8.4.2 Evidence from the US

Belsky et al (2007b) used the NICHD Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development to look at whether any effects of childcare continued into school and up to teenage years (15). Their study is situated within mixed evidence on the long lasting effects of early childcare, with some claiming that any effects of early years care do not endure beyond preschool or early primary; with others, including Belsky, thinking the effects are more long lasting, at least for low income children in high quality care. They draw on analysis by van Ijzendoorn et al (2004) which found that negative effects of long hours of childcare on behaviour at 54 months was linked to non-relative care (be it formal or informal) (particularly centre based care) and not relative care. Belsky et al's analysis focused on childcare that children were in for at least 10 hours each week – thus excluding short amount of care

[74] Parental report of injuries resulting in being taken to a GP or Accident and Emergency Department.

and ad hoc arrangements. While they identified a relationship between non-relative (largely centre-based) early childcare and measures of teacher-child conflict, academic work habits and social-emotional competence, these were not associated with relative care.

Leach et al (2006) cite evidence from the Study of Early Childcare and Youth Development that the amount of time in childcare can negatively affect social outcomes, and this is only partly mediated by the quality of the care.

8.5 The 'quality' of informal childcare

There is a strong body of evidence about the differential effects of formal early years provision and childcare of good and less good quality (eg Sylva et al 2004; Smith et al 2009b). This includes some evidence of links between childcare quality and measures of children's cortisol (Leach et al 2006). However, the same body of evidence is not available around the quality of different forms of informal care. Few studies in the UK have sought to measure the quality of care provided by informal childcare providers, and, all too often, informal carers (or particular carers such as grandparents) are treated as a homogenous group in term of the quality of care that they are assumed to provide. This is clearly a gap in the evidence which, if filled, would augment the small but growing body of evidence around the associations between informal childcare and child outcomes. As with formal childcare, one would expect the quality of the care provided to have an impact on the children involved. In the UK to date, we usually rely on proxy indicators such as maternal education, with the assumption that these will reflect the education level of grandparents, the key provider of informal childcare. Ideally, we would disentangle the role that quality plays over other elements that distinguish informal and formal childcare.

There is a little UK research on the quality of informal care, but there has been more done in the US. And very little of this work on quality goes on to link it with children's outcomes in a way that has been done for formal childcare. In this section, we try to examine what is known about the quality of informal childcare – in particular the elements where it comes out as being stronger or weaker – and look in particular for any evidence about whether this might help us understand how or whether informal childcare is linked to better or worse outcomes for children. This by no means substitutes a proper study which links quality with outcomes, but makes the most of the available evidence. We do not report on evidence around the *prevalence* of good, medium and poor quality informal and formal provision in the US, as it would not be appropriate to extrapolate from this to the quality of provision in the UK. Rather, we are interested in the measures used to assess quality, and in the differences in quality between different forms of informal and formal childcare.

One of the key findings from our examination of the evidence in this area is that it has proved very difficult to measure the quality of different forms of informal care. Those who have tried to measure the quality of informal care have done so in different ways – making comparisons across studies difficult – and with varying degrees of self-assessed success. Finding scales that can be used across both formal and informal settings is difficult, especially when a comparison with formal group care is required. It is not appropriate to use many of the established scales in informal settings. Even where a measure is suitable for both environments, it does not necessarily work in the same way in informal and formal providers. And, indeed, it is arguable whether the same factors fit together to form 'quality care' in formal and informal settings. In the paragraphs below, we describe how different research teams have attempted to look into these issues and what they have found. They provide

examples of each of the issues raised above. We would say that the current evidence highlights the usefulness – but challenges – of developing scales for measuring the quality of informal care the result of which can be read across to formal care (very likely not using the same scale) as well as measure differential quality within the informal childcare sphere.

These measurement problems do make it difficult to draw substantive findings from the evidence with any confidence. However, on the basis that there is some convergence across measures on these points, we might tentatively suggest that informal carers tend to provide a less rich learning environment than formal providers, and that their disciplining is more variable, but that they score better in terms of sensitivity and responsiveness. These findings relate to the evidence that children spending time with grandparents have better vocabulary than children in formal childcare (linked to responsiveness) but are less school ready (linked to the learning environment).

The measurement of the quality of informal care has potentially been hampered by attempts to use or adapt the measures developed for various forms of formal childcare. Porter et al (2003) summarise the arguments put forward by themselves and others (eg Collins, 2000; Rice and Mahon, 2001) against using the existing standard measures for assessing the quality of informal childcare. They point to the fact that measures such as the Family Daycare Rating Scale (FDCRS) [75] reflect standards for regulated childcare settings and score factors such as 'learning activities' based on the quantity of materials presented in the home. They also raise issues with the Arnett's Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett)[76], as it measures sensitivity and responsiveness in a way designed for settings in which childcare is provided through a contractual agreement with the parent rather than, as is the case in much informal care through the relationship between the carer and the child and/or its parents. Both of the scales are used in one of more of the studies below.

In the US, Fuller et al (2004) ran a longitudinal study (starting in 1998) of around 900 lone mothers with children aged between a year and three and a half, entering welfare to work programs in five US states. They measured quality of the care provided by informal carers and formal home-based providers using the Arnett Scale; the Child-Caregiver Observation System (C-COS)[77]; and the FDCRS. They found that informal carers (both familial and non-familial) provided care of *lower* quality in *two* respects than the care provided formal home-based providers and the average centre-based care (although there was a lot of variation in quality among the latter). Firstly, they were less highly educated than formal providers. Secondly, the environment that they provided was rated less highly in terms of appropriate learning and play resources. However, the same was not true of the quality of the social interaction between the provider and child, where informal carers did not come out as providing lower quality than formal settings.

Fuller et al's study is interesting substantively, as it provides some evidence that informal carers – on certain measures – provide as good quality childcare as formal providers. However, it also adds further to the methodological discussion around the measurement of quality in informal childcare settings. It highlights the shortcomings of the FDCRS scale for informal carers, with the authors themselves feeling that the measures are not necessarily appropriate for measuring the quality of

[75] Measuring the quality of both the physical environment (eg appropriate learning and play materials) and the nature of the child-caregiver interaction.
[76] This focuses on the character of the social interaction between the child and caregiver, including the caregiver's attentiveness, propensity to reason with the child and affection.
[77] Recording the adult-child verbal and non-verbal interactions over a period of time.

informal care. Moreover, it highlights the difficulties in making comparisons between formal and informal settings using the same scales. Different quality ratings interacted differently in the two types of settings. For instance, they found that, among informal providers, frequency of interactions (as measured in C-COS) was highly related with education level, while this was not true in formal settings.

Shivers (2006) conducted a qualitative study to look at the quality of informal care. Her interest was in the variation within informal care, rather than comparing informal care with formal provision. The qualitative nature of her study and its sample design mean that our interest in it is methodological (how she measure quality) rather than substantive. She argues for the need for informal care to be measured according to the caregiver's quality (eg professional development; sensitivity) rather than process-oriented indices of quality. She focused on providers' professional development backgrounds (education level and specific childcare training), positive care giving and provider sensitivity and environmental quality. She identified three clusters of provider-child engagement, by taking the behaviour of both adult and the children into account: 'defiant/harsh' (with some assumption that defiance leads to harsher discipline styles); 'language play'; 'harsh/talkative'.

Leach et al (2006) sought to compare the quality of provision across different types of formal and informal childcare using an English study, the Family, Children and Child Care Project. Their study is useful as it provides UK evidence on the relative quality of informal and formal provision. Using Arnett's Caregiver Interaction Scale (Arnett[78]), ORCE, HOME, FDCRS and ITERS (the latter for formal care only), plus interviews with caregivers (eg they asked grandparents about outings), they rated the quality of provision of (a) grandparents/other relatives (b) nannies (c) childminders and (d) group childcare. They had a particular focus on childcare provided at 10 months and 18 months. Across all factors, individual formal and informal carers were rated more highly than centre based care on all domains, except punitive behaviour at 10 months. In fact, individual carers, be they formal or informal, had very similar ratings, with interactions between adults and children better among individual carers rather than group care. Where grandparents/other relatives scored less well was in the range of activities they offered, safety and health and (at 18 months) being more punitive (in comparison to childminders).

Dowsett et al (2008) used the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD) to compare the quality of care provided by group formal childcare, individual formal childcare and relatives for two, three and four and a half year old children. They assessed quality in terms of a number of ratings including (a) Observational Ratings of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE) (b) Home observation for the measurement of the environment (HOME) for home-based formal and informal care. As with other studies, they found that informal carers were less educated on average than formal carers and had more traditional views about childrearing. They found that children in centre based care experienced more cognitive stimulation, less frequent negative interactions with adults and watched less television, although, in turn, they had less frequent language interactions with adults. Children in formal care (be it group or individual) had more interactions (both positive and negative) with peers and spent more time unoccupied. So, put in terms of what this means for the quality of informal care, children have more interaction with their adult providers, but a proportion of this is 'negative interaction'. They spend less time unoccupied, but more time watching television. And they spend less time with other children. This latter point links to the

[78] This focuses on the character of the social interaction between the child and caregiver, including the caregiver's attentiveness, propensity to reason with the child and affection.

evidence that children in informal care demonstrated more peer problems than children in formal group care.

