

# Barriers to Participation: The experiences of disadvantaged families in engaging with early childhood services

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A study funded by the NSW  
Department of Human Services



# The Barriers to Participation Project: Research Design

## **Family Information** (n = 101)

- 52-item Questionnaire - adapted from the 'New Hope' Study (Duncan, Huston and Weisner, 2007)
  - Demographic data
  - Mother and father employment and education
  - Sources of support and parenting information
  - Formal and informal child care arrangements
  - Family financial resources
- In-depth interview around family decision making and engagement with early childhood services

## **Child Interview** (n = 40)

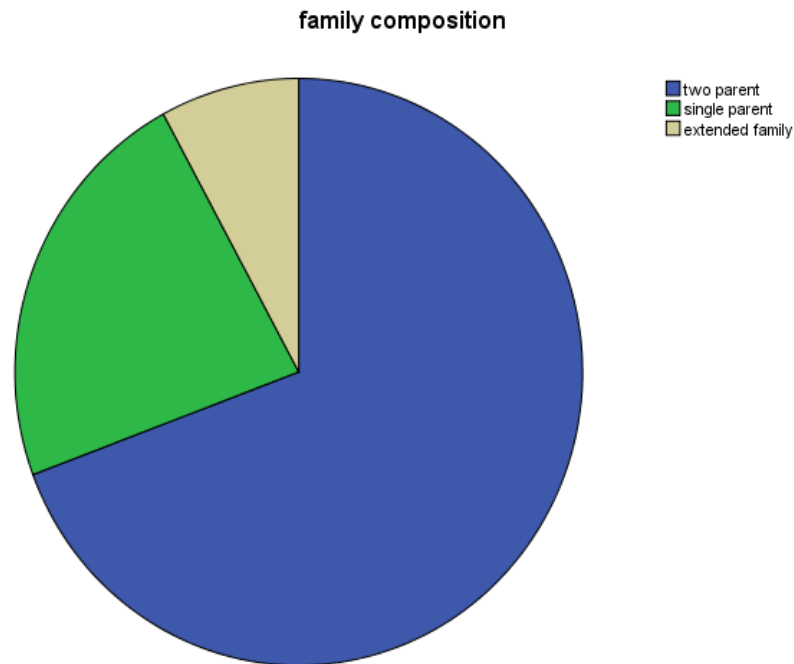
- Face-to-face interviews focused on their experiences of attending an early childhood setting

## **Worker Interviews** (n = 50)

- Worker perceptions of the barriers and facilitators to family engagement and supports required

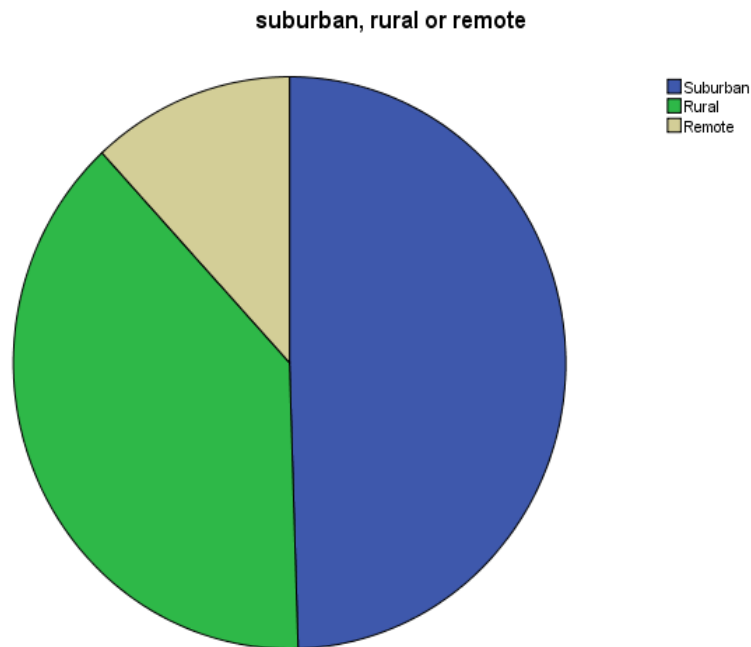
# The Participating Families

## Family Composition



Two parent families: 69.3%  
Single parent families: 22.8%  
Extended families: 7.9%

