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## Increasing employment of partnered mothers: changes in child care use

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### Abstract

Women's employment has changed significantly over the 1980s and 1990s: mothers of young children are more likely to be employed and a high rate of part-time work amongst these women has resulted in a large increase in the number of women working part-time. The increased employment of partnered mothers, especially those with young children, shows that more women are finding ways of fitting work around the care of their children. This is likely to be at least partially due to the increased availability of formal child care over this period. Australian Bureau of Statistics Child Care Survey unit record files from 1984, 1993, 1996 and 1999 have been used to explore how child care patterns have changed in the 1980s and 1990s, linking those changes to the changing employment of women. As expected this analysis finds there are large difference in care arrangements according to age of youngest child and mother's working hours. Also, it is evident that while the growth in employment has been associated with a higher use of formal child care, it has also been associated with significant growth in the use of informal care, and the sustained use of no care by families which are able to manage their child care arrangements solely within the home.

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# 1 Introduction

Women's employment has changed significantly over the 1980s and 1990s – mothers of young children are more likely to be employed and a high rate of part-time work amongst these women has resulted in a large increase in the number of women working part-time. The increased employment of partnered mothers, especially those with young children, shows that more women are finding ways of fitting work around the care of their children. In part this may be due to the larger number of women in part-time jobs, but it is also likely to be at least partially due to the increased availability of child care. This chapter investigates how child care use has changed over this period, and what care arrangements working mothers are using for their children.

The focus in this analysis is on working mothers, but it is important to recognise that child care arrangements are the responsibility of both parents, not just the mother. Because it is more likely to be the mother's employment that is affected by having children, as show elsewhere in this thesis, it makes sense to question how the child care arrangements used by the family are associated with the mother's employment. In this paper I do not consider the child care arrangements used in single-parent families, simply because the aim of the analysis is to relate child care use to the increasing employment of partnered mothers. The child care patterns of single parents would be an interesting topic for further analysis.

This analysis, then, seeks to understand how child care patterns have changed, and also seeks to link that to the changing employment of women. Before presenting the statistical information, the following sections provide background to the subject. First, the next section reviews the international and Australian literature on the relationship between child care and female employment. This is following by an overview of how the formal child care program has developed in Australia over the period since the 1970s. The final sections present a summary of how child care patterns have changed, and then analysis of the association between child care and employment.

## 2 Background

While this analysis does not seek to determine to what extent changing availability and cost of child care are causally related to the increasing employment of mothers, it is useful, for background, to review the literature on this subject. Intuitively one would think that an increase in the availability of affordable child care places would lead to an increase the number of working mothers. Further, the cost of care may be an issue in making decisions about whether or not to work, and how many hours to work, for those women that need to rely on paid child care. When the cost of care is higher, the take-home pay is reduced, for some making it no longer cost-effective to work. We might expect some women in these situations to withdraw from work or reduce their hours of paid child care in order to minimise their costs. While subsidies aim to bring the costs of care down somewhat, these costs can still remain a significant proportion of family income. As quality increases and social acceptance of child care increases we can also expect a positive effect on employment.

In reality, the relationship between availability, affordability and quality is only relevant to the employment decision when considered at the local level. To complicate it further, the availability of alternative forms of care is a factor at the individual level (Redmond, 1999) – the availability of a family member or friend who may be willing to care for children for free or at a lower cost could be a major workforce incentive. It is possible, also, that as high quality formal care becomes more available or affordable, it could be those women already using care, whether informal or another type of formal care, who will take up the newly available formal care places, resulting in no net increase in the number of women working (Jaumotte, 2003).

A great body of international literature supports the relationship between the availability or cost of child care and labour supply (as reviewed in Gauthier, 2001; Powell, 1998). Mason and Kuhlthau (1992) found that problems with child care (lack of availability or affordability) led to reductions in the supply of female labour, either by not working altogether or by reducing hours of work. Powell (1998) also found that higher child care costs affect the labour supply decision negatively, much more-so for full-time employment. On the other hand, other studies have demonstrated that the relationship between child care and female labour supply can be quite weak, as reviewed in Cobb-Clark (1999).

The evidence of the relationship between child care availability or affordability and labour force participation in Australia is inconclusive. Gregory (1999) and Goward (1998) observe that there is no evidence of a positive relationship between child care availability and employment, referring to the labour force statistics which showed no increase in female employment in a time of growth in child care places (Gregory, 1999) and no reduction in employment of mothers of young children in a time of decreased affordability (Goward, 1998). Gregory concludes that growth in child care appears to have gone to non-employed women, or women substituting another form of child care for care in long day care centres. However, given the rise in the number of places was occurring at the same time as decreasing affordability, a positive effect of increased places may have been cancelled out by the negative effect of decreased affordability, resulting in no net impact on employment.

The view that worsening affordability was affecting labour supply was expressed in submissions to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee for the Review of Child Care Funding in 1998. These submissions gave evidence of women reducing hours or withdrawing from work because of the high cost of care (see SCARC, 1998).

Corbett examined the issue of child care and female employment in a study in which she modelled aggregate female employment data against other aggregate data, including expenditure on child care. Her results showed that child care expenditure was an important determinant of female employment, and she concluded that this provided evidence that increases in child care supply were necessary for increased female employment, rather than increases in child care supply being a result of increased female employment (Corbett, 1993).

Analyses of 1980s child care data by Teal resulted in a finding that child care costs were important in a labour force participation model, with higher costs being associated with a lower likelihood of participation, however, the effect was small. As Teal states “Most of the change in participation that occurs as the child ages from birth to four years is due to the different valuation the mother places on her time with the child as the child ages” (Teal, 1992). Similarly, Teal finds that “the hours of work rise as the price of child care falls but this effect is small relative to the child effects...a complete elimination of child care costs would still leave the woman a part-time, rather than a full-time, worker” (Teal, 1992).

Countering this is an analysis of reasons for not using child care by Cobb-Clark, Liu and Mitchell (1999). They found that child care costs were not a major barrier to participation, but were perhaps an important factor in deciding between different types of child care – that is, formal versus informal care (Cobb-Clark et al., 1999).

The data used in this analysis are not sufficiently detailed to completely resolve the issues around the causal relationship between child care availability, costs and female employment. However, they are used to describe how child care use has changed, relating that to changes in employment. The role of the expansion of the formal child care program, as described in the next section, will be examined in this analysis.

## **3 Use of Child Care in Australia**

### **3.1 Introduction**

What forms of child care are families in Australia using to enable the participation in employment by both parents? While some parents do this through managing their working hours to ensure one parent is always available to care for children (see later in this paper), many do this through the use of non-parental child care arrangements.

Of course, school provides a form of universal care once children reach school-age, but for couples in which both parents work full-time additional care can be required after and/or before school hours. Parents of children attending preschool are in a similar, although worse, situation, with most preschool sessions running for only three half days a week. Preschool on its own is not usually sufficient to enable the employment of the mother (Corbett, 1993). In addition, parents who work while their children are in school or preschool also need to have arrangements in place for care during school holidays.

