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Maternal Employment and the Care of School-Aged Children

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Abstract

Children's participation in both formal and informal child care is often a necessity in families of school-aged children when parents are employed. This mixed methods paper describes links between maternal employment and use of different types of child care for school-aged children, incorporating findings from the Family and Work Decisions qualitative study, and analyses of survey data from the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children. The paper explores factors involved in mothers' decision-making about employment as well as child care, with key concerns being related to the availability of different care providers, the flexibility of their own employment and children's capacity for self-care. The data are also used to examine which families use particular care arrangements for school aged children, with a focus on how care arrangements vary for mothers working in different types of jobs. Informal care arrangements are examined as well as formal care arrangements.

JEL Classification: J130, J290, D190

1. Introduction

Children's participation in both formal and informal child care is often a necessity in families of school-aged children when parents are employed. However, little attention has been given to school-aged children's care arrangements in the Australian literature (Cartmel, 2007; Cassells and McNamara, 2006; McNamara and Cassells, 2010; Simoncini and Lasen, 2012; Winefield, Piteo, Kettler, Roberts, Taylor, Tuckey, Denson, Thomas, and Lamb, 2011) compared to the care of younger children. The relationship between maternal employment and care arrangements for these older children has also received little attention. This paper, builds on the research to date that has focused on care for school-aged children in Australia, and also the limited international research on this topic (Brandon and Hofferth, 2003; Capizzano, Tout and Adams, 2000).

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Better understanding the relationship between maternal employment and school-aged children's care is important in the context of an ongoing policy focus on increasing the labour market participation of mothers of school-aged children. Existing Australian policy primarily supports maternal employment through attention to formal child care availability, quality and cost, as well as through the National Employment Standards, and related areas of labour market policy. The availability of appropriate supports for maternal employment has particular relevance for families in receipt of income support payments, which require parents of primary school aged children (aged six years and over for partnered parents and eight years and over for single parents) to be employed or seeking employment.

This mixed-methods paper incorporates analyses of survey data and qualitative interviews to describe the care used by school-aged children and how this use of care varies according to maternal employment characteristics as well as other family characteristics. The qualitative data are also used to highlight how care decisions are closely linked with employment decisions for many mothers of school-aged children.

For the analyses of survey data, the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children is used to examine the types of care children attend outside of school hours. This includes formal outside school hours care (OSHC) programs provided before and after school, as well as informal care arrangements. Participation in formal and informal care is examined according to mothers' usual work hours, type of job contract and usual job schedule. Additional socio-demographic variables are also included, to consider differences according to family composition, region of residence and other factors.

The qualitative data for this paper are drawn from the Family and Work Decisions study. This study explored the factors involved in mothers' decision-making about employment and child care. The current analyses focus on mothers' decisions around employment and child care for school-aged children. Factors explored include the impacts of beliefs about motherhood and child care, the availability and cost of formal options, and use of informal care such as sibling and grandparent care.

2. Background

Care of school-aged children in Australia

For care of school-aged children, formal and informal options may be used outside of school times. Using the ABS Childhood Education and Care Survey, Baxter (in press) reports that in 2011, of six to eleven year old children with an employed mother, 13 per cent attended only formal care, 23 per cent attended only informal care and 6 per cent attended both formal and informal care at some stage during the survey reference week. In another recent study of school-aged children's child care, using the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australian (HILDA) survey, Cassells and Miranti (2012) found that almost 30 per cent of school-age children were in some form of child care when their parents were working, including just over 10 per cent who used formal OSHC.

OSHC is the most common formal care arrangement for children of school age, in which children participate in a program of activities, while supervised before and/or after school hours or in school holidays. Other formal care arrangements for school-aged children may be provided through different centre-based or home-

based arrangements, including family day care. Participation in OSHC has grown considerably since the 1980s, due to the increased availability of these places and the growth in maternal employment (Baxter, in press; Brennan, 1998; Cartmel, 2007; Moyle, Meyer, and Evans, 1996). OSHC is most often provided on school grounds, although it is not usually operated as part of the school itself. This arrangement provides a 'wrap-around' care, especially for children of parents whose work hours are not compatible with children's school hours. OSHC is required to meet standards set out in the Government's National Accreditation Framework, and in particular has been a recent focus of the Council of Australian Government's reform agenda for childhood education and care, with the development of the 'My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia'.

As is the case for children under school age, informal care of school-aged children very often involves care provided by grandparents (Baxter, in press; Cassells and McNamara, 2006). Other providers of informal care include a parent who lives elsewhere, siblings or other relatives of the child, and friends or neighbours. This care is generally provided in a home environment – either that of the child or the carer, and is often of no or low cost.

While an obvious alternative to formal and informal care outside of school hours is parental care, another option is that school-aged children may spend some time without adult supervision before or after school (Craig and Sawrikar, 2008; DeVaus and Millward, 1998; Mullan, 2013; Ochiltree, 1992). Self-care may become more relevant as children grow and seek more responsibility, but there are significant concerns about ensuring children in self-care are safe, and able to adequately care for themselves (see, for example, 'Home alone', by the NSW Department of Community Services). Children's self-care as a form of before or after school care is not adequately captured in the LSAC data, and so is not examined in this paper (see Mullan (2013) for analyses of school-aged children's time without adults present, using other components of the LSAC data). A related form of care is that of care provided by their siblings, who may still be relatively young (aged under 18 years) themselves. This informal care is captured in the LSAC data. As we will see from the FAWD study, parents may consider self-care or sibling care when thinking about their work and care options, although sometimes rejecting this as a viable solution.