# Regions



Suburban areas: Mt Druitt,  
Wollongong

Rural areas: Nowra, Taree,  
Bathurst, Tweed Heads

Remote area: Broken Hill

# The Children

N = 109

Mean age: 4 years, 2 months (range: 3 years – 5 years, 11 months)

20 children (18.3%) had a disability

- Language delay, n = 4 (3.7%)
- Hearing impairment, n = 2 (1.8%)
- Behavioural disorder, n = 7 (6%)
- Medical condition, n = 4 (3.7%)
- Learning/intellectual disability, n = 3 (2%)



# Early Childhood Service Usage

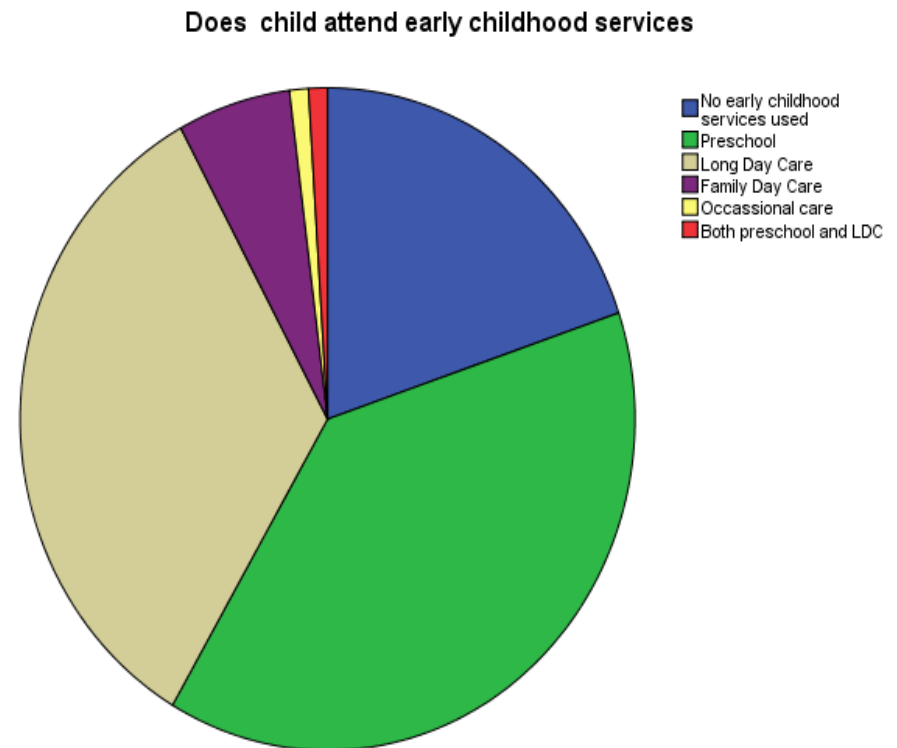
Preschool: n = 39 (38.6%)

Long Day Care: n = 34 (33.7%)

Family Day Care: n = 6 (5.9%)

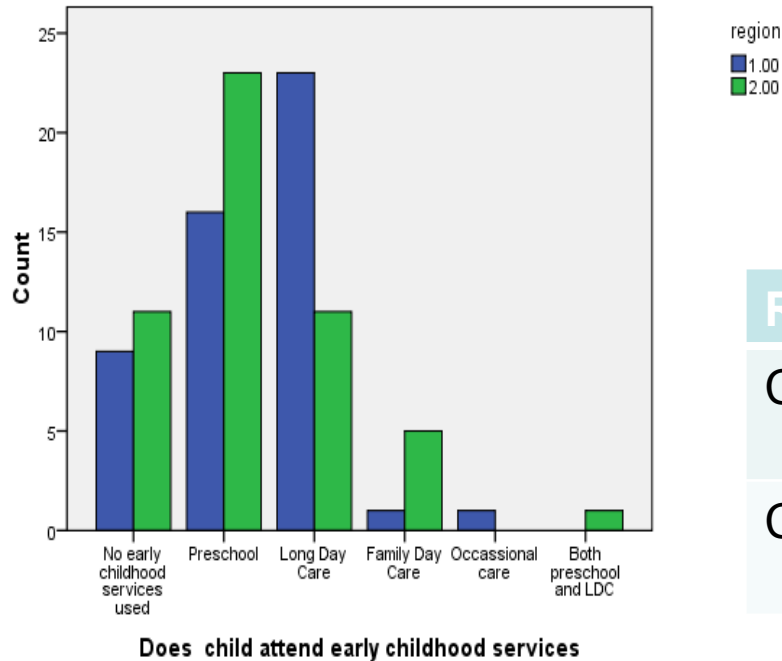
Occasional Care: n = 1 (1%)