There is some evidence that what counts as 'good quality' for a child of one age does not necessarily hold true for all ages. Dowsett et al (2008) point to research using the NICHD SECCYD (eg NICHD ECCRN, 1996, 2000, 2004) which showed that relative care scored higher than other care on positive care giving for children under 3, but by the time children were aged 4.5 it scored less well than formal care on the quality of care overall. Using a score of observed global quality based on the individual scales they had used (see above), Dowsett et al found that relatives scored most highly when children were 2. However by the time they were 4 and half, centre based care scored more highly than formal or informal individual care. There was a similar pattern for cognitive and language interactions, where the older the children got, the better centre care in comparison to individual relative care. The differences in the characteristics of the quality of care were not accounted for by family and child characteristics.

Earlier we mentioned the evidence cited by Belsky et al (2007) from van Ijzendoorn et al (2004) on the negative effects of long hours of non-relative (particularly centre-based) childcare on children's behaviour at 54 months; an association not found with long hours in relative care. They found that the quality of the care provided by relatives was more strongly correlated to academic outcomes than the quality of non-relative care. In other words, this might suggest that ensuring good quality relative care is more important than good quality non-relative care.

Several other US studies provide mixed results, which highlight the volatility of the measured used. Porter et al (2003) summarise some of these. We took two points away from their article which are of relevance to how we might measure quality in the UK context. The first point they made was that when people found significant differences in quality between informal and formal carers, the differences are not large. And the second point is that there may be as much variation across informal carers as between formal and informal care. Given difficulties in coming up with measures that work for both formal and informal care, it might be worth considering the usefulness of a measure of quality within informal care (as measures such as ITERS and ECERS are group-care specific).

8.6 Concluding comments

There are some inconsistencies in the findings across different studies. Nonetheless, we suggest that there is little strong evidence to suggest that children are substantially advantaged *or* disadvantaged by being looked after by their grandparents or other informal childcarers. This applies to both educational outcomes (vocabulary development and school readiness) and socio-emotional outcomes. Where some small associations were found between childcare in the three years of life and outcomes at age 3, these do not appear to last long and were not apparent at age 5. This is a key finding. However, a further very important conclusion that we draw from our review are the gaps in the evidence base that mean that we are unable to understand the full picture. These involve (at least) an ability to take a more nuanced look at the quality of the care given by informal providers; the interaction of different 'packages' of childcare used, and the amount of time spent with different providers; and to account for why different packages affect children in different ways. These are all issues to which we return in Chapter 10.

9 Arguments for and against a role for state financial intervention

9.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses whether there is a role for state financial intervention to support informal childcare.

First, it considers what economic arguments would, in principle, justify any government intervention to encourage (or discourage) the use of informal childcare, and then asks whether the evidence supports or refutes those arguments. Again, it concludes that the existing evidence tells us almost nothing. Second, it reviews proposals that have been put forward by organisations or researchers which would support informal childcare in some way, and assesses their practicality, with particular reference to the fact that most informal childcare is not generally traded in a market.

Ultimately, questions such as "should the state intervene financially to support informal childcare?" should be informed by a cost-benefit analysis which reflects the true long-run cost of any policy intervention, and the true long-run benefits (including consideration of how well the policy would contribute towards a government's social objectives for redistribution or gender equality). Clearly, a similar approach could be taken to evaluating any proposed reform to support informal care, and should be taken were the government to consider seriously any intervention in this area. Such a cost-benefit analysis would need to address all the issues highlighted in this chapter: the extent to which the intended reform would affect childcare use and maternal employment, how children would be affected by the change in the experience of childcare, and how maternal earnings would be affected by the change in employment patterns. These benefits would all need to be compared to the cost of the policy, which would include the cost of providing support to families who would have used informal childcare in the absence of any policy change (commonly referred to as deadweight). In this chapter, though, we limit ourselves to considering, in a loose sense, the strength of the case for government intervention.

9.2 What is the economic justification for intervening to support informal childcare?

HM Treasury's Green Book suggests that there are two parts to assessing the case for government intervention.

The first step is to consider what factors might prevent people's decisions from being the best for themselves and society (this usually starts from the position that people make the best decisions for themselves and for society; note that the concept of "best" can include distributional concerns). This step would lead to a set of arguments which, *in principle*, could justify state intervention.[79] (Note that

[79] From HM Treasury's Green Book: "This underlying rationale [for government intervention] is usually founded either in market failure or where there are clear government distributional objectives that need to

merely establishing that an activity produces large social or economic benefits does not itself give a prior case for government intervention; it may be that, left to their own devices, people would choose the amount of this activity which is optimal for society).

However, the existence of factors preventing people's decisions from being the best for themselves and society does not mean that intervention is always justified, as intervention is likely to incur costs and create distortions, and these have to be set against the realised benefits of any intervention. Of course, these two steps are effectively combined in a full cost-benefit analysis (where the benefits of a proposed interventions are compared to its costs, relative to the status quo). An example of such an analysis is provided by PricewaterhouseCoopers' assessment, for the Daycare Trust and Social Market Foundation, of the costs and benefits of a particular package to support *formal childcare* among pre-school children and to support labour market attachment amongst the mother of pre-school children.[80]

A fully-quantified cost-benefit analysis, though, is an extremely demanding requirement, and it was beyond the scope of this project to undertake one (furthermore, as we set out, many of the things that one would need to know to perform a CBA are unknown). Instead, this section discusses what economic arguments could, in principle, provide a justification for government interventions to support or encourage the use of informal childcare. First, we review what economic arguments could, in principle, provide a justification for government interventions to support or encourage the use of *formal childcare*, and then we consider how well those arguments carry over to *informal childcare*.

9.2.1 What are the common economic justifications given for intervening to support formal childcare?

In this sub-section, we summarise previous studies which have tried to perform the first stage described above when considering the case for intervening to support formal childcare. In other words, researchers have asked "what factors might prevent parent's decisions about the use of formal childcare from being the best for themselves and society?".[81] This is, of course, quite a different issue from assessing the economic and social benefits to the use of formal childcare.

One aspect of government intervention in formal childcare is to try to ensure a minimum standard of care in order to protect children. Assuming such regulation is effective in practice, this is a justifiable intervention given that that the state has a duty to protect children, and given that it is hard for parents to know what the childcarers are actually doing, or what the evidence is about indicators of quality in childcare.

The next set of factors correspond to what an economists call "market failure": if markets fail (in some sense), then it is quite likely that people end up making decisions which are not in society's best interest.

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be met. Market failure refers to where the market has not and cannot of itself be expected to deliver an efficient outcome; the intervention that is contemplated will seek to redress this. Distributional objectives are self-explanatory and are based on equity considerations." HM Treasury (2011), para 3.2.

[80] Daycare Trust (2004). See also PwC (2003).

[81] We draw on Duncan and Giles (1996), Paull and Taylor (2002), Paull (2003) and Blau and Currie (2004).

In principle, there are many ways in which a market can fail. But the usual arguments put forward that might justify state intervention in the formal childcare market on *economic efficiency* grounds include the following:[82]

i. That parents place too little value on the benefits to their children experiencing formal childcare, either through lack of information, or because some of the benefits accrue to society as a whole (ie externalities)
ii. That parents place too little value on the benefits to themselves of being in work, either through lack of information on the potential loss of wages, or because some of the benefits accrue to society as a whole (ie externalities) [83]
iii. That constraints on borrowing prevent families from affording formal childcare even if it provides a positive financial payoff in terms of higher earnings or improved child development in the future

In other words, these arguments revolve around the existence of *externalities*, *information failures*, or *credit constraints* applying to decisions to use formal childcare or decisions about maternal employment. If such market failures exist then, in the absence of state intervention, there would be too little use of formal childcare and too few mothers in work.[84]

An additional argument for financial support for formal childcare would be one based on *distributional* (or *equity*) *concerns*: in other words, that the outcome of an unregulated childcare market would have distributional consequences that society or government wished to avoid. For example, the outcome of a childcare market "free" from government interventions would probably entail children from low-income families using less formal childcare than those from high-income families, have mothers in low-income families doing less paid work than mothers in high-income families, and entail mothers of young children doing less paid work than fathers of young children. A government might choose to support formal childcare if it thought it would help equalise outcomes for children in low-income and high-income families, or equalise opportunities to engage in paid work between low-income and high-income mothers, and between mothers and fathers. Blau and Currie (2004), citing Bergmann (1996), argue that "high quality childcare can be thought of as a 'merit good, something that in our ethical judgement everybody should have, whether or not they are

[82] A case for intervening on *economic efficiency* grounds would exist if there are issues which prevent a market from functioning efficiently or optimally).

[83] Blau and Currie (2004) suggest there may be externalities to having low-income mothers in work if it discourages fertility (and welfare use) amongst other women, and if having a parent in work in itself is beneficial to children. Of course, it is possible that having a parent in work in itself is harmful to children, in which case there could be a negative externality.