Maternal employment and care of school-aged children

Children most likely to be in some form of child care are those with employed mothers, with children more likely to be in formal care when mothers work longer hours (e.g., Baxter, Gray, Alexander, Strazdins, and Bittman, 2007; Baxter, in press; Brandon and Hofferth, 2003; Cassells and McNamara, 2006; Craig and Sawrikar, 2008).

Previous research on child care use for younger children suggests that other job characteristics are likely to explain some of the variation in who attends formal or informal child care (Baxter *et al*., 2007; Laughlin, 2010; VandenHeuvel, 1996). Some parents will have selected jobs with particular characteristics, given constraints or preferences regarding their child care options. Others will have less flexibility in their employment choices.

Given that mothers spend more time than fathers on child care, even when both parents are employed (Baxter and Smart, 2010; Craig, 2006), mothers' job

characteristics are expected to be more strongly associated with child care decisions than are those of fathers, and will be the focus of this paper. Of course, some fathers may reduce or alter their labour force participation in order to care for children, or if out of employment, may take on child care responsibilities, but on average, fathers are less likely than mothers to make use of flexible working arrangements to care for children (Baxter, 2013).

Mothers' beliefs about caring for children may affect both their employment decisions and the use of non-parental care for school-aged children. Previous qualitative research has found that "mothers make morally and socially based decisions about… what is right and proper" in balancing paid work and care (Duncan, Edwards, Reynolds and Alldred, 2003, p.327) and that these decisions "vary between different social groups in different places" (Duncan *et al*., 2003, p.327). For example, mothers of school-aged children who have reservations about using formal care such as OSHC may remain out of the labour force or restrict their work hours to times when their children are at school so that they can be available to them when needed (Hand, 2005; Reid-Boyd, 2000). However, others may see formal care options as an important support to their employment arrangements and will negotiate both employment and child care arrangements that allow them to balance both working and caring roles (Elliott, 1998; Morehead, 2005; Winefield *et al*., 2011). Previous research suggests that this decision-making process is complex and parents' decisions about work and care relate to parents own needs as well as those of their children (Hand, 2005).

Other factors relevant to the care of school-aged children

Variation in the different forms of care used outside school hours, across family and local area characteristics, has been shown in Australian as well as international work (Brandon and Hofferth, 2003; Capizzano *et al*., 2000). Cassells and Miranti (2012), for example, showed that participation in school aged care varied across regions of Australia, with lowest rates in those areas that were more socio-economically disadvantaged. Regional patterns of use of OSHC or alternative forms of school-aged care are likely to be linked to both the demand and the supply of OSHC services. This particular research is limited in how this can be explored, given lack of information on the local area availability of services, and so focuses only on variation in whether children live in metropolitan or ex-metropolitan regions.

In Cassells and Miranti's research, and also in earlier research by Cassells and McNamara (2006), child care participation rates were higher in single-parent families, compared to couple-parent families, which is consistently reported in analyses of child care for younger children, and is related to couple parents having greater flexibility in being able to share the parental care of children to avoid the use of non-parental child care.

Parental education is often considered in respect to child care participation for younger children, but the associations between parental education and school aged care are not expected to be as important as parental employment characteristics. While parental education may be indicative of higher income, and therefore greater affordability of formal services, higher parental education may also lead to children being enrolled in extra-curricular activities such as music lessons or additional tuition,

that are not counted as outside school hours care. Exploring these associations for school aged children would be a fruitful area of further research.

Understanding which families use particular care arrangements is important for the development of appropriate policies and programs that support maternal employment across different family types. Differences in types of school-aged care, according to family characteristics, may reflect constraints imposed by the availability (or lack of availability) of certain care options. However, differences may also reflect a need or a preference for a particular form of care, given the family or employment circumstances, or given beliefs about the value (or risk) of different care options.

Research questions

This paper explores two key research questions. The first is to what extent do beliefs and opportunities about non-parental care affect decisions about employment for mothers of school-aged children? The second also concerns non-parental care and maternal employment, but our interest is more directly on how different types of employment arrangements are related to different patterns of care for school-aged children.

3. Data

The Family and Work Decisions study

The qualitative data from this paper are drawn from interviews conducted for the Family and Work Decisions (FAWD) study.

The large-scale FAWD study combined quantitative and qualitative methods, with in-depth interviews undertaken with 61 mothers from Victoria and South Australia. The in-depth interviews were conducted in 2004 and took a life course perspective, asking mothers to describe their work-family and childcare decisions and/or intentions at different key stages of their lives, such as when their youngest child commenced school (see, Hand, 2006; Hand and Hughes, 2004). While this study is older than the LSAC data, the focus of the study on mothers' decisions provides valuable detail and insights not available in more recent Australian studies.

Of the 61 mothers interviewed for the FAWD qualitative study, 47 (77 per cent) had at least one child who had started school at the time of the interview. However, this paper draws on data from all of the mothers, including those only with children under school-age. Around half of the mothers were employed (12 per cent full time and another 41 per cent part-time). Around half of the 61 mothers were partnered.