Both preschool and Long Day Care programs: n = 1 (1%)



# Attendance by Region

Bar Chart



Was there a significant difference between city and country groups relating to non-attendance? No

Region	No	Yes	Total
City	n = 9 (18%)	n = 41 (82%)	n = 50 (49.5%)
Country	n = 11 (21.6%)	n = 40 (78.4%)	n = 51 (50.5%)

# Cultural Diversity and Attendance

## Indigenous Families

Attendance at an EC Service	Indigenous families	Non-Indigenous families
YES	76.5%	81.7%
NO	26.3%	18.3%

## NESB Families

Attendance at an EC Service	NESB families	English first language families
YES	73.7%	81.7%
NO	26.3%	18.3%

# Why don't some families use early childhood services?

Stanley (2006)

The five groups of children who are missing out:

1. Children living in workless households
2. Children living in large families
3. Children in single parent families
4. Children with families facing high cost barriers
5. Children in working families on low incomes

Hypothesis 1: Children living in households where the mother does not work in paid employment are less likely to attend early childhood services

This hypothesis was not supported.

Mother employment status	Non-attendance	Attendance
Not in paid work and not looking	n = 13 (65%)	n = 48 (60%)
Full-time work	n = 0 (0%)	n = 10 (12.5%)
Part-time work	n = 2 (10%)	n = 13 (16.25%)
Casual employment	n = 2 (10%)	n = 4 (5%)
Not in paid work but looking	n = 3 (15%)	n = 5 (6.25%)
Total	n = 20 (100%)	n = 80 (100%)

Hypothesis 2: Children from large families are less likely to attend early childhood services.

This hypothesis was not supported.

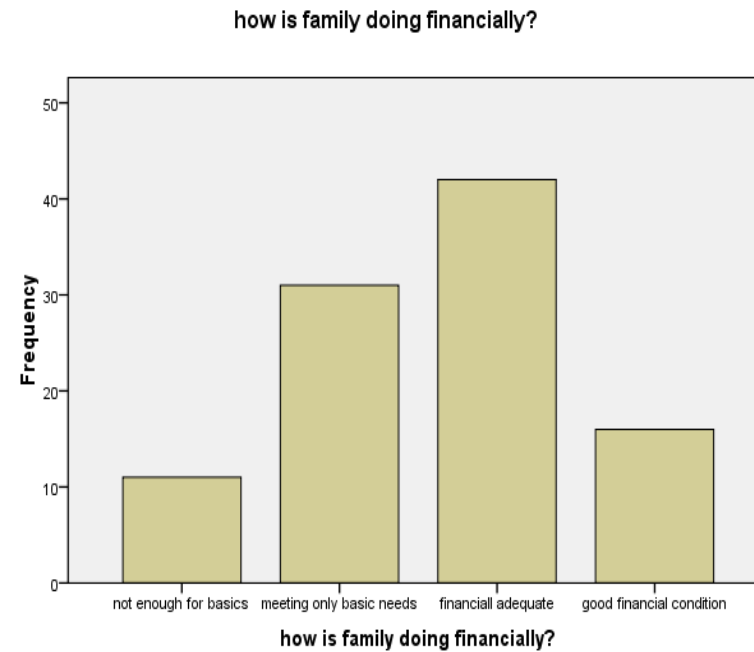
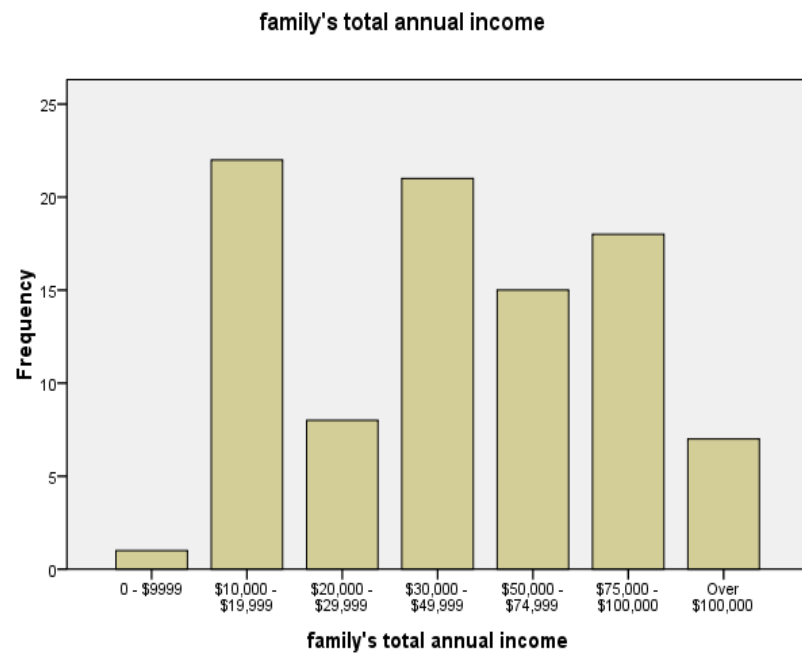
Hypothesis 3: Children from single parent households are less likely to attend early childhood services.

This hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 4: Children who have a disability themselves, or who live in a family where another family member has a disability, are less likely to attend early childhood services.

This hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 5: There is a relationship between the amount of money a family has and whether or not the child attends early childhood services.



## **Qualitative findings: Emerging themes relating to the choice not to use early childhood services**

**1. “They’re better off at home”:** Child development needs

**2. “They’re safer with me”:** Issues of Trust

Sub-theme: Trust born out of parent perceptions of staff caring and competence

Sub-theme: Trust based on the feelings of the child

**3. “It’s my responsibility”:** Notions of good mothering

# Engagement

The research literature argues for the importance of family participation in early childhood services on the basis of:



## 1. Child development and education outcomes

- Brain development studies
- Establishing early patterns to support child behaviour, social skills and cognitive development
- Opportunity for enhanced language development and pre-academic skills

## 2. Equity and Social Inclusion

“ . . . People who feel part of a vibrant, healthy community are themselves more likely to see that they can contribute something worthwhile to that community. This then, is the beginning of a cycle of positive support and enhanced community life where individuals and the wider social group reap the rewards.”

(Tomison, 1999 as cited by Yuksel and Turner, 2008, p.8)

# Coding Engagement

**Low engagement:** parents do not spend any time visiting the centre beyond drop-off and pick-up, have very little knowledge of what happens during the day for the child, do not communicate regularly with the staff, do not know other parents from the centre

**Moderate engagement:** parents have a basic idea of what happens during the day and chat with the staff at pick-up and drop-off, parents will attend one or two events at the centre each year, and have met some of the other parents

**High engagement:** parents regularly volunteer within the centre, talk regularly with the staff about their child, may serve on a centre committee, and have a strong knowledge of the day-to-day routines of the service and the other children and parents

# Engagement Findings

Family factors that did not show a significant correlation with level of family engagement:

- Mother education
- Mother employment
- Area where the family lives
- Whether or not families were Indigenous
- Whether or not families were from a non-English speaking background

Significant finding: There was a significant correlation between the number of days a child attends the service and level of family engagement ( $r = .455$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

Significant finding: There was a significant correlation between parent perception of the support available to them and level of family engagement ( $r = .447$ ,  $p = .001$ ).

# Measuring family perceptions of support available to them

Rating Scale (1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = some, 4 = very strong support)

- Partner or Spouse
- Your parents or other relatives
- In-laws
- Your friends and neighbours
- Professionals within the community
- Your religious group

There are many questions left to be answered, including those exploring the direction of influence, for example:

Does engagement with early childhood services facilitate the building of support networks?

OR

Are people with strong support networks more likely to engage with early childhood services?

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