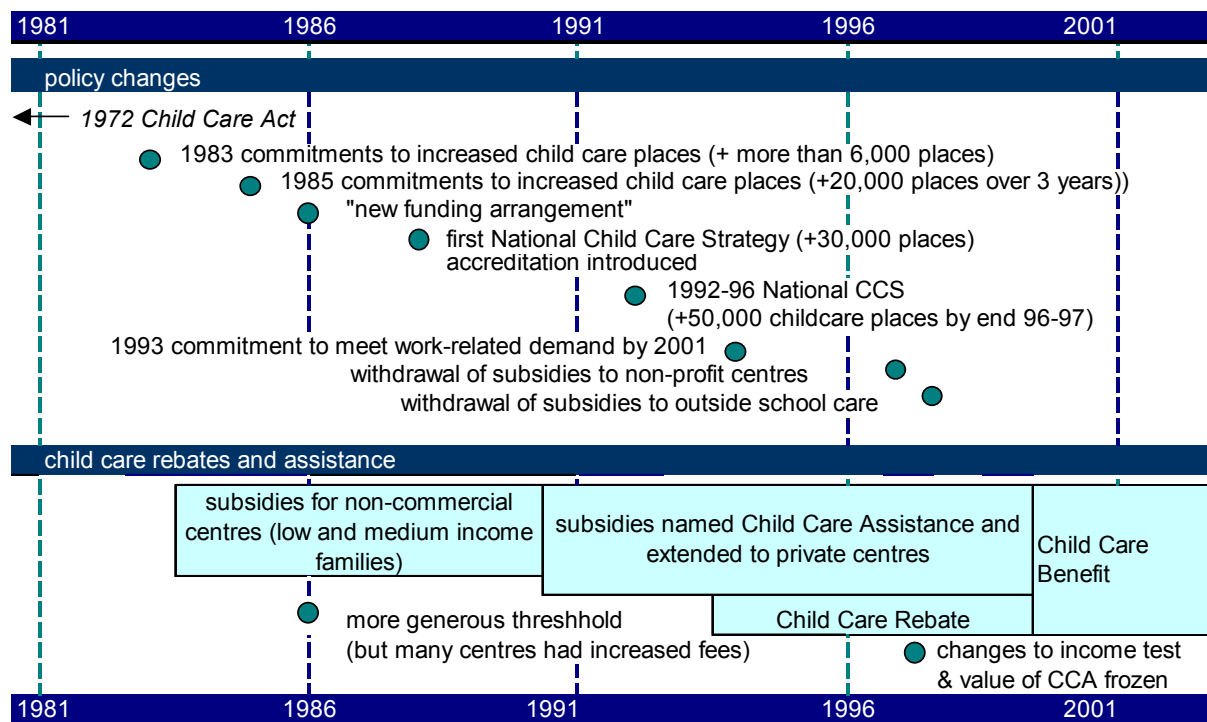
For those that do use non-parental child care, there are different forms this care can take. This care is classified as formal care or informal care. Formal care is regulated, and may be provided by government, community or private operators. The types of formal care are child care centres, preschools, occasional care, outside school-hours care and family day care. Informal care includes registered and unregistered carers providing care in their own or the child's home. Grandparents make up a large portion of these carers.

### 3.2 Changes in formal child care

In the early 1980s, very little formal child care existed for children under school-age, except for the formal State-run preschool systems which some children attended for usually three half-days a week. For school-aged children, there was little outside school hours care.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, governments were committed to an expansion of child care places, and a summary of changes to formal child care over this period has been provided in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Timeline of Changes to Child Care Policy, 1981 to 2001**



The Federal Government initially provided operational subsidies to non-profit providers and, from 1984, fee relief to low income users of these services. Fee relief was extended to users of commercial centres in 1991, and renamed Child Care Assistance. Further financial assistance was provided to working parents through the Child Care Rebate from 1994. In the late-1990s, operational subsidies to non-profit centres were withdrawn, which had serious financial implications for such centres. The affordability of formal child care was a problem for many over this time. While government subsidies provide some assistance, there is evidence that the affordability of care had declined (Burke and Redmond 2002; Powlay 2000). In 2000 the two forms of financial assistance were combined into the Child Care Benefit, with some

changes to rates and eligibility criteria. With this new payment affordability improved (AIHW 2002).

The expansion of child care has resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of places available<sup>1</sup>, although measurement of these changes has been made difficult because of significant changes in reporting methodologies<sup>2</sup>. The available data have been summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1 Number of Commonwealth-Supported Child Care Places ('000) by Year and Type**

	Long Day Care Centres			Family Day Care	School Age Care <sup>(b)</sup>	Other <sup>(c)</sup>	Total
	Community Based Centres	Private Centres <sup>(a)</sup>	Total				
<b>1982</b>			18.6	15.1	7.9		41.6
<b>1986</b>			34.6	34.0	15.9		84.5
<b>1991</b>	39.6	36.7	76.3	42.5	44.4	5.1	168.3
<b>1996</b>	45.6	122.5	168.1	60.1	71.8	6.6	306.6
<b>2001</b>	61.2	132.6	193.8	70.8	230.5	4.9	500.0

Source: (AIHW, 2001; Brennan, 1998)

(a) This breakdown is not available prior to 1991. Total numbers prior to 1991 may understate the number of private centre places, as places in these centres generally received no commonwealth subsidies before 1991. The figure for Private Centres includes employer and non-profit centres in 1991 and 1996 data. In 2001 these places have been allocated according to their ownership status.

(b) Due to changes in funding arrangements and reporting methodology, vacation care was included in the 2001 figure.

(c) Includes occasional care. These figures were not separately available in the collections prior to 1991.

Nationally, the 41,600 commonwealth-sponsored places in 1983 rose to 168,300 places in 1991 and 306,600 in 1996. The number of places has continued to rise since 1996, but the published 2001 figure of 500,000 is not directly comparable with these figures, with the inclusion of vacation care figures that were not previously included. (AIHW 2003:429; Brennan 1998:203). While long day care centres, along with pre-schools, continue to be the main providers of formal child care to under school-age children, there has been an overall shift from community-based to private centres (Lee & Strachan, 1998). Family day care has also grown, as has the outside school-hours program (AIHW 2003:429).

How these changes have translated into changes in usage by children in the different age groups is explored in the next section.

<sup>1</sup> “The total number of places is equivalent to the total number of children who can use the service at any one time during the hours that the service operates” (AIHW 2003).

## **3.3 Patterns of Child Care Use**

### **3.3.1 The Data**

The ABS has conducted a survey of child care use approximately every three years since 1969. This analysis is sourced from these data but has been limited to 1984 to 2002, given the introduction of a new classification of type of child care in 1984 which was not directly comparable with that of previous years. The child care surveys were conducted in different months of the year, which has implications for the numbers of children in care<sup>3</sup>.

### **3.3.2 Trends in Child Care Use**

Figure 2 shows the numbers of children aged under 12 using any form of child care, and these figures also as proportions of all children in each age group. There are distinct differences in child care use by age group, with the three to five year olds proportionately the most likely to be in some form of care. The least likely to be in care are the young school-aged children (those aged 6 to 11), although given the large number of children in this age group, there are still considerable numbers using care. The number and proportion using child care is very much lower in 1984 than in later years. There was a large increase between 1984 and 1987, and another increase between 1987 and 1990. In the 1990s the trends have been less consistent.