Using these in-depth interview data, a thematic analysis using a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 2009) was undertaken to examine the different issues that were important to mothers in their decisions about employment and the care of children once they reached school age. It included the perspectives of mothers of primary and secondary school-aged children and also considered the intentions of mothers whose children were yet to commence school.

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)

The analyses of survey data are based on LSAC. This study is a nationally representative large-scale longitudinal survey that is following two cohorts of Australian children into adulthood. At the first wave of interviews in 2004, the children were aged zero to

one years (B cohort) and four to five years (K cohort). To date, data from four waves of the study are available, with the B cohort children aged six to seven years and the K cohort children aged 10-11 years at the latest wave, which was collected in 2010. This paper uses data from the B cohort at wave four (at age six to seven years), and from the K cohort at waves three and four (at ages eight to nine years and 10-11 years respectively. Child care details were available for 4,220 children at age six to seven years, 4,306 children at eight to nine years and 4,131 children at 10-11 years.

The LSAC sample is broadly representative of Australian children in the birth cohorts from which the sample was selected (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2005). From Wave 1 to later waves there has been some selective attrition, and so the estimates presented in this article are made using sample weights that adjust for differential probability of selection into the sample and differential response rates.

Child care

The child's primary carer (in most families the mother) was asked to report on the regular types of child care used before school and after school, with the list of possible providers of care shown in prompt cards. Details were also collected regarding school holiday care, however, these data have not been included in this paper. Care arrangements are only collected for the LSAC study child, not siblings of the child. The types of care have been classified here as formal care or informal care (table 1). Formal care is most often through outside school hours programs located in schools or child care centres, but can also be provided through family day care. Informal care is care provided by a grandparent, by another relative (including siblings of the child or a parent who lives in another household), or by a friend or neighbour. Grandparent care is the most common of the informal care arrangements. Children can be recorded as being in multiple forms of regular care and so the percentages in table 1 add to more than 100 per cent.

Methods of analyses

Multivariate methods were used to analyse how participation in each of the types of care is associated with maternal employment and other characteristics (described below). These analyses were conducted only for children of employed mothers. Logistic regressions were estimated, as in all analyses the outcome variable was a binary indicator of whether or not the child participated in this form of care. To take account of there being up to two observations per child in the analyses for K cohort children, the standard errors were adjusted to account for this clustering. Results have been presented throughout as odds ratios, with the reference category identified in the 'variable' column.

Table 1 - Percentages in each type of care before and after school hours

	After school care			*Before school care*		
Type of care	*6-7 years*	*8-9 years*	*10-11 years*	*6-7 years*	*8-9 years*	*10-11 years*
Formal child care (%)						
Before/after school care program at a school	14.6	11.5	7.1	4.7	3.9	2.3
Other formal care (child care centre not at a school, or family day care)	2.4	1.7	1.1	1.2	0.9	0.3
Total formal care	**17.0**	**13.2**	**8.1**	**5.9**	**4.8**	**2.7**
Informal child care (%)						
Grandparent	12.6	12.2	11.0	5.4	4.9	3.8
Non-relative aged >=18 years ["Friend, neighbour, nanny, babysitter or other person"]	5.3	4.3	4.3	2.3	1.6	1.2
Parent who lives elsewhere	1.9	2.0	2.6	1.5	1.5	1.8
Sibling or other relative aged >=18 years	1.6	2.2	2.7	0.6	1.6	1.5
Sibling, other relative or other person aged under 18 years	1.3	3.3	4.8	0.6	1.3	1.5
Total informal care	**19.6**	**20.5**	**22.0**	**9.3**	**9.6**	**9.1**
No formal/informal care (%)	67.6	69.3	69.5	85.3	86.3	87.9

Source: LSAC.

Employment and other characteristics

Employment is defined as work for pay, including self-employment. For the purposes of these analyses, mothers who are employed, but away from work for the week prior to the LSAC interview, are classified as not employed, since they are likely to be available to provide care for their children. For employed mothers, job characteristics examined are the type of job contract (self-employed, permanent employee, casual employee), mothers' usual working hours (<15 hours, 15-24 hours, 25-34 hours, 35-44 hours, >44 hours), whether mothers work regular day-time hours, regular night or evening hours, or some other arrangements.

Family characteristics are also included in the analyses, and these data are summarised in the Appendix (see, table A.1). Family composition identifies single mother families (that is, families in which children do not have a resident father), couple families with employed fathers, and couple families in which the father is not employed or employed for less than full-time hours (and so may be available to provide care). Another indicator of family composition captures whether an adult (other than parent/s) lives in the household, since this person may be available to help with the care of children. Where present, these other adults are often grandparents. The presence of younger siblings or older siblings is taken into account since having younger siblings may alter care arrangements as parents (if employed) would have to find care solutions for these children also, while some older siblings could provide care to their younger school age siblings (DeVaus and Millward, 1998). An indicator of metropolitan versus ex-metropolitan is included, as regional differences in use of OSHC are expected (see,

Cassells and Miranti, 2012). Age of child in years was also included in the analyses to allow for changes that might occur as children grow because of changes in the availability of forms of care, changing perceptions of appropriate forms of care for children of different ages, and changing attitudes of the children themselves to different care options.