[84] Blau and Currie (2004) suggested that a government might also advance the argument that it was cheaper to support childcare for working mothers than pay welfare benefits to non-working mothers, but they concluded that "there is little evidence either for or against the existence of strong enough dynamic links to make means-tested, employment-conditioned, childcare subsidies cost-effective for government." They also suggested that a non-utilitarian government might consider that having people in paid work is a good thing in itself, and this might lead them to support formal childcare as way of encouraging work and discouraging welfare receipt even in the absence of the market failures outlined above.

willing or able to buy it.'" Clearly, a government taking this view would no doubt intervene to encourage the use of formal childcare, perhaps through direct provision.

9.2.2 How well do these arguments for formal childcare carry over to the case for state intervention to support informal childcare?

This section considers how well the arguments outlined above apply to informal childcare.

First, is there a role for government regulation to ensure a minimum quality of informal childcare? Western governments of all persuasions generally intervene in family life only when necessary to protect children. And informal childcare (particularly from relatives) is different from formal childcare in several respects. First, parents will often have a better idea of the quality of care provided by an informal childcare than a formal childcarer[85], and second, as many informal childcarers are connected to the children being cared for in some way, we might be able to assume that an informal childcarer has the child's best interest at heart; the relationship is not just a commercial one. Finally, a concern for privacy and non-intervention in family affairs would suggest that government interference in the quality of informal childcare would be unacceptable to society.

Second, how well do the market failure arguments apply to informal childcare? Such market failures might exist:

i. If parents place too little value on the benefits to their children experiencing informal childcare, either through lack of information, or because some of the benefits accrue to society as a whole (ie externalities)
ii. If constraints on borrowing prevent families from affording informal childcare even if it provides a positive financial payoff in terms of higher earnings or improved child development in the future

Or, as with formal childcare:

iii. If parents place too little value on the benefits to themselves of being in work, either through lack of information on the potential loss of wages, or because some of the benefits accrue to society as a whole (ie externalities)

Our view is that there is very little hard evidence to support or refute these possible arguments, just as there is very little hard evidence to support or refute the existence of market failures in the market for formal childcare. All one can do is decide whether they seem plausible.

On (i), the literature does suggest that informal childcare users place a lot of weight on having a childcarer who has a personal or family connection to the child, and not much weight on the activities which the childcarer and child engage in, but this does not tell us whether they are making the right or wrong choices for their child.[86]

[85] One might argue that the government has an interest in raising the quality of informal childcare if it is less beneficial to children than formal childcare. This is really an argument for encouraging formal childcare.
[86] Duncan et al (2004), Wheelock and Jones (2002), Skinner and Finch (2006).

On (ii), there is no hard evidence to support or refute that an inability to *afford* informal care is a key element in preventing parents from working (or using informal childcare), nor does the literature give any concrete guidance on what would happen were parents to have a greater ability to pay for informal childcare or if providers were able to be remunerated. The evidence is overwhelming (see the Tables 7 to 13 in Appendix 3) that the vast majority of informal childcare –and particularly care provided by grandparents – is not paid for directly. But that does not rule out the idea that *more* informal childcare arrangements might exist were *potential* informal childcarers to be remunerated. We do know a little about how parents' demand for *formal childcare* varies with the price of *formal* childcare, and therefore how it responds to explicit subsidies such as the childcare element of the working tax credit[87]. The literature suggests that, when the price to parents of formal childcare falls, more formal childcare is used, and slightly higher quality formal childcare is used, but there is no consensus on what happens to the use of informal childcare when formal childcare becomes cheaper, in part because many studies have simply assumed that – rather than tested whether – informal and formal childcare are substitutes.[88] And the evidence is entirely lacking on how the demand for informal childcare (let alone formal childcare) would respond to policies to support it directly.

The second step in the Treasury's framework is to consider what would happen (and what would the costs and benefits be) if government did intervene to support informal childcare.

Again, we consider that there is no hard evidence on the extent to which more supply of informal childcarers would be forthcoming if parents were given a greater ability to buy informal childcare. As Chapter 7 discusses, Gray (2005) reports evidence from the Time Use Survey that non-working women aged 45-64 are twice as likely to spend time caring for children in another household than working women in the same age group (although the TUS does not record whether the children being cared for are the respondent's grandchildren, nor does it identify which of these older women

[87] One of the most detailed attempts to do this for the UK is in Paull and Taylor, 2002 (see also Duncan, Paull and Taylor, 2001a&b). They found that the price of formal childcare did affect whether a family used formal childcare for pre-school children, but not for school-aged children, and they found no convincing evidence that the price of childcare was linked to the amount of childcare used amongst childcare users. Some existing papers estimate to what extent use of informal childcare changes when the price of formal childcare changes (Blau and Hagy, 1998, Michalopoulos and Robins, 2000, Powell, 2002), but most empirical studies by economists have assumed that parents are choosing between formal and informal care.

[88] By assuming that parents are choosing between formal and informal care, many studies have adopted the crowding-out hypothesis for formal childcare: in its simplest form, such a hypothesis assumes parents needing childcare have to choose between readily available informal care, and less-readily available (or less affordable) formal childcare. In such a model, a fall in the price of formal care causes a small rise in total childcare use, but a large switch from informal to formal because formal and informal care are (economic) substitutes for each other. Raeymaeckers et al (2008) discuss (and then analyse empirically across EU countries) the alternative crowding-in hypothesis, where a fall in the price of formal childcare leads parents to use *more* of both formal and informal childcare because they are (economic) complements to each other. Drawing on previous authors' arguments, they suggest this could be due to logistical need (parents may need informal carers to provide care before and after formal care, especially when formal care has limited or inflexible opening hours), or by allowing greater specialisation: "it can be argued that extensive formal service support enables families not only to continue or increase formal support , […] but also establishes a framework in which both families and formal services provide the services that they deliver best" (Motel-Klingebeil, 2005, cited in Raeymaeckers et al (2008)).

have grandchildren at all). This might suggest that providing informal childcare and paid work "compete", in some sense, for grandparents' time, and this in turn might suggest that allowing older people to request flexible working could increase the pool of informal childcarers, and that proposals to provide financial support to informal carers could increase the pool of informal childcarers by making it financially more attractive to stop paid work and start providing informal care. [89],[90] But the evidence is by no means conclusive: just because there is a (positive) correlation between (lack of) employment and being an informal childcarer amongst older women in the TUS does not mean that there is a causal link from the former to the latter. For example:

- the higher employment rate might be limited to those older women who are not grandmothers, or to those grandmothers who have no prospect of providing informal care, perhaps through lack of proximity to their grandchildren;
- that grandmothers who work (especially full-time) might have different dispositions from their non-working counterparts and they would not provide informal care even if they were not in employment.
- Similarly, the causation could run from providing informal childcare to paid work (grandmothers work only if they are not required to provide informal care).
- Gray (2005) also reports that (although the underlying source is not clear; p562) that "lower-educated grandparents are more likely to live close to their grandchildren", and lower-educated adults are also less likely to be in work.

And there may be cohort effects here: future grandparents may be more likely to be in work, and to have been in work for more of their working-age lives, than the current cohort of grandparents, and so they may be more influenced by financial considerations. But these are unknowns.

On (iii), there is no hard evidence which would help us assess how maternal employment would respond were there a greater supply of, or greater ability to afford to pay for, informal childcare. Many studies have attempted to estimate to what extent maternal (or parental) employment depends upon the price of formal childcare[91], but few have considered how maternal employment

[89] We argued in Chapter 3 that the upward trend in employment of older men, but particularly older women, must be placing some constraints on the pool of informal childcarers for precisely this reason.

[90] Giving NI credits to informal childcarers would clearly only affect actual or potential informal childcarers who are below the state pension age and not in paid work; it is not clear what fraction of actual or potential childcarers this would apply to.

[91] Brewer and Paull, 2004 summarised methods which could be used to estimate the link between the price of formal childcare and maternal employment and, in doing so, also gave their impression of the state of the literature at that time (drawing on Blau, 2000 and Blau and Currie, 2004, so it should be noted that this reflects the state of the literature at least 6 and perhaps 10 years ago). Anderson and Levine (1999) report that existing studies "do uniformly find a negative relationship between childcare costs and mothers' employment". But, reviewing much the same studies, Blau and Currie (2004) found some of the studies to be more convincing than others, and concluded that: "it is risky to generalize from only three studies, but the fact that the studies that accounted for unpaid child care [ie informal care] in ways consistent with the existence of an informal care option [Ribar (1995), Blau and Hagy (1998), Tekin (2003)] produced small elasticities [of mothers' employment with respect to the price of childcare] suggests that the true elasticity may be small". Overall, the view of Blau and Currie is that maternal employment is not very sensitive to the price of formal childcare (and is certainly less sensitive than the use of formal childcare to the price of formal childcare). There are, though, a number of more recent studies looking at expansions in the availability or reductions in the price of formal childcare in a number of countries, and these have come to conflicting conclusions about the link between the availability and price of formal childcare and maternal employment.

varies with the availability of informal childcare. The few studies which did examine informal childcare assumed that informal and formal care were substitutes, so an increased use of formal care naturally led to a reduced use of informal care, and vice versa; the descriptive information we presented earlier suggests that this is not entirely the case for pre-school children, much less for older children. Of course, economic theory and common sense suggest that maternal employment would rise (and certainly would not fall) if informal care became more available. Though as Brewer and Paull (2004) argue, addressing this question using economic or econometric methods, in the absence of a well-designed and robustly-evaluated policy experiment which affected the availability or price of informal care, poses considerable, perhaps insurmountable, problems.[92]

Third, could distributional or other equity concerns justify intervention to support informal childcare? It is very hard to see that there would be distributional concerns over which children use informal childcare in a world with no government support for informal childcare (although there may be distributional concerns over access to paid work, as argued above). But– in a consideration that is not relevant for formal childcare – it is possible that the government could be concerned about the distributional consequences of the burden placed on informal childcarers, if one chooses to view it as a burden (and the literature gives mixed views on this: see chapter 7). For example, a government might want to view informal childcare as similar to the care provided for a disabled adult or child, the burden of which is recognised through Carer's Allowance. On the other hand, if a government viewed informal childcare as something provided willingly by friends or relatives, then there would be no case for compensating informal childcarers in this way.