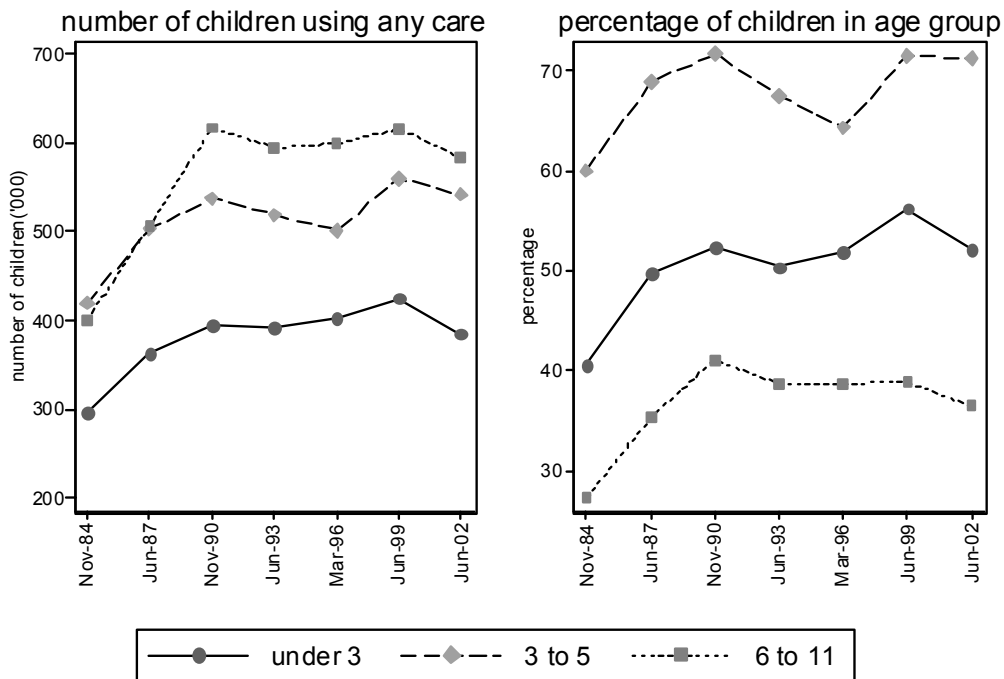
The next figure, Figure 3, breaks down the data by age of child and type of care. As these figures represent any use of care, children can be counted in one or more type of care.

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<sup>2</sup> In particular, a significant number of places in private centres are likely to be excluded from the pre-1991 statistics.

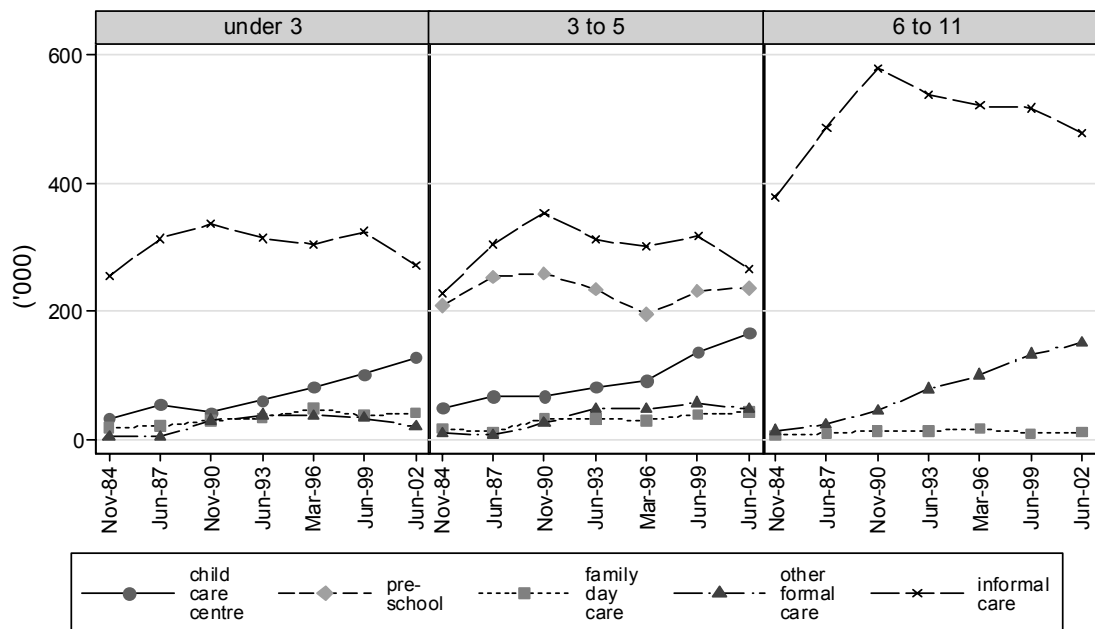
<sup>3</sup> Conducting the Child Care Survey in different months of the year affects the numbers of five-year olds reported to be in care. Caution should be taken in comparing the figures including the five-year olds across surveys. Children aged five in March (the 1996 survey) are most likely to be in school, meaning there will be very few five-year olds in preschool or child care centres. However, by June (1987, 1993, 1999 and 2002) there will be some children who have turned five since school commencement, and of these some will be in child care or preschool. Further, by November (1984 and 1990) many more five year olds could be expected to be in care or preschool. The effect of this shows up most clearly in the numbers of three to five year olds attending preschool, where there is a dip in the trend line in 1996 as a result of fewer five-year olds being at preschool at this time of the year.

**Figure 2 Number and Percentage of Children Aged Under 12 Using Any Child Care, 1984 to 2002**



source: ABS child care publications (4402.0), various years (ABS various)

**Figure 3 Number of Children Aged Under 12 Using Care, by Type of Care and Age of Child, 1984 to 2002**



source: ABS child care publications (4402.0), various years (ABS various)

The changes in patterns of formal care use are consistent with the changes in policy, with growth in the use of child care centres and outside school care in the 1980s and 1990s. Clearly, formal care is not the only child care solution – informal care is immensely important in providing care to young children. A high proportion of care for infants is informal, even though child care centre use has risen over this period. For pre-school aged children, informal care is also important, but so is preschool, and also child care centres have provided a higher proportion of the care over the 1980s and 1990s. For older children, who are in school for most of the day, a smaller proportion require care, but of those that do the majority use informal care. Over time, though, more children in this age group have used formal care, no doubt associated with the expansion of formal care programs for this age group in the 1980s and 1990s.

Can these data be related to changes in maternal employment? In these form, they are not useful for this purpose. These data include care that parents have used for personal reasons, for example to attend sporting or social events, and much care is for very short durations. This is seen in the following table, in which care for any children aged under 12 is classified according to the reason for that care and the hours of care used.