4. Results

The findings from the two research studies are woven together throughout this section. First, the relationship between employment and child care is explored with a focus on mothers' decisions about whether or not to work and the reasons mothers give for staying out of employment. Second, the child care participation of school-aged children is summarised from the LSAC data. Third, the two studies are used to examine child care decisions in the context of mothers' employment arrangements.

Employment decisions for mothers of school-aged children

It is well established that many Australian mothers withdraw from, or reduce their hours in, paid work, while they have young children to care for, but they often increase their time in paid work as children grow older. Across the LSAC sample of children aged six to seven years, eight to nine years and 10-11 years, 63 per cent had mothers in paid work. This percentage was lower for mothers who had other children aged under six years old (50 per cent employed), compared to those whose youngest children were school-aged (70 per cent employed). Focusing on mothers in LSAC who were not employed and had no under-school-aged children, reasons for non-employment were dominated by family-related reasons (including that they prefer to care for children themselves, cited as a reason for not having a job by 54 per cent of mothers). Very few mothers said they did not have a job because of non-availability of child care (about one per cent), with the other more commonly cited reasons being job-related reasons (e.g., no jobs available) (12 per cent), issues related to money or eligibility to benefits (eight per cent), and 'other' reasons, which included problems related to ill health, disability and caring (28 per cent).

Like the mothers in the LSAC sample, mothers in the FAWD study who were not employed often focused on family-related reasons for their not being employed. That is, they primarily spoke about a strong preference for not using care for their children, other than that provided by themselves. They often expressed a desire to be available to care for their children in case they were needed, even if most of the time the child was at school. Being available for children outside school hours was one of the factors mothers took into account when choosing to work, with many only prepared to engage in paid work that could be undertaken within school hours.

> *The thought of after school care would be the thing that would kill [the idea of returning to paid work] for me. I'm not interested in after school care, or before school care. I want to be there for my children. (Partnered mother, 4 children aged 6 to 16, not employed).*

Mothers in this study also expressed views about formal care options when discussing their work decisions. Formal care options for school-aged children were

seen a problematic by many of the not-employed mothers who stated concerns about the potential impacts of the care on their children. Some of this group worried about the impact on their children being at school for longer than necessary. Others stated concerns about the quality of care and the level of supervision provided. For a smaller number of mothers access to formal care was seen as an issue, with the most frequently reported barriers being the cost of care and being unable to access care that works for evening or irregular work hours:

> *The cost. And the availability. Having to phone up and go on waiting lists and also the hours. (Single mother, 3 children aged 6 to 11 years, not employed)*

Among the mothers who were or had been employed, many were pragmatic in seeing their childcare arrangements–formal or informal–as being necessary if that employment could not fit into school hours. For some mothers, decisions about employment appear to have been made easier by the availability of informal care options, such as having a co-resident parent or having older children who could help with the care.

Accounts from many mothers in the FAWD study also show that both their employment and child care arrangements can be quite fluid and changeable. This means that mothers may respond to changes in their circumstances through adapting either their employment or child care arrangements or both.

For the analyses that follow, using FAWD and LSAC, we focus on how choices about formal or informal for school-aged children might vary with different family and employment characteristics.

Maternal employment and child care for school-aged children

Using LSAC, formal and informal child care participation is summarised for children aged six to seven years, eight to nine years and 10-11 years in table 2 according to the employment status of mothers. After school hours care and before school hours care are shown separately. Participation rates in both informal and formal care were considerably lower for children with mothers who were not in employment, with around 90 per cent of these children in neither formal nor informal care. For children with employed mothers, 17 per cent were in formal care after school, and six per cent in formal care before school. The percentages in informal care were higher.

For children of employed mothers, 60 per cent were in no formal/informal care after school, and 82 per cent in no formal/informal care before school, showing that families often manage their work responsibilities such that they can rely only on (resident) parental care. Mothers in the FAWD study also reported this situation, as discussed below.

The LSAC data also show that children are more likely to be in formal or informal care, before or after school, when employed mothers worked full-time rather than part-time hours, although relatively small proportions used formal before school hours care, even among children of full-time employed mothers. Children of single mothers were more likely to be in some form of care before or after school than were children of couple mothers.

Table 2 - Percentage of children in formal or informal after school and before school care, by mothers' employment status

	After school hours care			*Before school hours care*		
Mothers' employment status	*Formal*	*Informal*	*No formal/ informal care*	*Formal*	*Informal*	*No formal/ informal care*
%						
Not employed	**4.6**	**8.9**	**87.0**	**1.5**	**4.1**	**94.1**
Employed and at work	**17.4**	**27.3**	**59.6**	**6.1**	**12.3**	**82.2**
Full-time hours	24.0	36.1	45.6	8.2	18.4	73.7
Single mother	*29.4*	*50.5*	*28.6*	*11.2*	*30.0*	*60.5*
Couple mother	*22.7*	*32.7*	*49.5*	*7.6*	*15.8*	*76.8*
Part-time hours	14.4	23.2	66.5	5.1	9.4	86.1
Single mother	*20.0*	*34.3*	*52.3*	*9.0*	*19.2*	*73.3*
Couple mother	*13.3*	*21.1*	*69.1*	*4.3*	*7.5*	*88.6*
Total	**12.8**	**20.7**	**69.5**	**4.4**	**9.3**	**86.5**

Note: Employed mothers who are away from work for the week before the LSAC interview are not shown in this table. Full-time hours is 35 hours or more per week.
Source: LSAC.