Overall, the case for government intervention to support informal childcare is not proven. There is no hard evidence to support or refute many of the arguments which could in principle justify intervention on economic efficiency grounds. Nor does the literature give a strong guidance as to whether informal childcarers are voluntarily offering their services as part of normal family activities, or are feeling burdened (perhaps because both can be true in practice).

9.3 Suggested policies for supporting informal childcare

A number of organisations and individuals have suggested or analysed reforms which would affect decisions about informal childcare. This section reviews these suggestions, focusing on their practicality. But in assessing the practicality of the proposals, a common theme emerges: that informal childcare is not generally traded in a market. We therefore begin this section by discussing the substantial constraints that this places on policies intended to support informal childcare.

9.3.1 How can government interventions financially support something not provided through a market?

Many policies intended to support informal childcare directly look difficult to implement because informal childcare is not generally traded in a market.

[92] These relate to the difficulty of observing, for each family, what informal childcare options are available to them, of what quality, and at what price. As argued elsewhere in this chapter, it does not make sense to think of a market for informal childcare, as each family's options for informal childcare are limited to their network of family and friends, and it is not the case that every potential provider of informal care would be happy to provide care to anyone prepared to pay the market rate.

In an economist's view of a well-functioning market, there are many buyers and many sellers, and these unconnected/unrelated sellers trade freely with any buyer in the market, provided the price is right. It is clear that the way that formal childcare is traded does come close to that ideal: it features providers who offer services at an identifiable price to any consumer who will pay.[93]

But it is not at all clear that there is a market for informal childcare.[94] The fact that most informal childcare is provided without financial remuneration does NOT by itself mean it is not traded in a market.[95] Most informal childcare is provided by people with whom the parent has a relationship (as a friend or relative), and this has two implications:

- someone seeking informal childcare has a limited set of potential "providers", determined by the extent of their network of friends and family.
- someone "providing" informal childcare will most likely be providing that service only to their network of friends and family.

In general, there are advantages to basing entitlement to financial support on information derived from market transactions (such as earnings, rental payments, or spending on formal childcare) because:

- information can be obtained from both parties to the transaction, helping ensure accuracy;
- information will usually be recorded by the parties as a matter of course;
- transactions involve market prices which neither the buyer or seller can influence.[96]

But as there is no market for informal childcare, so there are no identifiable or verifiable market transactions, and where they are, they do not meet the criteria above. The latter two criteria are unlikely to be the case for a typical arrangement of informal care, and the first is much less powerful in the case of informal care because it would be very easy for the consumer and provider to collude to provide false information (or for arbitrarily large amounts to be paid for the informal care) as most informal childcare is provided by family and friends with whom the purchaser has an on-going relationship.

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[93] Ball and Vincent (2005) argue that the market for formal childcare is "peculiar". They argue this is partly because the services being traded are "complex and unusual, with social, moral and emotional components…[t]rust is at a premium, and doubt, anxiety and guilt abound" (p565), and because the choice of childcare is "both very rational and very emotional". And they argue that it is a poorly-functioning market even when assessed on more traditional economic grounds: it is "highly segmented and diverse", with different sorts of providers offering slightly different services, and it is hard to argue that the consumer (ie parents) is sovereign, given that consumers know much less about the product than its suppliers. Furthermore, it is also the case that there are real costs (to parents and children) in moving from provider to provider, meaning parents can be "locked-in" to a particular provider.

[94] We are excluding from informal childcare that childcare which is effectively formal childcare (as provided by childminders or nannies) but organised in an informal way so as to sidestep regulations or evade tax (cash-in-hand/unregulated/informal economy).

[95] It is, of course, the case that each individual family arranging childcare faces a choice of some sort between a variety of formal and informal carers, each with their own (financial or non-financial) price or cost, and each with a different set of characteristics (or "quality"), even if financial considerations play only a small role in this choice. What makes informal childcare a non-market service is that every parent faces a different set of potential informal childcare providers.

[96] This uses the advantages in basing tax liability on market transactions outlined by Slemrod et al (2010).

Overall, then, ***there can never be an easily verifiable record of how much informal childcare has been provided, and at what price***. This is a crucial point: it can leave policies designed to support informal childcare open to abuse through fraudulent claims, which would increase the cost to government, lead to inequities, and perhaps weaken public acceptance. We make reference to this point repeatedly in the rest of this section.

9.3.2 Suggested policies to support informal childcare directly

A number of organisations and individuals have suggested or analysed reforms which would affect decisions about informal childcare. Some have suggested reforms directing support to the informal carers, and others direct support to families with children. These can be thought of, respectively, as policies to boost the supply of (or availability) of informal care, and to boost the demand (or ability to pay) for informal care.

Proposals aimed at informal carers include the following:

1. Changes which influence the availability of informal carers, such as allowing informal carers the right to request flexible working, or perhaps allowing them to count time spent doing informal care as "work" for the purposes of working tax credit.

Proposals aimed at families with children include the following:

2. Extending the childcare element of the working tax credit so that informal care is eligible in addition to formal care[97].
3. Adding an "informal care allowance" to the working tax credit which could be claimed instead of the existing childcare element of the working tax credit [98].

This section reviews these suggestions, focusing on their practicality.

9.3.2.1 Policies to encourage the availability of informal carers

It is argued that one way to encourage informal care would be to direct additional support to those who provide it. For example, from 2011, working-age grandparents will be entitled to a credit towards their National Insurance contributions in the same way as parents, foster carers and carers of disabled adults are if they provide informal childcare to children aged under 12 for 20 hours per week or more. Much more generous variants on this theme would be to allow grandparents

[97] See, for example, Paull (2003). Grandparents Plus argue that "parents should be able to claim childcare tax credits for the childcare that grandparents provide if it enables them to work," but do not suggest how this could be done.
http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/files/Rethinking%20Family%20Life%20Report.pdf.

[98] Wheelock and Jones (2002) suggest a "a small 'grandparenting allowance', say of £3 or £4 per week could provide ... recognition, and would counteract the tendency of CCTC [the childcare tax credit] to downgrade, de-motivate and discourage [informal] childcarers, at the same time underpinning parental choice and intergenerational welfare. " The Conservative Party proposed a similar measure in their 2005 manifesto, as we discuss in the text.

providing informal care to be treated as if they were engaged in self-employment (and without requiring them to be registered childminders), which might allow them to benefit from the working tax credit if they provided sufficient hours of care, or to allow a form of Carer's Allowance to be paid to people providing informal care.

These proposals would require records of who is providing informal care, and potentially for how many hours and for what remuneration. As we argued above, easily verifiable records of this do not exist. This leaves such schemes open to abuse through fraudulent claims, which would increase the cost to government, lead to inequities, and perhaps weaken public acceptance.[99]

A related idea is to give informal carers the right to request flexible working. Such a right would be open to abuse if it were limited to informal carers, because it would be virtually impossible for an employer to verify whether an employee was providing informal care. But one advantage of a general right to request flexible working (perhaps limited to older workers) would be to make it easier to combine informal caring and paid work, thus potentially increasing the availability of informal care.[100]

9.3.2.2 Extending the childcare element of the WTC to informal childcare

Paull (2003) discusses extending the childcare element of the WTC to informal care. She puts forward a number of variants, including:

- A simple extension of the childcare element of the working tax credit so that informal care is eligible. In other words, the tax credit claim form would ask families how much they spent on informal care, and families would be eligible to a refund of some percentage of that, subject to the usual means-test in the working tax credit.
- A variant under which families report only how many hours of informal childcare they are using; this is multiplied by a notional hourly rate, and this notional weekly spending is then subsidised by the childcare element of the working tax credit in the usual way.[101]

She showed that, *at the levels of informal care currently reported by families in the Family Resources Survey*, a straightforward extension to informal care would have little impact on the cost of the childcare element of the working tax credit because so little informal care is currently paid-for (see Tables at end of this chapter), but the cost of her second variant would (unsurprisingly) depend on the notional hourly rate.[102] But, for similar reasons to those outlined by us above, she argues that the existence of either of these schemes would almost certainly alter the amount of informal

[99] Grandparents have to get a healthcare professional to verify a claim for Carer's Credits.
[100] The new Government has pledged to look into the feasibility of this, with a view to extending the right to all employees.
[101] Paull capped the number of hours of childcare at the number of hours the main carer was in paid work. She highlighted two variants for the notional hourly rate, using the average hourly rate currently paid for paid-for informal care, and the average hourly rate currently paid for paid-for formal care, but any rate could be chosen. She also analysed a variant where this rule applied to formal and informal care, but in this report we consider it applying only to informal care.
[102] We are not reporting the costs here, as Paull was considering reforms to the WFTC system in 2002-3.

childcare that was reported to be being used or being paid for.[103] She shows that, without some sort of ceilings on the amount of informal care that could be subsidised, or the notional hourly rate, a direct extension of the childcare element of WTC to informal care would mean "the budget costs of the childcare credit could escalate enormously to well beyond what is likely to be deemed affordable".