**Table 2 Children Aged Less Than 12, Reasons for Care and Hours of Care by Whether Formal or Informal Care, 1984, 1993 and 2002**

	Formal Care				Informal Care		
	1984	1993	2002		1984	1993	2002
	<i>Percentage (%)</i>						
<b>Reason for care</b>							
Work-related	27.9	43.1	49.3	41.2	46.2	46.3	
Good for child	63.0	42.8	35.6	6.0	4.7	3.0	
Personal	5.2	12.8	12.6	36.9	42.0	37.6	
Other	3.9	1.3	2.4	15.9	7.0	13.0	
<b>Hours of care</b> (in reference week)							
Less than 5	16.7	21.2	18.5	39.5	46.7	35.0	
5 to 9	26.6	30.8	25.2	24.0	23.8	25.5	
10 to 19	41.3	31.5	34.5	17.2	15.0	19.7	
20 or more	15.4	16.5	21.8	19.4	14.5	19.7	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	
<b>Total Number of Children in Care('000)</b>	<b>358.9</b>	<b>596.3</b>	<b>787.4</b>	<b>865.0</b>	<b>1166.2</b>	<b>1019.2</b>	

Source: ABS Child Care publications (4402.0), various years

To adequately assess to what extent changes in child care use are associated with increasing maternal employment, the data need to be examined from a different perspective, being mindful of the different reasons for which care is used. The following section addresses this subject, using these same data but changing the focus to the mother, analysing the types of care she (and her partner) use for their youngest child while she is working.

## **4 Child Care and Employment, Further Analysis of Child Care Data**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This section looks more closely at the changing use of child care arrangements for employment, making use of the confidentialised unit record data from the 1984, 1993, 1996 and 1999 ABS Child Care Surveys. Instead of looking at the data from the perspective of the child, and the numbers in care, this analysis is from the perspective of the mother. The population analysed is employed mothers in couple families with children aged under 12.

### **4.2 The Data**

For each working mother, her care use was classified according to the care used for her youngest child<sup>4</sup>. Because the main aim of this analysis was to determine what forms of care were being used while the mother works, the ‘reason for care’ classification was used to exclude care that appeared to be just for non-work reasons. Care used for work-related (which includes study) reasons was included, and so was care for which ‘good for child’ was given as the reason. ‘Good for child’ is often cited for preschool-aged children, and if the mother is working it is most likely this care is being used for work-related reasons. Any preschool use was retained, regardless of the reason given for using preschool, as working parents probably have their children in preschool while they work. In other cases, that is, where the respondent stated a form of care was for personal or other reasons only, this type of care was reclassified

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<sup>4</sup> In 1999 the survey methodology was changed so that child care details were collected from no more than two children in a family. Where there were more than two children aged less than 12, the two were selected at random. While the survey collected some basic information on those children not surveyed, this information was not available on the CURF. The youngest child for 1999 reflects the youngest child for which information was collected, but this may not be the youngest child in the family.

to not having used care. This had the largest effect on the coding of informal care, with about a quarter of the cases of informal care being excluded. As a result, the ‘no care’ category rises by about 10 percentage points. A comparison of the classifications is given in Table 3 below.

**Table 3 Employed Partnered Women with Children Aged Under 12, Original Care Type Classification, and Adjusted Care Type Classification, by Year**

year	Original Care Type (Any Care)				Adjusted Care Type (Work-Related Care)				All
	no care	formal only	informal only	formal and informal	No care	formal only	informal only	formal and informal	
<i>percentage (%)</i>									
1984	46.7	11.2	36.2	5.9	55.4	12.3	28.0	4.3	100.0
1993	34.7	13.5	39.9	11.8	44.4	16.2	31.7	7.7	100.0
1996	35.0	15.3	36.7	12.9	44.7	18.3	28.5	8.6	100.0
1999	35.6	16.8	33.5	14.1	45.0	19.1	25.9	9.9	100.0

A closer look at these data suggested that while most of the ‘personal reasons’ care has been used for non-work care, there is less certainty about the ‘other reasons’ care. The ‘no care’ category may be overestimated, then, if some of those stating ‘other reasons’ did in fact use the care for work reasons<sup>5</sup>.

To ascertain whether these data were representative of results from other surveys, two other data sources were examined. The following table (Table 4) summarises the 1996 Child Care Survey data<sup>6</sup>, along with data from the 1996-97 Negotiating the Life Course Survey (NLCS) and 2002-03 Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey.

The 1996 Child Care Survey and 1996-97 NLCS data are from comparable time periods. The NLCS was particularly valuable because work-related care was collected separately to other care. In this survey, the question asked about any care for children under school-age, and separately about care for school-aged children. The proportion

<sup>5</sup> A closer examination of these data showed that most of the ‘personal reasons’ informal care that had been reclassified as no care, was for less than 5 hours a week. Also, in the 1984 data, I was able to confirm most of this care was for shopping, sport participation or other social events. The ‘other reasons’ informal care that had been reclassified as no care, was more problematic, with about a quarter of working women saying they used this care for 20 or more hours a week.

<sup>6</sup> This year was chosen as it was the most recent data for which the details were collected for all children in a family – in 1999 child care details were collected for at most two children in a family.

reporting no care for under school aged children is similar, whether looking at all care used, or work-related care only. The work-related care figure in the Child Care Survey figures is perhaps a bit high, which may indicate a small problem with the recoding exercise described above. The main difference between these surveys is the proportion in the ‘formal and informal’ category – it is much smaller in the NLCS. The NLCS question only allowed for two possible types of care, so perhaps undercounted the number combining different forms of care, but the effect of this should have been slight<sup>7</sup>. It is not clear why the proportion reporting both formal and informal care in this survey is much smaller than reported in the Child Care Survey, and may be related to different question wording<sup>8</sup> or methodologies.

**Table 4 Employed Partnered Women with Children Aged Under School-Age, Care Type, Comparison with other Child Care Sources**

Source	No care	Formal only	Informal only	Formal and informal
	<i>Percentage (%)</i>			
<b>All care for any child under school-age</b>				
Child Care Survey, 1996	17.1	26.2	28.9	27.8
Negotiating the Life Course, 1996-97	15.7	35.5	37.6	11.2
<b>Work-related care for any child under school-age</b>				
Child Care Survey, 1996	24.2	32.9	24.4	18.5
Negotiating the Life Course, 1996-97	20.9	33.0	36.6	9.4
<b>All care for any children<sup>(1)</sup>, where youngest child is aged under 6</b>				
Child Care Survey, 1996	19.5	22.4	30.5	27.6
HILDA, 2002-03 <sup>(2)</sup>	24.7	27.8	13.5	34.0

(1) For the Child Care Survey this is any child aged under 12, for HILDA this is any child aged under 15. (2) Data extracted by Paula Mance, Demography and Sociology Program ANU.

The HILDA Survey was conducted six years after the 1996 Child Care Survey, and the data were less specific, referring to care used by any child in the family. Similar data were derived from the 1996 Child Care Survey for comparison. These data can be analysed by age of youngest child as is shown in the table. The HILDA data is very different to other data in the smaller proportion reported to be using informal care only. This may be related to a change over time, with more families relying on formal care, a combination of care arrangements, or managing to use no care – this would be

<sup>7</sup> In the 1996 Child Care Survey, less than 2 per cent of children aged less than five had more than two care arrangements in the reference week (1996 Child Care CURF).

<sup>8</sup> The Child Care Survey collects information on care used last week. The NLCS questions ask about usual arrangements.

consistent with changes over time observed in the Child Care Survey data. It may also be related to different survey methodologies.

Overall, the Child Care Survey data do not appear to be problematic. There may be some overstatement of the ‘no care’ category as derived in the adjusted classification for work-related care, but if so, the error is not likely to be large. While there are other differences across the collections, they relate more to the division between the use of formal or informal care only, versus using formal and informal care. There is no reason to suspect these data are inadequate in the Child Care Surveys.