Exploring the relationship between maternal employment and use of child care for school-aged children

This section considers the associations between the characteristics of mothers and families of school-aged children, and the use of non-parental care by these children. Findings from the FAWD study are presented first to explore mothers' accounts of the factors influencing their decisions around employment and child care for school-aged children. LSAC are then used to explore these issues with multivariate methods.

Qualitative data from the FAWD study

Many of the mothers in the FAWD study reported limiting their paid work hours to school hours to minimise the use of formal and informal care for their children. Limiting their hours was seen by mothers as enabling them to be available for their children before and after school as well as engage with their children's lives at school. When mothers could not limit their work hours to times when their children were at school, they sought to limit the number of days they worked (and hence hours overall).

However, some mothers do work hours that are not compatible with school hours, and therefore require some child care. These mothers often focused on different concerns about formal care options, to those raised above, highlighting the stress associated with managing their time.

> *They went into after care…that was a bit of a hair-raising thing. To get back by 6 o'clock and not get slammed for god knows what, you're always racing along, your whole day has to be absolutely split second timing, but every mother knows that. I mean if you've got your kids in care, in, using paid care, you do have to be super organised. (Partnered mother, 2 children aged16 and 19, employed full time)*

Many mothers also related minimising the use of formal care to address their children's wellbeing. Like mothers who were not employed, there were concerns about the length of the day, the quality of care and their child's preferences. For others, the cost of care was seen a concern and a key reason to minimise or not use formal care arrangements.

> *The cost of one child for child care isn't a great deal, but when you're multiplying it, it is a lot more, and for bigger families, and there's no adjustment… Particularly working families, I mean, if you're not working, it's negligible. But when you're working, it's a big outlay…I don't think I'd ever use child care anymore, it's just too expensive for me. I'll always find another way. (Partnered mother, 5 children aged 8 to 15, works part time hours over 5 days a week)*

However, for those that had used care, mothers' reports were somewhat mixed, some being quite accepting of the need to use this form of care, and some noting the positive aspects of the formal OSHC programs for their children.

> *I've got my boy who's very active and the boys at the school care, they've got big guys there that are working and boys have learned so many skills from just spending time and doing different things at the school. I mean, compared to having a mum who's just come home from work and I'm so tired. Or going through a divorce and I'm so exhausted and I can't turn my attention to the children, I've got to do this, that and…and instead they're there playing and…you know, playing cricket, playing football. Again, that's the role model that they need as well. (Single mother, 3 children aged 8 to 13, works part time)*

A small number of couple mothers worked irregular or non-standard work hours when their partners were home and available to care for children as a way of managing work and child care needs. However, for the most part, couple mothers did not talk about their partners as part of the employment and child care equation. If partners were involved it was because their hours were such that they were available to pick up children after school. However, very few partners were described as changing their work patterns to undertake school pick ups or drop offs.

Being able to take up (or sustain) evening or irregular work was seen as being particularly difficult for single mothers who tended to have less informal care supports available to them, and found that formal care was often not available for the hours they needed. While some single mothers did engage with shift work they often relied on older siblings to care for their children.

> *He [youngest child] was probably about ten when I started working at the hospital and that was a definite, I am here, you can ring me, and hopefully they'll put you through. I felt at ten, I mean his older brothers were here too, I didn't leave him on his own when he was ten, but his older brothers were here, so that would mean his older brother was like 15 or 16, so I felt that was ok. (Single mother, 2 children aged 15 and 9 years, works part time)*

These arrangements were often viewed to be unstable and not without problems. As a result, some mothers who had attempted this type of care arrangement had ended it out of concern for the children who were the carers and those being cared for.

> *The older kids sometimes get [their younger siblings] ready for school. Put them on the bus or get them off the bus and get them ready for them bed. But I was finding if I did that too often, my son was getting a little bit bullying. He saw it as a chore. ... And I just thought it was better all 'round to have child care. (Single mother, 5 children aged 5 years to 20 years, works full time hours, evening and overnight shift work).*

As a way of avoiding using either formal or informal care, a number of the mothers had organised to do their paid work from home.

> *No, I've worked it so I can work at home, and she's at home and she's busy doing stuff, I'm accessible to her (Single mother, 1 child aged 11, works at home outside of school hours)*

> *When the opportunity came to move the machine home I thought that would really be ideal to work from home because then I don't have to get behind schedule, you know, if the children are sick and I've got to stay home with them. (Single mother, 2 children aged 11 and 13, has home based business)*

Many of the employed mothers in the FAWD study, if they were unable to work entirely within school hours, relied on informal child care outside of school hours. Mothers often referred to grandparents, friends, and in the case of separated families, the child's father, as providing some of this care. Some were able to regularly rely on this informal care in order to leave for work before school hours, or to work longer in the afternoon. For others this was a back-up arrangement for those times when work hours did not align with school hours.

Formal care, however, was just seen as a necessity by some mothers. This included those without the informal care options. Mothers, for example, expressed that without this care, they could not sustain their paid work.