Even with such caps, though, any system of subsiding informal care which conditions the support directly on the amount of informal care being used, or the cost of such care, will founder on the problem that there is no easily verifiable records of how much informal childcare is being used. Such arguments would also apply to the idea of an "informal care allowance" in the working tax credit if it took the form of the tax credit claim form asking parents whether they used informal care. Essentially, the government has no way of knowing which families are using informal care, and so it would not be possible to police such a scheme. At the extreme, all families could claim to be using informal childcare, and this would turn an intended direct support for informal childcare into support for all working families. But variants on this idea would be feasible, as we discuss below.

9.3.2.3 An "informal care allowance" which could be claimed instead of the existing childcare element of the WTC

Given that there can be no verifiable method of identifying which families are using informal care, one option is to give notional support for informal childcare to families where all adults work but which are not claiming the childcare element of the WTC. For example, one idea might be to change tax credits so that families with children under 5 where all parents were in work could EITHER claim the childcare element of WTC to rebate their spending on formal childcare in the usual way, OR be treated as if they were spending a notional £50 a week on childcare per child under 5. [104] This would increase tax credit payments to all families currently spending less on formal childcare than £50 per child under 5 (and meeting the work tests and income test for the childcare element of WTC).

Strictly speaking, this policy does not directly support informal care, as the families who would benefit need not be using any informal childcare at all, and could use the extra money in any way they wished.[105] Essentially the policy would increase the amount of support given to working families, and reduce the explicit subsidy for formal childcare. The policy would therefore increase the reward to working at all (for families who would not want to use formal childcare when in work), and reduce the relative attractiveness of using small amounts of formal care (as the marginal cost of using formal care would rise for spending of £50 a week per child under 5 or less). Some parents

[103] She argues that: "The non-market nature of the provision of informal care generates large incentives to expand the cost of this type of care without altering the hours of care. In the informal arrangement, the amount of monetary transfers between the parent and carer may be of no relevance, either because the transfers can be returned in some other way (monetary or non-financial) or because the parent and carer care sufficiently about each other that they effectively operate as one household…Any childcare subsidy for this type of care creates an incentive for both parent and carer to report the greatest possible cost of the care (either through a high hourly cost or through long hours) in order to maximise the amount of the childcare credit that can be shared between them."

[104] This was proposed in the Conservative Party's 2005 general election manifesto (but not the 2010 manifesto).

[105] See Brewer et al (2005).

may, therefore, switch from using small amounts of paid-for formal childcare to informal childcare (the incentive to use free early years' entitlement would be unaffected, though).

This policy and its variants[106] embody a pragmatic approach to identifying which families should be supported for using informal childcare. It can be seen as embodying the view that all families where all adults work and with children aged under 5 need childcare of some kind, so those not using formal childcare must be using informal childcare. However, this assumption will not always be accurate, even for pre-school children. For example, some two-earner couples may arrange their working patterns so that one parent is always available to care for the children. And many users of formal care – who would not receive additional support – also use informal care (see Chapter 4).

A variant to this, which accepts that there can be no verifiable method of identifying which families are using informal care, is to give notional support for informal childcare to families with children regardless of their work status (although perhaps income-related, and perhaps limited to families with children of certain ages). For example, Hakim et al (2008) argued that support for childcare should be linked neither to parental employment nor to formal childcare, and recommended that the existing schemes for subsidising formal childcare should be scrapped and replaced with a rise in child benefit of £50 per family with a child aged under 3[107]. It therefore turns support for informal childcare into general support for parents of young children.

9.3.3 Summary

Policies which try to subsidise informal childcare directly face the problem that there can be no easily verifiable record of which families use informal care, for how long and at what financial cost. This leaves such schemes open to abuse through fraudulent claims, which would increase the cost to government, lead to inequities, and perhaps weaken public acceptance. The same problem confronts those policies which try to support informal childcarers directly, although the government has proposed a mechanism for grandparents who wish to claim Carer's Credit that involves a health-care professional verifying the details of the claim.

The only policy proposed to support informal care that is **not** subject to this criticism is one that supports informal childcare indirectly, for example by increasing (possibly income-related) support for families where all adults work (if support for informal childcare is intended to be only for work-related childcare), or for all parents (if support for informal childcare is intended to be paid regardless of a parent's work status), perhaps limited to children of a certain age.

[106] For example, Wheelock and Jones (2002) suggest a "a small 'grandparenting allowance', say of £3 or £4 per week could provide ... recognition, and would counteract the tendency of CCTC [the childcare tax credit] to downgrade, de-motivate and discourage [informal] childcarers" although it is not clear whether they meant this to be paid in addition to or only instead of the existing CCTC.

[107] The proposal of Hakim et al is quite dramatic: it would substantially increase state financial support directed at the under 3s, but make formal childcare substantially more expensive for working families with children aged 3 or more.

9.4 Concluding comments

A reoccurring theme in this chapter is that we have little or no hard evidence on how informal childcarers and parents would respond were support to be available for informal childcare. It is therefore extremely difficult to decide whether arguments which could in principle justify supporting informal childcare are valid or not. In other words, the case for support to be available for informal childcare is not proven. However, there is also a major practical barrier to supporting informal childcare, which is that most informal childcare arrangements are not conventional market transactions. They do not involve money, and they take place between adults who have a relationship with each other. This means that any policy intended to support informal childcare directly would likely leave itself open to abuse and fraud, as there can never be an easily verifiable record of which families use informal care, for how long and at what financial cost. We recommend that the government (and other funders of research) consider collecting evidence on how informal childcarers and parents might respond if support were available for informal childcare. However, robust evidence might arise only from a carefully design pilot or demonstration.

10 Conclusions

10.1 Reporting on 'informal childcare'

At the start of this review, we commented on the fact that 'informal childcare' encompasses a wide range of childcare. It may most traditionally be equated with grandparental care, followed by regular help from other family members and friends. However, ad hoc and circumstantial acts of reciprocity (for instance, taking turns in collecting children from school) are also forms of 'informal childcare' in its widest sense[108]. So, we set out with the aim of avoiding reporting on 'informal childcare' in its generic sense, but rather to distinguish between different types of care, both in terms of who is providing the care and with what regularity and amount it is given. While we have done this wherever the data or the publications allowed, one key finding is that we were far from being able to achieve our aim.

Even within surveys like the Childcare Survey and MCS which distinguish between the different types of care, once we were looking at a sub-group of the population or a question only asked of certain families, we sometimes needed to aggregate groups of informal childcare providers to have a large enough sample size for analysis. Other studies did not distinguish between groups of informal providers in any detail. Because grandparents make up such a large proportion of all informal childcare provision, it was usually possible to look separately at the childcare they provide. However, the evidence on using other relatives and friends or neighbours is patchy. Our ability to explore regular versus ad hoc use of informal childcare was limited. The Childcare Survey asks about childcare used in a reference term time week so, while accurately recording all childcare use, does not distinguish between regular and ad hoc arrangements. Other studies only record childcare which is regular and/or used for a minimum number of hours each week. So, we can say quite a lot about regular, substantial amounts of care from grandparents or informal childcare more generically; and not very much at all about ad hoc arrangements or reciprocal arrangements between friends and neighbours. This is an important gap in the evidence which helps us understand how parents use informal childcare to 'make things work', juggling home life, school and paid work. Arguably this evidence gap is less important with regards discussions around the impact of different forms of childcare on children's development or the case for funding informal childcare.

10.2 Perspectives of parents, providers and children

A second broad conclusion that we draw from our review is that the vast majority of the evidence comes from the 'demand side' – from perspectives of parents who need or use the childcare. Evidence on who is providing the childcare – the 'supply' - be they grandparents, other relatives or friends and neighbours – is sparse. We have reported nothing on the perspectives of informal childcare providers other than grandparents, and the evidence on the latter is limited and largely attitudinal. What is missing is sufficient robust up-to-date data on the prevalence and profile of grandparents providing childcare to facilitate parents work, including hours of care. Given that the proportion of grandparents in paid work is likely to continue to grow, as is the proportion of

[108] While others may include non-regulated forms of paid childcare such as babysitters and unregistered childminders; or ex-partners, we have excluded these from our definition of informal childcare. This is further discussed in Chapter 2.

grandparents also needing to look after their own parents, it is important to have much better data on the ways that these two activities interact with grandparent childcare in order to look at the sustainability of families' arrangements.