### 4.3 Maternal Employment

This section presents estimates of employment of partnered mothers, as derived from each Child Care Survey, and compares them to the same data derived from each Australian census over the same period. The figures are given in Table 5.

**Table 5 Partnered Women with Children Aged less than 12. Comparison of Labour Force Status in Child Care Surveys and Australian Census**

Age youngest child	Child Care Survey				Australian Census				
	1984	1993	1996	1999	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001
	<b>Percentage employed (%)</b>				<b>Percentage employed (%)</b>				
Under 3	27.6	39.0	42.0	41.6	27.9	33.0	41.9	42.3	45.2
3 to 5	43.5	50.4	56.4	55.3	41.9	46.9	55.4	56.5	57.5
6 to 11	55.7	65.0	67.6	65.9	54.0	58.9	66.5	66.3	69.6
<b>Under 12</b>	<b>41.6</b>	<b>51.0</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>54.4</b>	<b>41.6</b>	<b>45.8</b>	<b>54.0</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>57.5</b>
	<b>Estimated number employed ('000)</b>				<b>Estimated number employed ('000)</b>				
Under 3	152.3	234.0	247.4	240.3	133.6	175.4	226.9	225.2	228.9
3 to 5	127.8	173.5	197.6	217.8	124.2	143.8	169.6	182.5	183.9
6 to 11	285.4	347.1	351.1	407.8	282.8	287.2	324.5	326.1	357.3
<b>Under 12</b>	<b>565.6</b>	<b>754.5</b>	<b>796.1</b>	<b>866.0</b>	<b>540.6</b>	<b>606.4</b>	<b>721.0</b>	<b>733.8</b>	<b>770.1</b>

Source: 1984, 1993, 1996, 1999 ABS Child Care Survey CURFS; 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2001 Census CURFs.

The percentage employed from the two sources show very similar trends across time, with a much lower rate of employment in the early to mid-1980s, followed by higher rates of employment in the 1990s. The rates in the 1990s do not change much – the exception being the Child Care Survey’s reported increase in the proportion working between 1993 and 1996 amongst women with a youngest child aged three to five. The estimated number employed in each category does vary across collections, such that for all the 1990s Child Care Surveys, the estimated number employed is higher than the estimate derived from the census data. This is evident mostly in the estimated

number of employed mothers with youngest child aged 6 to 11, but also those with youngest child aged 3 to 5. This could be in part due to the different timings of the collections<sup>9</sup> and also due to different survey methodologies and sampling error.<sup>10</sup>

## **4.4 Child Care Use by Partnered Employed Women**

### **4.4.1 Overview**

Figure 4 combines employment data from the ABS census and from the Child Care Surveys, showing the estimated total number employed from each source, but breaking down the Child Care Survey data further into care type used. The census data have been interpolated between census years to provide an approximate comparison to the total estimate of employed partnered women as derived from the Child Care Surveys. This census figure is meant to be indicative only – more sophisticated techniques would be required to produce an accurate estimate.

These data allow us to examine the role child care may have played in the increased employment of these women. As seen here, families are continuing to make use of a range of care arrangements, including using no care at all. While formal care is important, on its own or combined with informal care, it is by no means the only arrangement being used.

These data are explored in more detail in the following tables. For each youngest child age group, a table shows the use of care for employed partnered women. To simplify comparisons over time, only three years are analysed, 1984, 1993 and 1999. These data are also examined in more detail by hours of work of the mother, as the use of no care is likely to be associated with women working part-time hours, or even those who are employed but currently on leave. The hours worked categories only permit these two scenarios to be separated from each other, and from other hours worked groups, in 1984 and 1999.<sup>11</sup>

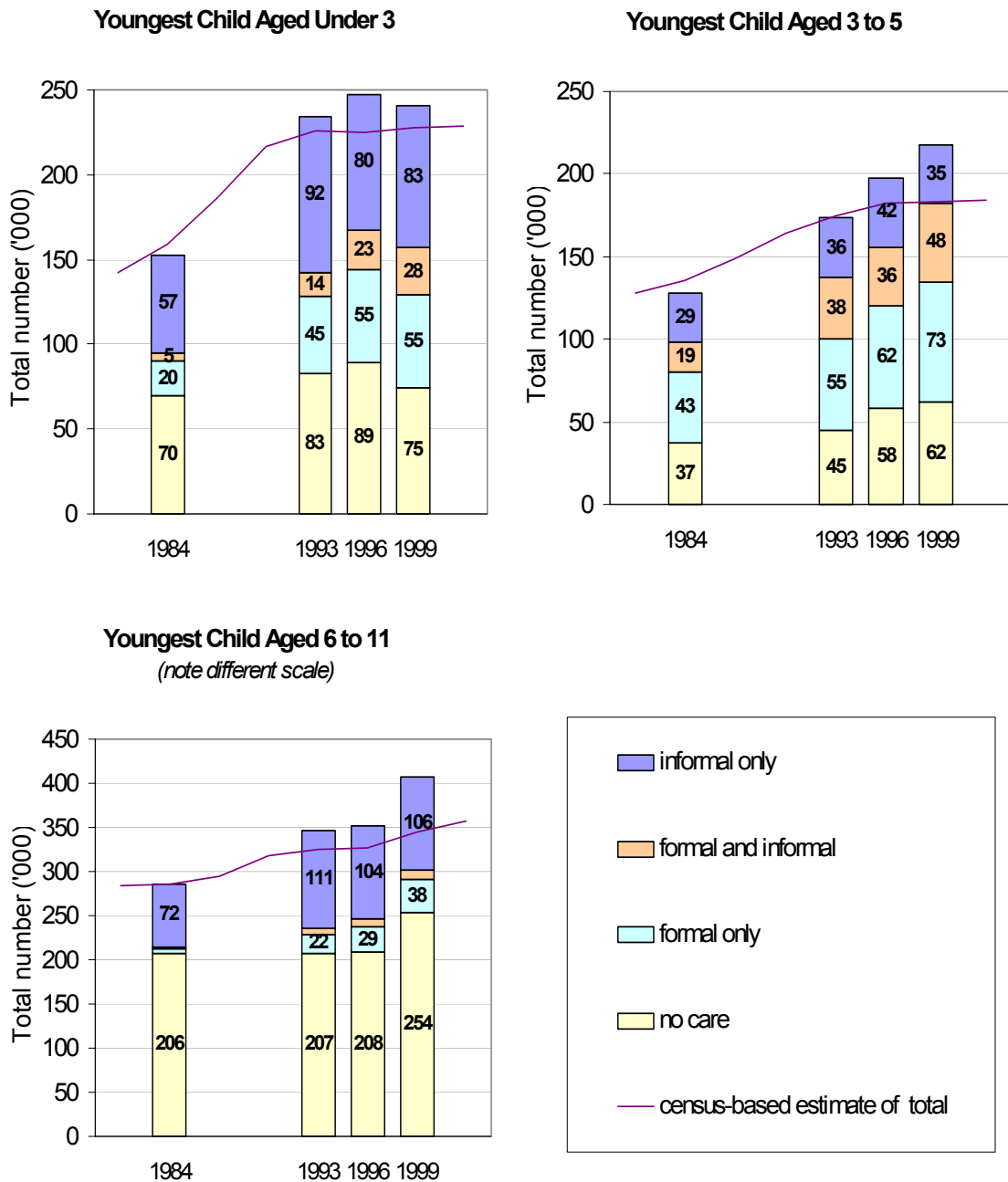
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<sup>9</sup> Censuses were conducted in June 1981 and 1986, then in August in 1991, 1996 and 2001.