Multivariate analyses of LSAC

The above section made use of the FAWD data to provide some insights into the different ways mothers of school-aged children combine work and care and why. To see how care is used across a large sample of school-aged children, the analyses presented below were designed to examine differences according to mothers' employment arrangements, as well as family characteristics.

Consistent with the working arrangements of mothers in FAWD, most mothers in LSAC who were employed, worked part-time hours. Two-thirds worked fewer than 35 hours per week (17 per cent <15 hours, 30 per cent 15-24 hours, 21 per cent 25-34 hours) with one-third working more than this (23 per cent 35-44 hours and nine per cent 45 hours or more). One in five (21 per cent) employed mothers were self-employed, 17 per cent were in casual employment and 62 per cent in permanent employment.

Most (79 per cent) worked regular daytime hours, with five per cent working regular evening or shift work and 16 per cent working irregular hours or some other schedule.

Table 3 presents the models predicting which children were in formal or informal child care before or after school hours. Additional multivariate analyses were undertaken on the specific types of formal and informal after school hours care (table 4 and table 5 respectively). Specific types of before school hours care were not analysed, given that much smaller percentages used before school hours care.

Table 3 - Results of multivariate analyses of after school and before school care, children with employed mothers (Odds ratios)

	After school hours care			*Before school hours care*		
Variables	*Uses formal care*	*Uses informal care*	*No formal/ informal care*	*Uses formal care*	*Uses informal care*	*No formal/ informal care*
Mothers' usual work hours per week (Ref=1-14 hours)						
15-24	2.36***	2.30***	0.41***	2.54***	3.51***	0.41***
25-34	3.25***	2.64***	0.33***	3.92***	4.34***	0.29***
35-44	4.24***	3.23***	0.22***	5.62***	6.31***	0.19***
45 or more	4.78***	4.32***	0.17***	5.22***	7.34***	0.18***
Mothers' job type (Ref= permanent employee)						
Self-employed	0.38***	0.46***	2.73***	0.16***	0.25***	4.20***
Casual employee	0.64***	0.64***	1.67***	0.90	0.68**	1.35**
Job schedule (Ref= Regular day time)						
Regular evening or night	0.61**	1.05	1.21	0.72	1.00	1.10
Irregular or other arrangements	0.65***	1.20*	1.04	0.86	1.44**	0.84
Family composition (Ref=couple, full-time employed father)						
Single mother	1.55***	1.86***	0.48***	1.33	1.85***	0.58***
Couple, father not full-time employed	0.71**	0.58***	1.78***	0.56**	0.61**	1.65***
Child has younger siblings	0.92	1.11	0.95	0.90	1.35**	0.86
Child has older siblings	0.41***	1.11	1.43***	0.35***	1.23*	1.26**
Another adult lives in household	0.54***	1.87***	0.69**	0.85	3.24***	0.43***
Metropolitan (Ref=ex-metropolitan)	1.97***	1.19**	0.67***	2.55***	1.48***	0.55***
Age of child (years)	0.74***	0.99	1.16***	0.78***	0.91***	1.16***
Constant	1.31	0.14***	1.07	0.12***	0.03***	8.37***
Number of observations	8500	8524	8524	8501	8524	8555
Pseudo r-square	0.13	0.06	0.11	0.13	0.09	0.11

Source: LSAC.
Notes: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

Table 4 - Results of multivariate analyses of formal after school care, children with employed mothers (Odds ratios)

Variables	*Uses school-based OSHC programs*	*Uses other formal*
Mothers' usual work hours per week (Ref=1-14 hours)		
15-24	2.35***	1.79
25-34	3.27***	2.05*
35-44	3.93***	3.46***
45 or more	4.79***	2.47*
Mothers' job type (Ref=permanent employee)		
Self-employed	0.39***	0.45**
Casual employee	0.61***	0.92
Job schedule (Ref= Regular day time)		
Regular evening or night	0.61**	0.98
Irregular or other arrangements	0.67***	0.63
Family composition (Ref=couple, full-time employed father)		
Single mother	1.34**	2.34***
Couple, father not full-time employed	0.67*	1.10
Child has younger siblings	0.87	1.32
Child has older siblings	0.42***	0.54**
Another adult lives in household	0.52***	0.84
Metropolitan (Ref=ex-metropolitan)	2.21***	0.83
Age of child (years)	0.75***	0.77***
Constant	0.92***	0.12***
Number of observations	8500	8500
Pseudo r-square	0.13	0.07

Source: LSAC.
Notes: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

From these data it is apparent that longer maternal work hours were generally associated with a greater likelihood of using formal or informal after or before school hours care (table 3). The association between maternal work hours and formal after school hours care was most apparent for school-based after school hours care (table 4) while for informal after school hours care the association was apparent for each of the types of informal child care (table 5). As discussed by the FAWD mothers, many women will have in fact limited their work hours to enable this situation, given a preference by many mothers to avoid the use of non-parental care.

While participation rates in formal and informal care tended to increase with higher hours of maternal employment, having a mother who worked full-time hours (35 hours or more) did not always translate into use of either formal or informal after or before school hours care, as was evident in table 2.

Children with mothers in permanent employment were the most likely to be in formal or informal after or before school hours care (table 3). The least likely were those children whose mothers were self-employed, with children of casually employed mothers in between. Differences according to mothers' job type were apparent in the same way for most of the types of child care after school (table 4 and table 5). No doubt these differences reflect that when mothers are in ongoing and relatively stable employment, there is a greater need for child care with similar characteristics. On the

other hand, self-employment is likely have taken up by some mothers to allow them to fit paid work around their caring responsibilities, in a way that minimises the need for non-parental care.