We have also found nothing to report on the views of children towards being looked after by informal childcare providers (or indeed formal providers). There is some work on the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren, but this tends to focus on issues around support (eg during times of stress or divorce) rather than care as such (see Buchanan (2008) and Mooney and Blackburn (2003)). With an increasing amount of choice of childcare for older children, started by the previous government's Extended Services agenda, it would be important to understand what children themselves see as appropriate for their needs. Currently, the key way of looking from the perspectives of children is to measure associations between childcare provision and socio-emotional and educational outcomes.

10.3 Sustainability

The evidence suggests that parents' demand for informal childcare will continue. There are now more working lone parents and more dual earner couple households than there were a decade ago. Despite a large increase in the number of formal childcare places and improved financial support towards childcare costs, many parents decide to use various types of informal childcare and the past decade has seen no decline in the numbers of families using informal childcare. The evidence about why this is the case is not conclusive, and is an area that should be further explored. Certainly, many parents see shortcomings in the current formal childcare market, and point to issues such as affordability, reliability and flexibility when explaining their decision to use informal childcare. Plus, many parents are using informal childcare alongside formal provision and this may be a result of the free part-time early years provision was introduced towards the end of the 1990s. However, the extent to which these factors take *precedence* over parental preference for the type of care that informal childcare providers can offer is not clear. 'Trust', 'love', 'a home environment' are all common themes in parents' discussions around informal childcare – all factors unconnected to what is available from the formal childcare market. So, from the 'demand side' the use of informal childcare looks to be sustainable.

Piecing together the patchy evidence around the availability or 'supply' of grandparental care (there was no evidence around other types of informal childcare), we would suggest that it is likely that parents' demand for grandparental childcare is sustainable. We surmise that various demographic changes in the grandparent population have worked together to maintain the availability of grandparents are childcare providers. Although predictions for the future are less clear, it seems unlikely that there will be sudden changes in the numbers of grandparents willing and available to help.

10.4 Heterogeneity

In the same way that commentators talk about 'informal childcare' in generic terms, so they talk in homogeneous terms about families who use informal childcare. Given there is plenty of evidence around the affordability of formal childcare, there is often an assumption that informal childcare is chosen as a low or no cost option and, in turn, that it is therefore the choice of lower income families. This is not the case and it is important to recognise that families using informal childcare are a heterogeneous group drawn from families with children of all ages, socio-economic groups and

maternal education levels. That said, there is a greater propensity for families in lower socio-economic groups (measured via income, socio-economic group or maternal education) to use informal childcare.

The implication of this is that parents do not (solely) choose informal childcare because it is low or no cost. Nor do they only use it because they have no other options open to them. The amount of heterogeneity also means that it is important to take account of this when discussing the type of care that informal childcare providers – particularly grandparents - can offer children. 'Children with grandparents' cannot be directly compared with 'children with childminders', 'children in day nurseries' and so on. We need to take account of the socio-economic backgrounds of the children – and of their grandparents. Moreover, it is worth us considering the usefulness or effect of different models of funding grandparental care, depending on the extent to which cost was a driver to using informal childcare and/or parents had the ability to pay.

10.5 Packages of childcare

The evidence we report highlights the role that different types of informal childcare plays in combination with early years provision, school and formal childcare, as well how some families use a combination of informal childcare providers. Often parents are not choosing between 'informal' or 'formal' care, but fitting together a complex jigsaw to meet the families' needs – either those of their own working patterns or the needs of children giving them a variety or 'package' of care. For some, these arrangements will be necessary; for others preferred, mixing an educational element of early years provision with a home environment provided by grandparents. To some extent, changes in formal childcare provision (largely free early years provision) have increased the likelihood or need for parents to find combinations of care. While recent years has seen a growth in the provision of out of school clubs, still, informal childcare (be it grandparents or friends and neighbours) play a key childcare role for children of all ages well into the teenage years.

10.6 Informal childcare: a 'good thing' for young children?

There is a body of evidence showing the benefits of formal early years provision on young children, especially those from 'disadvantaged' backgrounds. Much less research has been done on the associations between spending time with different informal providers (or indeed a combination of formal and informal care) and children's socio-emotional or educational development. Among the limited evidence available, there are some inconsistencies in the findings. Nonetheless, we suggest that there is little evidence to suggest that children are substantially advantaged or disadvantaged by being looked after by their grandparents or other informal childcarers. We should also be mindful of the fact that families' decisions around how to organise their lives and what they feel is in the 'best interests' of their children are determined by a much wider set of factors than government policies (eg around childcare, around paid work) that influence them. To a certain extent, the success of such policies will be determined by the complex interplay of these wider factors.

Within the research on formal childcare, we know that the quality of the provision is key to whether it is associated with good outcomes for young children. The literature highlights the need for more work to be done on how one might measure and assess the quality of informal childcare, and make meaningful comparisons within and across informal and formal provider types.

10.7 A role for state funding

We have little or no hard evidence on how informal childcarers and parents would react were support to be available for informal childcare, and therefore it is extremely difficult to decide whether arguments which could in principle justify supporting informal childcare are valid or not: the case for support to be available for informal childcare is, therefore, not proven. However, there is also a major practical barrier to supporting informal childcare, which is that most informal childcare arrangements are not conventional market transactions –they do not involve money, and they take place between adults who have a relationship with each other – and this means that any policy intended to support informal childcare directly would likely leave itself open to abuse and fraud, as there can never be an easily verifiable record of which families use informal care, for how long and at what financial cost.

10.8 Recommendations for future research

During the course of compiling the evidence for this review, some clear gaps in the research evidence have emerged. In a good number of places, further research would be valuable to add to or corroborate the conclusions that we have drawn on the available evidence. However, given limited research funds, some thought is needed about the relative priorities for any future work. So, in this final section, we have attempted to do just that. We have given particular weight to areas where further evidence may be most likely to have direct input into government policies related to parental work and to childcare, be it formal or informal.

The following sub-sections discuss our suggestions for future research, in what we view as a rough order of priority.

10.8.1 Further understanding children's outcomes related to informal childcare

Given many families continue, and are set to continue, to use informal childcare, we should seek to understand better the effect of different childcare situations on different types of children. Such evidence could direct policy makers, providers and parents about why might work best and for whom. It would also open up a discussion about the quality of various forms of care, and what might usefully be done to maximise the quality of the informal childcare which is provided. What is lacking from the available evidence is a nuanced look at the interaction of different forms of childcare (eg the combined effect of grandparents and group care); and an ability to fully take account of the amount of time that children spend with different providers. Having survey data which would provide both of these would be important in order to test the effect of 'real life' patterns of childcare that many children of working parents find themselves in.

A further important question in this area is whether children's childcare arrangements affect all children in the same way. All of these studies on which we report take account of some of the more concrete and measurable differences between children receiving different forms of care. To a certain extent, they take account of family characteristics in order to see whether the picture varies from children of different backgrounds. However, using US data from the NICHD SECC study, Pluess and Belsky (2009) identified a differential susceptibility to childcare quality among pre-school children manifesting high levels of negative emotionality, showing both more behaviour problems if

in low quality childcare and fewer in high quality childcare. Examining this issue within a UK context – and what variation there is within informal care – would be of huge benefit to trying to understand the results in Chapter 8. Given complementary evidence about the interaction between negative emotionality and parenting (cited in paper, Belsky 2005), we might surmise a similar relationship with informal childcare.

Thirdly, more needs to be done to measure the quality of the care provided by grandparents. Several studies show that, in the case of formal childcare, there is a clear relationship between the quality of care and better cognitive outcomes for children, although the evidence regarding socio-emotional outcomes is more mixed. But we simply know too little about quality of informal childcare provision to know if there is a similar, or similar sized, effect. There is a limited body of literature that discusses potential ways of measuring quality. However, they highlight the complexity of the task, in particular how to develop measures that would allow for meaningful comparisons between different types of formal and informal providers. There would be scope to develop some of the work done in the US on these issues. We might also usefully consider whether measures such as those used for the Home Learning Environment (eg as used in Speight et al, 2010) could be adapted to measure what grandparents (or other informal providers) do with children. Folbre et al (2005) advocate the role of a child-centred Time Use Survey which takes account of the activities and time that children spend with grandparents as well as parents, one which uses more nuanced measures (than other time use surveys) of what adults do with children. This would help to understand the information on outcomes and provide some data to measure the quality of grandparent:grandchild interactions.

In the US, in recognition that so many families rely on informal care, a number of initiatives have been developed in different US States to train informal carers in how to engage the children in their care and develop them educationally and socio-emotionally. For instance, the Child Care Development Fund, the federal child care program, requires states to incorporate training for 'kith and kin' caregivers in their professional development plans. Within the UK, organisations such as Grandparents Plus have called for more support for grandparent carers in this respect (Grandparents Plus 2009).