<sup>10</sup> In addition, the exclusion of the income unit weight from the unit record files for 1993 onwards meant that I had to use the weight belonging to the youngest child to calculate estimates.

<sup>11</sup> In 1996 the zero hours category was included in the less than 16 hours group, and in 1993 hours worked was aggregated using different cut-offs than in other years.

**Figure 4 Employed Partnered Women with Youngest Child Aged Less than 12, Child Care Arrangement Used for Youngest Child, 1984, 1993, 1996, 1999 (and comparison with census estimates of total employed partnered women by age of youngest child)**



Source: 1984, 1993, 1996 and 1999 ABS Child Care Survey CURFS; 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996 and 2001 Census CURFs.

Notes:

The census-based estimate has been derived by interpolating between census years, for each estimate of partnered employed women by age of youngest child. Estimates have been derived from the census CURFs, using those with valid responses to labour force status questions.

No care includes those that used care, but used it for personal or other reasons only.

#### 4.4.2 Mothers of Infant Children (Children aged under 3)

Figure 4 shows that the total number of employed women with children aged under three increased dramatically through the 1980s, with less increase observed through the 1990s. The main purpose of this analysis is to see how the increased employment of mothers has been managed, that is, to determine who is caring for the children with such a large increase in the number of women working. Has the expansion of formal child care enabled this increase? Figure 4 and Table 6 show that the increase in employment between 1984 and 1993 was achieved through all forms of care arrangements. While formal care has been important, particularly child care centres, families have also used the other forms of child care to manage this increase in employment.

**Table 6 Employed Partnered Women with Youngest Child<sup>(a)</sup> Aged Under 3, Child Care Arrangement<sup>(b)</sup> Used for Youngest Child, 1984, 1993 and 1999**

	Number ('000)			Per cent (%)		
	Nov-1984	Jun-1993	Jun-1999	Nov-1984	Jun-1993	Jun-1999
<b>No care</b>	<b>69.8</b>	<b>82.8</b>	<b>74.8</b>	<b>45.8</b>	<b>35.4</b>	<b>31.1</b>
<b>Formal care only</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>45.4</b>	<b>54.7</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>19.4</b>	<b>22.8</b>
Child Care Centre	10.3	24.9	36.1	6.8	10.6	15.0
Family Day Care	8.3	17.5	15.4	5.4	7.5	6.4
Other formal	1.4	3.0	3.2	0.9	1.3	1.3
<b>Informal care only</b>	<b>57.2</b>	<b>92.1</b>	<b>83.3</b>	<b>37.6</b>	<b>39.4</b>	<b>34.7</b>
Adult Relative only	36.9	65.7	67.4	24.2	28.1	28.1
Sibling	1.1	1.6	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.2
Non-Relative	19.2	24.8	15.4	12.6	10.6	6.4
<b>Formal and Informal Care</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>13.7</b>	<b>27.5</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>11.4</b>
Child Care centre & relative	1.8	3.5	18.0	1.2	1.5	7.5
Child Care centre & non-rel.	1.2	3.2	0.9	0.8	1.4	0.4
Family Day care & relative	1.5	4.7	5.7	1.0	2.0	2.4
Other	0.9	2.4	2.8	0.6	1.0	1.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>152.3</b>	<b>234.0</b>	<b>240.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: 1984, 1993, 1999 ABS Child Care Survey CURFS

(a) In 1999, this refers to youngest child for which information was collected.

(b) Where a child used more than one form of formal care (but only used formal care) only the first of those used is indicated above such that the child is counted only once. The same applies for those using only informal care. Similarly, where a child combined formal and informal, the method used was to check for the combinations listed above, and the first one encountered was recorded. Care type used for work/study related reasons, 'good for child' or preschool.

The number of partnered mothers with under-three year old children using no care remained high (although declined as a proportion), while there were very large increases in the numbers using informal care (particularly relative care) and formal care – both child care centres and family day care. Between 1984 and 1999 the most

significant change was the growth in the use of child care centres, and the reduction in the use of non-relative informal care. These patterns are evident overall (Table 6) and also across the different categories of hours worked (Table 7).

Child care centres grew in importance between 1984 and 1999, particularly amongst those working longer hours. In fact, while the use of 'child care centre only' has grown, so too has the combined use of child care centre with informal arrangements. This national data provides no evidence of mass withdrawal from child care centres, or the increased use of 'backyard carers' as was presented in submissions to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee for the Review of Child Care Funding in 1998 (SCARC, 1998).

**Table 7 Employed Partnered Women with Youngest Child<sup>(a)</sup> Aged Less than 3, Age of Youngest Child, Hours Worked and Child Care Type Used<sup>(b)</sup> for Youngest Child, 1984 and 1999**

	1 to 15 hours		16 to 34 hrs		35 hours +	
	Nov-84	Jun-99	Nov-84	Jun-99	Nov-84	Jun-99
	<b>Number ('000)</b>					
<b>No care</b>	<b>36.4</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>9.7</b>
<b>Formal care only</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>11.2</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>20.9</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>21.7</b>
Child Care Centre	2.1	6.8	4.8	14.4	3.5	14.2
Family Day Care	1.8	3.1	3.8	4.7	2.6	7.5
Other formal	0.7	1.2	0.6	1.7	0.1	0.1
<b>Informal only</b>	<b>18.4</b>	<b>27.1</b>	<b>22.2</b>	<b>35.1</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>21.1</b>
Adult Relative	12.8	22.4	14.7	28.1	9.0	16.9
Non-relative	5.2	4.3	7.2	6.9	6.9	4.2
<b>Formal &amp; Informal</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>8.1</b>
Child Care Centre & Rel.		2.5	0.7	9.5	1.1	6.1
Other combinations	1.0	1.3	1.1	6.2	1.5	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>60.4</b>	<b>73.1</b>	<b>46.3</b>	<b>88.6</b>	<b>34.0</b>	<b>60.7</b>
	<b>Percentage (%)</b>					
<b>No care</b>	60.3	42.5	28.5	19.2	26.3	16.0
<b>Formal care only</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>15.3</b>	<b>19.8</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>35.8</b>
Child Care Centre	3.4	9.4	10.3	16.3	10.2	23.3
Family Day Care	3.0	4.2	8.1	5.4	7.8	12.3
Other formal	1.1	1.7	1.4	2.0	0.3	0.1
<b>Informal only</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>37.1</b>	<b>47.9</b>	<b>39.6</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>34.7</b>
Adult Relative	21.2	30.6	31.7	31.7	26.5	27.8
Non-relative	8.6	5.9	15.5	7.8	20.2	6.9
<b>Formal &amp; Informal</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>17.6</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>13.4</b>
Child Care Centre & Rel.	0.0	3.4	1.5	10.7	3.2	10.1
Other combinations	1.6	1.7	2.3	6.9	4.4	3.3

Source: 1984, 1993, 1999 ABS Child Care Survey CURFS

(a) In 1999, this refers to youngest child for which information was collected.