The differences in care use according to whether mothers worked regular day-time hours or regular evening or night-time hours were not often statistically significant at conventional levels of significance. However, the ability to detect such differences will in part be affected by there only being a small number of mothers in the sample having worked evening or night time hours. The multivariate analyses showed that formal after school hours care participation was less likely when mothers worked regular evening or night-time hours, and this was particularly apparent for school-based after school care (table 4). Being able to manage without this formal care could reflect that parents in these families were taking turns to care for children, as was discussed by the FAWD mothers.

Table 5 - Results of multivariate analyses of informal after school care, children with employed mothers (Odds ratios)

Variables	*Uses care by non-relative aged >18*	*Uses care by grand-parent*	*Uses care by parent living elsewhere*	*Uses care by other relative aged >18*	*Uses care by someone aged <18*
Mothers' usual work hours per week (Ref=1-14 hours)					
15-24	2.08***	2.27***	1.04	2.87*	1.66*
25-34	2.22***	2.54***	1.14	3.11**	2.37***
35-44	2.90***	2.53***	1.11	4.91***	2.99***
45 or more	4.12*	3.07***	1.64	5.04***	3.61***
Mothers' job type (Ref= permanent employee)					
Self-employed	0.59***	0.50***	0.75	0.51**	0.39***
Casual employee	0.61**	0.64***	0.72	0.72	0.90
Job schedule (Ref= Regular day time)					
Regular evening or night	1.02	0.99	1.67	1.65	0.67
Irregular or other arrangements	1.47**	0.94	1.43	1.72**	1.63**
Family composition (Ref=couple, full-time employed father)					
Single mother	1.32*	1.20	73.95***	1.17	1.31
Couple, father not full-time employed	0.52***	0.65***	3.62**	0.96	0.53**
Child has younger siblings	1.07	1.36***	1.07	0.66*	0.70*
Child has older siblings	0.72**	0.84*	0.86	1.66**	12.73***
Another adult lives in household	0.44**	2.83***	0.53	1.77*	0.68
Metropolitan (Ref=ex-metropolitan)	1.62***	1.13	1.12	1.05	0.80
Age of child (years)	0.92**	0.91***	0.99	1.12**	1.34***
Constant	0.06***	0.18***	0.00***	0.00***	0.00***
Number of observations	8500	8500	8500	8500	8500
Pseudo r-square	0.04	0.05	0.31	0.05	0.16

Source: LSAC.
Notes: * p<0.05; ** p<0.01; *** p<0.001.

For mothers working irregular hours, care arrangements might need to be particularly responsive and flexible to changing work arrangements. In fact, these data showed that when mothers worked irregular hours, children were less likely to be in formal after school hours care, compared to children of mothers working regular hours. They were more likely to be in informal before and after school hours care, when compared to those whose mothers worked regular hours (table 3). Those working irregular hours were significantly more likely to have children cared for by non-relatives, by relatives other than grandparents aged over 18 years, or by someone aged under 18 years. Grandparents did not appear to be called upon especially by mothers working these irregular hours (table 5).

Before concluding, it is worth highlighting some of the findings related to family characteristics. As many of the FAWD mothers who expressed having difficulties with care for school-aged children were single parents, it is interesting to observe in LSAC that children in single mother families were more likely to be in formal or informal before or after school hours care compared to children in couple families. The greater use of formal care may reflect a need for help with care, given these parents do not have another resident parent to share this role. Given that single parents do not have the back-up of another resident parent, having access to reliable care may especially be sought by single mothers, so that they have greater certainty that the care will be available when they need it. In the collection of information about providers of child care, parents were able to nominate a parent living elsewhere as being one of the providers of care. While this is clearly a very different form of care, rather being a sharing of parenting, we have chosen to retain it as a form of care for these analyses since it may actually facilitate maternal employment. Table 5 shows that care provided by another parent was much more likely in single-mother families compared to other family forms. While there was a large effect in this particular model, it is important to remember that only a very small percentage of children were recorded as being cared for by a parent who lives elsewhere (see table 1 for overall figures). Of children living with an employed single mother, the other parent provided care to 13 per cent of children after school and nine per cent before school.

At the other extreme were families in which the resident father was not employed full-time, and therefore potentially able to help with child care. These families were more likely to manage with only parental care when compared to couple families with full-time employed fathers.

The other family composition variable indicating whether another adult was living in the household was significantly related to children being more likely to be in informal after and before school hours care. This was significantly related to the likelihood of being in grandparent care and being cared for by another relative aged over 18 years. This is likely to reflect that these co-resident adults, often being grandparents or other relatives, provide child care to the school-aged children. Children in these families were less likely than others to be in formal after school care.