10.8.2 A robust examination of the choices that parents make in terms of the types and combinations of childcare

There is clearly a role for collecting additional evidence on parents' choices about childcare, including choices that might be less about trade-offs and more a positive preference for a mixed portfolio of care. Without this, it is hard to understand parents' decision-making processes and the extent to which policies around, say, the affordability or quality of childcare provision will affect parental choice. However, as we raised in Chapter 6, collecting robust evidence on these choices is by no means straightforward. We do not know what options individual parents have open to them. Moreover, we do not know much about the attributes of those options which are in parents' choices sets. For formal childcare, we can measure the price and Ofsted rating, but not other attributes which parents clearly care about, such as location and opening hours. And we can measure very little about informal childcare. This means that traditional economic analysis of choices is limited in its usefulness[109]. One option would be to capture parents' views before, or at least during, the

[109] These are the same underlying reasons why it is so hard to learn about the link between the price of formal childcare and its use, and maternal employment.

decision-making process. We might usefully draw on a study by Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (2000) in the US which involved interviewing employed women before and after the birth of their first child, in an attempt to avoid the methodological difficulties of asking mothers to provide retrospective information on their decisions about childcare. However, we do wonder whether even asking about childcare issues pre-birth that attitudes will be affected by the constraints that mothers know will exist later.

Another potential approach is the one taken in a recent study looking at how to quantitatively collect data on lone parents' decision-making regarding barriers to paid work in a way that reflected the complexities of decision-making involved (De Souza et al, 2008). In order to provide respondents with the opportunity to reflect on the relative importance of different issues, they were given a series of cards (the content of which was the result of prior qualitative work) and asked to sort them into one of three piles, which reflected the importance in the decision-making process. It allowed respondents to consider factors jointly and spend time thinking about relative priorities. The data were analysed using Latent Class Analysis enabling respondents to be grouped according to a combination of their underlying attitudes to work and their socio-demographics. It would be a useful exercise to repeat in terms of what parents' choices and constraints that they have when organising childcare.

10.8.3 Collecting robust survey data on the prevalence and profile of grandparents providing childcare while parents work

Given the discussion and debate about the sustainability of grandparental childcare, a key but simple addition to the evidence base would be to add questions to some of the large surveys to enable researchers to identify people who have dependent grandchildren (and, ideally, with data on the children's ages, and whether the grandchildren are related to the grandparents through the children's mother or father). The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), which already asks whether older people have grandchildren or great-grandchildren, is a key candidate for doing this. These surveys could also include some simple questions around whether people look after their grandchildren while the children's parents are at work or studying, in order to build up a profile of grandparent childcare providers, and link this to whether they are working or have other caring responsibilities. Depending on the available space, the questions could be kept quite simple or include more detail on hours, location, wraparound provision and activities.

Building on this idea (but potentially not as essential) would be work that looked more specifically at the inter-relation between the needs and views of and constraints faced by the different generations – children, parents, grandparents and, in turn, their parents. So a study which involved all generations would add hugely to the evidence base. This could build on the design of the 1998 British Social Attitudes module, but interviewing a number of generations from one family, regardless of the household they lived in. One way of doing this might be to seek consent to interview relatives of sample members of Understanding Society.

There is also scope for research that would provide a greater understanding of the decisions that grandparents make balancing their different roles, in order to add to the evidence base about the sustainability of their care. The method of questioning might be similar to that discussed on parental

choice. In the US[110], Baydar and Brooks-Gunn (1998) came up with a typology of grandmothers using cluster analysis, which would be interesting to replicate if there were the available UK data. Taking account of socio-demographics, well-being, employment status and levels of social participation, they categorised grandmothers into 'homemakers' (the most likely group to regularly look after their grandchildren), 'young and connected' (likely to be working and look after grandchildren), 'remote' and 'frail' (with these latter groups unlikely to be looking after grandchildren. Obviously, any more detailed work of this kind would be a much more ambitious enterprise, and potentially of lower priority than the demographic profiling.

10.8.4 Understanding how and why informal childcare plugs gaps in formal childcare provision

Although the number of formal childcare places has increased a lot since the start of the National Childcare Strategy, and the number of children with informal providers has also risen, the research evidence suggests that there are shortfalls in provision for particular groups of children. Here, we are thinking particularly about childcare during non-standard working hours and school holidays; and childcare for disabled children or children with SEN. We suggest that there is a role for research which focuses on whether formal or informal childcare is best placed to plug the gaps in the current provision for these groups or times. And then, if the answer is informal childcare, whether any government support should be made available to help this. For instance, it is quite possible that further research into the childcare needs of parents working at the weekends and in the evenings might conclude that informal childcare providers are best placed to do this. Then, given they are fulfilling a role that formal childcare does/cannot, should this affect discussions about whether such care should be eligible for childcare subsidies?

There are a number of ways that these issues could be researched. Further analysis to understand the role that informal childcare does and could play will be possible using 2009 Childcare Survey and data from the DCATCH evaluation. The latter will provide some indication of how improved access to formal childcare might change the role of informal childcare providers. There is also the potential to combine data from a number of waves of the Childcare Survey in order to increase the sample sizes of some smaller sub-groups. This exercise would give more precise figures on prevalence than are available from only a single wave. However, this assumes that there are no substantial changes in trends over the waves that are combined. Plus, this would not overcome the difficulties of using a generic survey on childcare use to understand the particular needs of some of these groups. This might involve adding modules of questions to surveys such as the Childcare Survey or surveys of families in these particular groups. The latter have significant cost implications and, potentially, complicated sampling strategies.

[110] We do not report on the survey findings themselves, as (i) we cannot extrapolate from the US context on prevalence and profile and (ii) the survey was carried out in the 1980s.

Appendix 1: References

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Appendix 2: Selection criteria

We have used different selection criteria according to the data on which the report or article was based – policy documents used for background and context; statistical studies using survey data and quantitative methods of analysis; qualitative studies based on non-random samples.

These criteria provided us with a strong indication of the quality of the evidence available to us. However, selecting in this way is not an exact science. Moreover, sometimes not all this information was available to us. Where we have included studies which do not entirely fit these criteria, we have highlighted this in the text. There were occasions where we decided that, despite some shortcomings in the design or analysis, that there were sufficient strong points to include them in the review.

Policy documents

- Relevant to issues around informal childcare (ie childcare; parental work; older people's work)
- Produced since introduction of the National Childcare Strategy in 1998

Research based on quantitative studies

- Random or random probability sampling
- Clear open reporting of methodology
- Decent response rate and, where appropriate, data adjusted for response bias
- Where appropriate, using validated tools, the choice of which is justified
- Unbiased structured questions, ideally with full question wording and scale cited during reporting
- Reporting only on statistically significant differences
- Testing of association between variables of interest to control for possible confounders

Research based on qualitative studies

- Well grounded in the literature
- Clear open reporting of methodology
- Purposive sampling (ie not convenience), with sufficient numbers for sub-group analysis
- Open (non-directive) questioning
- Thoroughness of analysis appropriate to qualitative data (cross analysis, triangulation, inclusion of atypical cases, not attempting to quantify)

Time period

In the main, we concentrate on work produced in the last 12 years, given the radical shift in policy and provision around formal childcare, maternity provision and family friendly working arrangements have changed in this time. However, on occasion, where a study is highly relevant and its findings not intrinsically linked with the availability of these arrangements, we have included it in the review.

Evidence from outside the UK

Our review includes only work published in English. Some issues in the review are clearly linked to the particular cultural, societal or policy context of the UK (and sometimes just of England). These

include how families use informal childcare alongside school and paid work; how grandparents combine childcare responsibilities with other caring roles and/or their own paid work. On these issues, we restrict the review to evidence from the UK. On other issues, it is appropriate to draw on evidence from outside the UK. Evidence on the association between type and quality of care and children's educational and socio-emotional development is an example. In most but not all cases, our non-UK evidence comes from the US. At the start of each chapter, we explain and justify whether or not it includes evidence from outside the UK.