(b) See footnote (b) Table 6.

For mothers of under-three year old children, a small number are working zero hours, most likely representing those on leave from employment while caring for young children. The majority of these women did not use any care arrangement in both 1984 and 1999 (not shown in the table)<sup>12</sup>. Many mothers return to work part-time, as a means of better managing work and family responsibilities. This is evident in the high number of women working less than 16 hours a week. A high proportion of these women used no care arrangements – 60 per cent in 1984 and 43 per cent in 1999 managed to work these hours while requiring no care<sup>13</sup>. This high use of no care could be associated with working schedules that complement those of the partner, meaning one parent is always available to care for children; or perhaps working from home with children present. Use of formal care is lower amongst these women who work one to fifteen hours (9.2% in 1984 and 20.4% in 1999 used some formal care). Many relied on adult relatives (usually grandparents) to care for their children.

#### **4.4.3 Mothers of Preschool-Aged Children**

The analysis of this age group is focused on those children aged three to five, but excluding those who are already at school<sup>14</sup>. In these tables (Table 8 and Table 9), children are separated according to whether or not they attend preschool, and then what other care they use, if any.

Looking at Table 8, there was a large increase in employment between the 1984 and 1993 surveys. Overall, while employment grew, the number using no care stayed around the same (and therefore declined as a proportion), the number using preschool increased (falling slightly as a proportion) and the number using non-preschool care increased (at a faster rate than the employment increased, and therefore rising as a proportion). The growth in the number using preschool occurred amongst women who combined preschool with another form of care, most notably, informal care. The growth in the number using non-preschool care was mostly through child care centres and adult relative care, or a combination of these.

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<sup>12</sup> An estimated 11,600 worked zero hours in 1984, and 17,800 in 1999. Of these more than 95% used no care.

<sup>13</sup> Under the original child care coding, where personal and other care has not been reset to no care, the proportion citing no care arrangement is still high at 40% (1984) and 26% (1999)

<sup>14</sup> Including five-year olds at school makes the analysis too complex, as school students need to be considered differently, looking at whether or not they attend after-school care, for example.

**Table 8 Employed Partnered Women with Youngest Child<sup>(a)</sup> Aged 3 to 5 and not at school, Child Care Arrangement Used<sup>(b)</sup> for Youngest Child, 1984, 1993 and 1999**

	Number ('000)			Per cent (%)		
	Nov-1984	Jun-1993	Jun-1999	Nov-1984	Jun-1993	Jun-1999
<b>No care</b>	<b>24.2</b>	<b>21.7</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>11.9</b>
<b>At preschool --</b>	<b>42.5</b>	<b>53.7</b>	<b>59.3</b>	<b>36.9</b>	<b>35.7</b>	<b>33.4</b>
Preschool only	23.8	23.2	19.6	20.7	15.5	11.0
And Child Care Centre	0.7	0.3	5.9	0.6	0.2	3.3
And Family Day Care	2.0	3.4	3.6	1.8	2.3	2.0
And informal care	15.9	26.1	29.9	13.8	17.3	16.9
<b>Not at preschool --</b>	<b>48.4</b>	<b>74.9</b>	<b>96.9</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>49.8</b>	<b>54.6</b>
Child Care Centre only	9.3	15.3	26.1	8.1	10.2	14.7
Family Day Care only	5.2	6.8	8.4	4.5	4.5	4.8
Other formal only	1.6	5.5	9.1	1.4	3.6	5.1
Adult Relative	13.9	21.4	27.6	12.1	14.3	15.5
Sibling only	1.7	1.3	0.8	1.5	0.9	0.4
Non-relative only	13.8	13.1	6.8	12.0	8.7	3.8
Formal/informal combined	2.8	11.5	18.1	2.4	7.6	10.2
<b>Total<sup>(c)</sup></b>	<b>115.0</b>	<b>150.4</b>	<b>177.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: 1984, 1993, 1999 ABS Child Care Survey CURFS

(a) In 1999, this refers to youngest child for which information was collected.

(b) See footnote (b) Table 6.

(c) These numbers differ to those presented in Figure 4 because of the exclusion of school students from this table. The total numbers subtracted for this reason were 12,800 in 1984, 23,100 in 1993 and 40,500.

The increase in employment occurred amongst all the hours categories, and the trends found at the overall level were also found within these hours groups, although the distribution by type of care used varied depending on the hours worked. For example, *preschool use only* declined over this time. The highest use of preschool only is amongst those who work 1 to 15 hours, but even in this category there was an expansion of use of preschool combined with informal care.

**Table 9 Employed Partnered Women with Youngest Child<sup>(a)</sup> Aged 3 to 5 and not at school, Hours Worked and Child Care Used<sup>(b)</sup> for Youngest Child, 1984 and 1999**

	1 to 15 hours		16 to 34 hours		35 hours +	
	Nov-1984	Jun-1999	Nov-1984	Jun-1999	Nov-1984	Jun-1999
	<b>Number ('000)</b>					
<b>No care</b>	<b>10.4</b>	<b>8.8</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>5.5</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>3.2</b>
<b>At preschool --</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>20.8</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>20.6</b>	<b>11.7</b>	<b>14.2</b>
Preschool only	11.1	8.1	5.7	5.5	6.3	2.8
And Child Care Centre	0.1	1.4	0.5	1.2	0.1	3.2
And Family Day Care	0.3	0.7	0.8	1.5	1.0	1.3
And informal care	5.1	10.6	5.8	12.4	4.3	6.8
<b>Not at preschool --</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>17.1</b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>42.5</b>
Child Care Centre only	1.3	4.2	4.0	10.2	3.7	11.7
Family Day Care only	0.8	2.5	2.1	2.5	2.3	3.0
Other formal only	0.7	0.8	0.7	2.6	0.2	4.8
Adult Relative only	2.4	6.1	5.7	8.0	5.5	13.0
Non-relative only	2.7	1.0	6.4	2.7	4.8	3.1
Child Care Centre & Relative	0.3	0.9	0.2	4.2	1.0	3.9
Other form./inform. combined	0.4	3.3	0.8	6.6	1.5	7.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>35.6</b>	<b>47.6</b>	<b>40.4</b>	<b>59.6</b>	<b>34.8</b>	<b>60.5</b>
	<b>Percentage (%)</b>					
<b>No care</b>	<b>29.3</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>13.2</b>	<b>5.3</b>
<b>At preschool --</b>	<b>46.7</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>34.6</b>	<b>33.7</b>	<b>23.5</b>
Preschool only	31.3	17.1	14.1	9.3	18.2	4.7
And Child Care Centre	0.3	2.9	1.3	2.1	0.3	5.3
And Family Day Care	0.8	1.5	1.9	2.5	2.8	2.2
And informal care	14.4	22.3	14.2	20.8	12.4	11.3
<b>Not at preschool --</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>37.8</b>	<b>51.1</b>	<b>56.1</b>	<b>53.1</b>	<b>71.3</b>
Child Care Centre only	3.7	8.8	9.9	17.2	10.5	19.3
Family Day Care only	2.2	5.4	5.2	4.3	6.7	4.9
Other formal only	1.9	1.7	1.8	4.4	0.7	8.0
Adult Relative	6.7	12.8	14.1	13.4	15.8	21.4
Non-relative only	7.5	2.2	15.8	4.5	13.7	5.1
Other Form./inform. combined	1.3	6.9	2.0	11.1	4.4	12.6

Source: 1984, 1993, 1999 ABS Child Care Survey CURFS

(a) In 1999, this refers to youngest child for which information was collected.