Children with younger siblings were somewhat more likely to be in informal care before school hours, compared to those with no younger siblings, and to more likely be in certain types of informal care after school. This was most apparent in the likelihood of being in grandparent care, which suggests grandparents may be

particularly called upon in families with younger children. On the other hand, children with older siblings were less likely to be in formal care, and more likely to be in no care before or after school hours. Also, children with older siblings were very much more likely than those without to be cared for by someone aged under 18 years (usually a sibling). This is consistent with the findings of de Vaus and Millward (1998) who reported that the single greatest determinant of a school-aged child being in self or sibling care was having older siblings. Children with older siblings were also more likely to be cared for by a relative aged over 18 years, who could also be a sibling. Further, the analyses showed that the older the child, the less likely they were to be in some formal or informal care, with the stronger effect of age on formal care, consistent with the perspectives of the FAWD mothers, that older children become more resistant toward going to formal programs. Despite these overall associations, the older the child, the more likely they were in informal care of an under-18-year old, or a relative aged over 18 years, which also may reflect that older school-aged-children are perceived as being more responsible, and so this form of care is seen as being more appropriate.

5. Discussion

When considered together, the findings from LSAC and FAWD provide some insights into the complexities of mothers' decision-making about employment and school-aged children's use of non-parental care.

Across both studies, some mothers of school-aged children had not returned to work. In both LSAC and FAWD the most common reason given for this was related to the needs of their children. The qualitative data provided insights into these decisions– many mothers felt that it was important to be available for their children in case they were needed even if, for the most part, the child was at school. This group of mothers said they wanted to be available for school activities and to care for their children when they were sick or during school holidays and did not see being employed as being compatible with this. While mothers in both LSAC and FAWD mentioned issues such as availability of places and cost of care as reasons for not being employed, these were less frequently cited than those that centred around beliefs about motherhood and non-parental care.

These analyses showed that mothers often seek work that fits within school hours, to minimise the need for care from sources other than themselves. Minimising care serves a number of purposes. Like mothers who are not employed at all, employed mothers in FAWD spoke about access issues such as cost and availability of care outside of school hours. Others had concerns about the appropriateness of children being in care before and/or after school on top of the school day. Similarly many mothers wanted to be available to spend time at their child's school, to take part in activities and to get to know teachers, other parents and children.

Single mothers in FAWD often reported having fewer supports (such as a partner or extended family), which made juggling work and child care more challenging. We saw in LSAC, these mothers were also the most likely to use formal care arrangements. Understanding the care decisions for these single mothers is particularly important given the requirement for single mothers receiving income support to be employed or seeking employment once their children are aged eight years.

Accounts from many mothers in the FAWD study also show that both their employment and child care arrangements can be quite fluid and changeable. This means that mothers may respond to changes in their circumstances through adapting either their employment or child care arrangements or both. This points to the need for both workplaces and child care providers to be able to adapt to the changing needs of parents, perhaps allowing for flexibility when there are alterations to the usual work or care arrangements.

Links between type of employment and type of non-parental care were apparent in the analyses of the LSAC data. Some types of jobs appear to be associated with an increased reliance on formal care for school-aged children, although the family circumstances matter too in relation to whether children are likely to be in formal care, or to be cared for by grandparents or other informal carers. This informal care is clearly very important to some families. The analyses of LSAC showed, for example, that informal care was more likely and formal care less likely for children of mothers who worked irregular hours, compared to those with mothers working regular daytime hours.

The diversity in use of different care options for school-aged children and the impacts of mothers' beliefs and individual circumstances suggest that policy responses that provide a range of options for families is needed. This applies in both the area of child care policy as well as employment policy, to the extent that parents are able to access the working arrangements that fit with care needs of school-aged children.

This paper adds to the limited Australian and overseas literature about maternal employment and child care for school-aged children. By drawing on data from two different sources, we have been able to highlight some of the complexities of the relationship between work and care for these families. There are some limitations to the current paper, however. Because the analyses draw on two separate studies, the quantitative and qualitative data could not be directly linked. Also, the FAWD study is relatively old, although the strong focus of the study on mothers' decision-making around work and care is its particular strength. Nevertheless, an updated study that combines these methodologies would be a valuable resource. Such research could build on the understanding of the issues presented here, and provide opportunities to explore effects of more recent policy developments such as the welfare to work reforms over the past decade.

In order to inform different policy approaches further research is needed, including exploring whether different care arrangements for school-aged children matter to the wellbeing of children. The research could also be extended to explore how well different care options work in various circumstances. For example, how do factors such as commuting time from work to the place of care affect parents' satisfaction with care arrangements and how do parents manage when unplanned occurrences mean they need to find alternative care arrangements?

Adding to the Australian research on the work and care issues faced by families with school-aged children is essential for the development of appropriate policy solutions for these families.

Appendix

Table A.1 - Family characteristics by employment status of mothers

Variables	*Mother not employed*	*Mother employed*	*Total*
	%	%	%
Family composition			
Couple, father employed full-time	57.7	72.7	67.3
Couple, father not employed full-time	21.9	10.58	14.6
Single mother	20.3	16.8	18.1
Child has younger siblings			
Yes	64.1	48.3	54.0
No	35.9	51.7	46.0
Child has older siblings			
Yes	56.4	58.0	57.4
No	43.6	42.0	42.6
Another adult lives in household			
Yes	6.7	5.4	5.9
No	93.3	94.6	94.1
Region of residence			
Ex-metropolitan	35.6	37.7	36.9
Metropolitan	64.5	62.3	63.1
		N	
Sample size	**3,946**	**8,508**	**12,454**

Source: LSAC.

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