Appendix 3: Additional tables for chapter 6 and 9

Chapter 6

Table 1 Reasons for choosing main formal provider, 2008

Base: selected child uses formal provider for work related reasons

	Age	
	Pre-school	School-age
Reason	%	%
Cost	**24**	**21**
I could not afford to pay for formal care	3	3
It was low cost	9	12
Employer subsidises childcare	5	*
Could receive help through tax credits	10	9
Professionalism/reputation	**82**	**63**
Wanted someone properly trained	52	35
Wanted child to be educated	49	19
Had a good reputation	60	40
Recommended	32	19
Provider's caring role	**56**	**54**
Someone who would show child affection	24	15
Would bring up child way I would	20	16
Wanted child looked after at home	5	12
Wanted someone could trust	50	48
Convenience	**79**	**77**
Easy to get to	46	42
Sibling go there	24	19
Fitted working hours	40	47
Wanted reliable care	46	49
Wanted child to mix with other children	**59**	**34**
Other reason	**7**	**13**
No other choice	**1**	**7**
Weighted base	*613*	*567*
Unweighted base	*800*	*489*

%s sum to more than 100% as respondents could choose more than one reason

Table 2 Main reason for choosing main formal provider, 2008

Base: selected child uses formal provider for work related reasons

	Age	
	Pre-school	School-age
Reason	%	%
Cost		
I could not afford to pay for formal care	*	0
It was low cost	1	1
Could receive help through tax credits	1	0
Professionalism/reputation		
Wanted someone properly trained	9	6
Wanted child to be educated	10	5
Had a good reputation	14	7
Recommended	7	5
Provider's caring role		
Someone who would show child affection	1	1
Would bring up child way I would	3	1
Wanted child looked after at home	1	2
Trust in provider	20	25
Convenience		
Easy to get to	6	7
Sibling go there	5	2
Fitted working hours	8	12
Wanted reliable care	3	8
Wanted child to mix with other children	**6**	**3**
Other reason	**5**	**11**
No other choice	*****	**3**
Weighted base	*610*	*565*
Unweighted base	*798*	*487*

Table 3 Reasons for choosing main informal provider, 2008

Base: selected child uses informal provider for work related reasons (and for whom informal provider is main childcare provider)

	Age	
	Pre-school	School-age
Reason	%	%
Cost	**51**	**41**
I could not afford to pay for formal care	37	26
It was low cost	22	21
Professionalism/reputation	**10**	**9**
Wanted someone properly trained	2	1
Wanted child to be educated	6	3
Had a good reputation	4	5
Recommended	0	1
Provider's caring role	**93**	**87**
Someone who would show child affection	64	44
Would bring up child way I would	60	46
Wanted child looked after at home	35	32
Trust in provider	86	80
Convenience	**65**	**65**
Easy to get to	27	28
Sibling go there	7	17
Fitted working hours	37	36
Wanted reliable care	42	48
Wanted child to mix with other children	6	6
Other reason	6	9
No other choice	3	5
Weighted base	*138*	*441*
Unweighted base	*157*	*392*

%s sum to more than 100% as respondents could choose more than one reason

Table 4 Main reason for choosing main informal provider, 2008

Base: selected child uses informal provider for work related reasons (and for whom informal provider is main childcare provider)

	Age	
	Pre-school	School-age
Reason	%	%
Cost		
I could not afford to pay for formal care	33	22
It was low cost	11	10
Professionalism/reputation		
Wanted someone properly trained	0	0
Wanted child to be educated	0	0
Had a good reputation	0	0
Recommended	0	0
Provider's caring role		
Someone who would show child affection	3	4
Would bring up child way I would	4	2
Wanted child looked after at home	1	3
Trust in provider	44	51
Convenience		
Easy to get to	0	1
Sibling go there	0	*
Fitted working hours	2	2
Wanted reliable care	2	2
Wanted child to mix with other children	0	0
No other choice	1	1
Other	0	3
Weighted base	*138*	*441*
Unweighted base	*157*	*392*

Table 5 Reasons for choosing main provider by provider type, 2008

Base: selected child uses provider type for work related reasons

Reason	Grandparents %	Early years provider %	Individual provider %	Out of school club %
Cost	**48**	**23**	**28**	**19**
I could not afford to pay for formal care	32	3	4	2
It was low cost	23	8	14	13
Employer subsidises childcare	-	5	1	1
Could receive help through tax credits	-	10	13	7
Professionalism/reputation	**10**	**85**	**65**	**61**
Wanted someone properly trained	1	51	45	34
Wanted child to be educated	4	54	13	20
Had a good reputation	6	63	38	41
Recommended	1	31	32	14
Provider's caring role	**91**	**50**	**80**	**44**
Someone who would show child affection	57	19	42	5
Would bring up child way I would	58	16	39	8
Wanted child looked after at home	33	2	32	1
Wanted someone could trust	85	44	71	42
Convenience	**68**	**79**	**83**	**77**
Easy to get to	30	47	41	46
Sibling go there	17	25	19	18
Fitted working hours	39	37	50	51
Wanted reliable care	50	46	52	50
Wanted child to mix with other children	**3**	**60**	**37**	**34**
Other reason	**6**	**7**	**7**	**16**
No other choice	**4**	**2**	**4**	**7**
Weighted base	*393*	*531*	*267*	*342*
Unweighted base	*381*	*678*	*264*	*298*

Table 6 Childcare packages used in term time, by age of children in household

Base: all families with school-age children and using childcare for work related reasons during term time

Childcare package	5 to 7+ %	8 to 11 %	12 to 14 %
Informal only	**31**	**44**	**58**
Grandparent only	20	23	25
Other relative only	1	3	14
Friend/neighbour only	3	4	4
Sibling only	4	7	6
Grandparent + other informal	3	6	6
Other mix informal	1	2	3
Formal + Informal	**24**	**19**	**13**
Centre based + Grandparents	8	2	1
Individual + Grandparents	2	2	1
Out of school club + Grandparents	4	7	5
Other mix formal + informal	10	9	6
Formal only	**43**	**34**	**27**
Centre based only	12	4	4
Individual only	8	10	5
Out of school only	11	15	15
Centre based + Individual	4	1	1
Out of School + Individual	2	3	1
Other mix formal	6	2	1
Other	**2**	**3**	**3**
Weighted base	*856*	*962*	*563*
Unweighted base	*1081*	*1051*	*595*

+ Includes 4 year olds who are attending school full time/part time

Chapter 9

Table 7 Whether pay for informal care, 2008

Base: all families using provider for work related reasons

Provider	%	Unweighted Base
Any Informal	10	*1451*
Grandparents	8	*1080*
Sibling	10	*126*
Other relative	8	*200*
Friend or neighbour	15	*249*

Table 8 Whether pay for informal care, by family type

Base: all families using provider for work related reasons

	Couple		Lone parent	
Provider	%	Unwtd base	%	Unwtd base
Any informal	10	*1129*	10	*322*
Grandparents	8	*856*	7	*224*

Table 9 Whether pay for informal care, by children's age

Base: all families using provider for work related reasons

	Pre-school		School-age	
Provider	%	Unwtd base	%	Unwtd base
Any informal	11	*782*	9	*1078*
Grandparents	10	*657*	6	*754*

Table 10 Whether pay for informal care, by household income

Base: all families using provider for work related reasons

	<20K		20K+	
Provider	%	Unwtd base	%	Unwtd base
Any informal	9	*277*	11	*1091*
Grandparents	5	*193*	9	*818*

Table 11 What paid informal provider for, 2008

Base: all families using provider for work related reasons *Survey*

	Informal provider type				
What paid for	Any %	Grandparents %	Sibling %	Other relative %	Friend or neighbour %
Education fees/wages	*	*	0	*	1
Childcare fees/wages	5	3	3	7	10
Refreshments	3	2	4	1	4
Use of equipment	*	*	0	0	1
Travel	2	2	2	*	1
Trips/outings	2	1	4	*	4
Other	7	5	4	7	11
Weighted base	*1542*	*1101*	*175*	*225*	*257*
Unweighted base	*1451*	*1079*	*125*	*198*	*249*

Table 12 Whether pay informal provider in kind, 2008

Base: all families using provider for work related reasons *Survey*

	Informal provider type				
Benefits in kind	Any %	Grandparents %	Sibling %	Other relative %	Friend or neighbour %
Look after carer's children in return	15	2	7	25	49
Do favour	21	20	13	16	20
Gifts	36	39	33	27	16
Other	1	1	*	*	1
None	51	51	55	48	32
Weighted base	*1542*	*1101*	*175*	*225*	*257*
Unweighted base	*1451*	*1079*	*125*	*198*	*249*

Table 13 Informal care and payments-in-kind (users of informal care for economic reasons) Type of care and form of in-kind payment (if any)	Percentage reporting this sort of payment
1 Grandparents: looked after their children (as payment in kind)	2
2 Grandparents: did favour (as payment in kind)	20
3 Grandparents: gave gift/ treat (as payment in kind)	38
4 Grandparents: no nothing (as payment in kind)	50
5 Grandparents: something else (as payment in kind)	1
6 None	
Unweighted base	1156
Weighted base	1178
1 Siblings: looked after their children (as payment in kind)	6
2 Siblings: did favour (as payment in kind)	12
3 Siblings: gave gift/ treat (as payment in kind)	33
4 Siblings: no nothing (as payment in kind)	54
5 Siblings: something else (as payment in kind)	0
6 None	
Unweighted base	137
Weighted base	187
1 Other relatives: looked after their children (as payment in kind)	25
2 Other relatives: did favour (as payment in kind)	15
3 Other relatives: gave gift/ treat (as payment in kind)	27
4 Other relatives: no nothing (as payment in kind)	45
5 Other relatives: something else (as payment in kind)	0
6 None	
Unweighted base	222
Weighted base	249
1 Friends/neighbours: looked after their children (as payment in kind)	49
2 Friends/neighbours: did favour (as payment in kind)	20
3 Friends/neighbours: gave gift/ treat (as payment in kind)	15
4 Friends/neighbours: no nothing (as payment in kind)	32
5 Friends/neighbours: something else (as payment in kind)	1
6 None	
Unweighted base	269
Weighted base	279