(b) See footnote (b) Table 6.

#### 4.4.4 Mothers of Young School-Aged Children

Young school-aged children (aged 6 to 11) are obviously in school for the majority of the day (school holidays excluded), so some working mothers are able to manage their working hours completely during school hours, requiring no non-parental care. If parents need care, then, that care only needs to be of a shorter duration than for younger children, being for before and/or after school hours.

**Table 10 Employed Partnered Women with Youngest<sup>(a)</sup> Child Aged 6 to 11, Child Care Arrangement<sup>(b)</sup> Used for Youngest Child, 1984, 1993 and 1999**

	Number ('000)				Per cent (%)		
	Nov-1984	Jun-1993	Jun-1999		Nov-1984	Jun-1993	Jun-1999
<b>No care (school only)</b>	<b>206.3</b>	<b>207.2</b>	<b>253.6</b>		<b>72.3</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>62.2</b>
<b>Formal care only</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>38.1</b>		<b>2.4</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>9.3</b>
<b>Informal only</b>	<b>71.8</b>	<b>111.3</b>	<b>106.1</b>		<b>25.2</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>26.0</b>
Adult Relative	27.6	42.2	58.5		9.7	12.2	14.3
Sibling	22.4	41.6	19.7		7.8	12.0	4.8
Non-relative	21.8	27.5	27.9		7.6	7.9	6.9
<b>Formal/Informal Combined</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>10.0</b>		<b>0.1</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>2.5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>285.3</b>	<b>347.1</b>	<b>407.8</b>		<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: 1984, 1993, 1999 ABS Child Care Survey CURFS

(a) In 1999, this refers to youngest child for which information was collected.

(b) See footnote (b) Table 6.

The number of employed mothers with the youngest child aged 6 to 11 increased between 1984 and 1993, and again to 1999. The vast majority of these families used no child care, although the proportion using care increased between 1984 and 1993. The use of formal care increased, on its own and in combination with informal care. The distribution of informal care types changed across surveys, with adult relative care increasing and sibling care being highest in 1993. Non-relative care is also quite high, but did not increase as much as the other types of informal care across these surveys.

Table 11 shows the care figures for 6 to 11 year-olds by mother's hours of work. Formal care is most likely to be used by mothers working 16 to 34 hours or 35 hours or more. These women are also the most likely to use informal care, while those working less than 16 hours have the highest proportion using no care.

As with families with younger children, formal care has played a role in the increased employment of partnered mothers, but not exclusively, as informal care has also expanded with the increased employment of these women, and families are continuing to manage their work schedules so that a high proportion of families do not need to use any non-parental care.

**Table 11 Employed Partnered Women with Youngest Child<sup>(a)</sup> Aged 6 to 11, Age of Youngest Child, Hours Worked and Child Care Type Used<sup>(b)</sup> for Youngest Child, 1984 and 1999**

	1 to 15 hours		16 to 34 hrs		35 hrs or more	
	Nov-1984	Jun-1999	Nov-1984	Jun-1999	Nov-1984	Jun-1999
	<b>Number ('000)</b>					
<b>No care (school only)</b>	<b>60.5</b>	<b>73.6</b>	<b>82.9</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>56.3</b>	<b>68.5</b>
<b>Formal care only</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>16.6</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>18.3</b>
<b>Informal only</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>30.7</b>	<b>47.4</b>
Adult Relative	5.1	8.9	11.8	20.6	10.1	28.1
Sibling	1.8	3.3	9.3	6.3	11.1	9.5
Non-relative	3.6	2.2	8.6	15.4	9.6	9.7
<b>Formal &amp; Informal</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>5.2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>81.8</b>	<b>105.0</b>	<b>144.9</b>	<b>204.4</b>	<b>122.1</b>	<b>186.8</b>
	<b>Percentage (%)</b>					
<b>No care (school only)</b>	<b>74.0</b>	<b>70.0</b>	<b>57.2</b>	<b>48.5</b>	<b>46.2</b>	<b>36.7</b>
<b>Formal care only</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>9.8</b>
<b>Informal only</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>20.5</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>25.2</b>	<b>25.4</b>
Adult Relative	6.2	8.5	8.2	10.1	8.3	15.1
Sibling	2.2	3.2	6.4	3.1	9.1	5.1
Non-relative	4.4	2.1	6.0	7.5	7.8	5.2
<b>Formal &amp; Informal</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>2.8</b>

Source: 1984, 1993, 1999 ABS Child Care Survey CURFS

(a) In 1999, this refers to youngest child for which information was collected.

(b) See footnote (b) Table 6.

## 5 Conclusion

Each age group has its own pattern of care use, given the importance of preschool for 3 to 5 year old children, and school for older children. Further, there are different patterns of use according to hours of mothers' work, with those women who work shorter hours generally more likely to manage with no child care or informal care, and those who work longer hours more likely to use formal care. Regardless of the hours worked or the age of the child, though, informal care is an integral aspect of child care. With increased numbers of mothers employed over the 1980s and 1990s, more women have used formal care, but more have also used informal care and no care. Increases in formal care alone have not been responsible for the increased employment of mothers.

Nevertheless, increased numbers of employed women have used formal care, on its own or combined with informal care. These data cannot tell us for certain whether these women using formal care would have been prevented from working in the absence of formal care places – perhaps they would have, or perhaps they would have

used other forms of informal care. The shift away from non-relative informal care that is evident in these data suggest there has been some change in the patterns of care use, with parents preferring the formal child care arrangements to the non-relative informal care. Even so, movement from informal care to formal care does not explain the growth in formal care places, as informal care by relatives has remained strong. Comparing the 1980s to the 1990s, for mothers of young children in particular, growth occurred in formal care and informal care as greater numbers of these women entered the workforce. It is quite possible that the newly created formal child care places facilitated some of this increased employment, while other families availed themselves of access to informal care arrangements which enabled them to work.

Of course women are continuing to work part-time in very large numbers, where families are less likely to use formal care for work. In these situations they are more likely to use parental care only or to use informal care. Formal still plays a part for these women, though, and the increased availability of formal care has possibly allowed some women access to part-time jobs they would have otherwise been unable to take on.

This analysis set out to determine how families were managing the care of their children, given the increased employment of women in the 1990s compared to early in the 1980s. These data show that formal care, informal care and parental care have all continued to be important to parents. However, the expansion of formal care does not explain the full extent of the increase in maternal employment.

This analysis has not considered how the cost of care has changed, in part because of difficulties with the data (for example, the cost of informal care was not available for 1984), but this might be interesting to examine in later work. In other work, I am examining how different job and family characteristics are associated with being able to use no care, or using formal or informal care. Also, as mentioned in the introduction, this paper has not considered the child care arrangements of single parents. It would be interesting to compare single parents and couple families' use of care, and to examine changes over time.

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