

Childcare Access and Affordability Issues for Young Parents in Two British Columbian Communities

Jean Shoveller, Cathy Chabot, Caroline Mniszak,
Putu Duff, Kate Shannon, Anna Carson, and
Devon Greyson

Introduction

Access to high-quality, affordable childcare is a critical issue for many parents in Canada, including early-age parents. However, there is little research evidence regarding the childcare needs of parents aged 15-25.

Methods

- Data were collected during a five-year ethnographic study of the experiences of young parents living in the Prince George (PG) and Greater Vancouver (GV) regions of BC.
- Longitudinal qualitative interviews were conducted with 113 young mothers and fathers (n= 51 in GV; n = 62 in PG).
- Naturalistic observations were conducted at three Young Parent Programs (YPPs) at secondary schools that provide subsidized on-site daycare for children from infancy to three years of age.
- Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis and constant comparative techniques were employed to identify and test emergent themes (Dey, 1999).

Findings

- Study participants completing their secondary school education at YPPs valued the licensed childcare services provided on-site during school hours. However, students could not leave school without their children to attend medical or counseling appointments. One YPP required students to care for their children during spare blocks, when most students are otherwise doing their homework. One YPP could not provide childcare to all students due to limited space and some parents struggled to find off-site childcare.

"When [my daughter] turns 3 she has to move to another daycare. So we're already talking about that, even though it's next year!" ('Maya', GV mom)

"Finding affordable childcare with hours of operation that can work with my schedule... is impossible. Like, I need to work evenings and weekends 'cause I've got school during the day." ('Kezia', PG mom)



"I want to go to school, but right now with [my son] not even having childcare, it seems impossible." ('Lisa', PG mom)



"There should be some sort of program out there to maybe help people be able to pay for childcare better. Because nowadays, like, for me to put him in full-time daycare would cost more than my rent, which is ridiculous." ('Riley', GV mom)

- Age restrictions at many daycares made it difficult for parents to find age-appropriate childcare. This was often a significant challenge for parents with two or more children, as there are few daycares that provide childcare for children from infancy to preschool age.
- Accessing childcare was a significant issue outside of school or business hours, which limited young parents' education and work opportunities. Family and friends who could provide trustworthy and flexible childcare were relied upon by many young parents.
- Provincial and federal childcare subsidies helped many young parents cover part of the cost of licensed or at-home daycare. Parents who did not qualify for these subsidies often could not afford childcare and, in many cases, were unable to work or pursue further education.

Conclusions

Childcare helps young parents to access much needed services, complete their high school education, pursue post-secondary training, and maintain their employment. Finding age-appropriate, reliable, safe, and affordable childcare was a significant challenge for many parents in our study. Not being able to access good quality, affordable childcare created barriers for some young parents' educational trajectories and job opportunities.

The provision of a universal, subsidized and regulated childcare system would greatly assist young parents with completing their education and pursuing and maintaining gainful employment.

Reference:

Dey, I. (1999). Coding. In *Grounding grounded theory: Guidelines for qualitative inquiry*, pp. 95-112. San Diego: Academic Press.