



The Childcare Barrier

**Is childcare the most prohibitive
factor for women in the Belfast area
who want to work?**

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Executive Summary

A "Childcare and Employment" survey was administered to unemployed women attending local community and women's groups across Northern Ireland. 1304 surveys were returned from the community and women's groups in the 3 targeted areas of Northern Ireland (Greater Craigavon, North/West Belfast, Ballycastle/The Glens). The surveys were completed within the centres over a 4-6 week period and were returned to the Employers For Childcare office for analysis. The main aim of the survey was to establish if childcare was the main barrier for women who wanted to secure employment for the first time or return to employment. The main findings are as follows:

- For women attending their local women's and community groups 49% said that finding suitable childcare was the biggest barrier and a further 17% found the anticipated cost of childcare a major problem.
- Other barriers included transport, having up to date skills, filling in application forms, preparing for the interview, lack of confidence in own ability and the length of time respondents had been unemployed.
- There was a significant relationship between the length of unemployment and perceived barriers to securing employment for women attending jobcentres as well as those women attending women's and community groups. The longer women had been unemployed the more barriers they identified in relation to securing employment.
- Only 15% of the women attending local women's and community groups were receiving relevant training in order to enter employment for the first time or return to the labour market. This training focused on IT skills.

- There was a relationship between the length of time respondents had been unemployed and their reasons for seeking employment now. These included financial reasons, wanting to further their career, their children not being as dependent and wanting to contribute more to their households.
- There was also a relationship between the number of children in a family and the perceived barriers to securing employment. If families had 3 or more male children or 2 or more female children living in the household this was perceived as a barrier to securing employment.
- Another relationship was found between the ages of children living in a family and the perceived barriers to securing employment. If the children in the family were under 3 years of age women found it more difficult to secure employment as presumably those children would have required childcare while the mother was at work.

Background

This report describes how mothers view childcare and its effect on their participation in the labour market. However, before describing this research it may be useful to place the present research within the context of existing literature, beginning with women's position in the labour market generally before focusing on the effects of childcare.

Women's Labour Force Participation

Women's labour force participation has been increasing steadily since the early 1970's but accelerated rapidly in the 1990's. Thus, whereas the proportion of women of working age who were in the labour force increased by about 3% in the 10 years between 1971 and 1981, and again by the same proportion between 1981 and 1991, it increased by over 6% in only 6 years between 1991 and 1997.

But which women now go out to work? This question can be addressed by reference to data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) as collected by the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Quarterly National Household Survey (QNHS). In western countries including Britain, women's employment expanded during the post Second World War boom; the main growth came initially from women who returned to work (usually part-time) after they had reared their children. The graph of women participation in the labour force over the life cycle in the UK generally is still therefore "bi-modal" – it peaks in the early 20's, falls slightly as some women leave work to have children and then rises again as they return to work when the children are older. (It is noteworthy that this 'M' profile was never as pronounced in Northern Ireland, where women leave work during

the child rearing years, but fewer subsequently return than in the rest of the UK (Kremer et al., 1993)).

More generally, participation rates have been rising for all age groups, with the younger groups having consistently higher participation. Over 71.8% of women between 25-49 years are now in the labour force. Furthermore, this also suggests that once they have entered the labour force, women are now more likely to remain in paid work rather than leaving as they reach their 30's and 40's.

The participation of women in the labour market is essential to the success of the UK economy and also provides significant benefits for employers, particularly in terms of the skills and experience available to them. There is growing recognition that the skills women excel in are to be highly valued in the changing economy.

The Earnings Gap

As is well known, on average a women's annual full-time earnings equate to about 60-70% of men's (depending on the year of measurement). The earnings or gender gap is thus somewhere between 30-40%. Only a relatively small proportion of this gap (about 5 percentage points) can be considered pure wage discrimination. The majority of the difference arises from the different labour market decisions women have made, a great many of which are associated with their primary responsibility for the rearing of children. For instance, about 10 percentage points of the difference is due to occupational segregation i.e. women are concentrated in sales, service and clerical female-dominated occupations. Those jobs may be easier to enter and exit, may offer more part-time employment, and may offer more flexibility in hours

of work than other occupations but there is a considerable wage penalty suffered in both the short term and long term. About seven percentage points of the average wage differential is statutory, related to differences in unionisation and the accumulation of human capital (experience and education). Close to 15 percentage points is due to differences in the number of hours typically worked (even among full-time workers). As Gunderson (1986) stated "differential child raising responsibilities is a crucial determinant of each and every one of these components". In fact, it is difficult to think of any other factor that is so important in influencing the various components of the earnings gap.

In terms of the ongoing trend towards smaller family sizes, the usual argument is that falling fertility and rising women's labour force participation are mutually reinforcing. If women choose to have fewer children then they are more available for paid employment. If women have paid employment then the benefits (both financial and emotional) associated with having children fall. Since it is assumed that Irish women have fewer children than in the past, then presumably this could both cause and effect rising labour force participation in Ireland (Collins & Wickham, May 2001).

Work and Career Breaks

There are more women than ever returning to paid work soon after having children, with their own requirements for balancing work and family life

- The proportion of women returning to work within a year after childbirth has increased dramatically - 74% in 2002 compared to 67% in 1996, 45% in 1988 and 24% in 1979. The proportion of

women working full-time following return to work after childbirth rose from 15% in 1988 to 24% in 1996 to 29% in 2002

- Lack of flexible working arrangements play a major role in influencing mothers' decisions to stay at home. A Women's Unit Survey (2000) on mothers reasons for not doing paid work, found that reasons included that suitable childcare was too costly or that they couldn't find work with suitable hours
- Research carried out by the Daycare Trust (2000) found that almost half of all parents say a supportive employer is important in helping women return to work and a similar proportion feel that working mothers do not receive this support from employers

Work/Life Balance

According to Age Concern (1999) 14% of people are care-givers and this proportion is likely to increase. At the same time, there is also a popular belief that commitment to family responsibilities hinders the advancement of women in the workplace

- Men generally work longer hours than women do
- According to Opportunity NOW (2000), 83% of women believe that commitment to family responsibilities hinders women's advancement in the workplace
- Since 1980 the Women's Unit has found that the proportion of mothers with children under 5 years who are in paid work has increased from 28% to 53% in 1999
- 25% of women in employment utilise flexible working patterns (including flexi-time, tem time working, annualised hours, job sharing and nine day fortnights) compared with 16% of men.

Women and Unemployment

After a decade of employment growth across the UK, we may think long-term unemployment is a less serious problem, but economic

growth has slowed greatly and we may soon see the jobless figures rise again. A recent MORI report by Williams & Stevens highlighted a range of barriers to employment for mothers, such as the lack of flexible working and the lack of affordable childcare. The women emphasised the need for further training to help them get back into employment. They said that training would not only update skills, but also build confidence. Many of the women who were on benefits felt they were better off not working, partly due to the perceived cost of childcare.

An article published in 1995 by the Centre for Research on Women maintained that unemployment was especially difficult to quantify for women as many will not consider themselves unemployed when busy with childminding and home care duties. This was a major survey comprehensively examining the issue of women and employment. It explored women's experiences of and attitudes to employment; the extent of and reason for their unemployment and economic inactivity; the influence of women's domestic life on their participation in paid employment and life cycle influences on women's movement in and out of paid employment.

Lone and Partnered Working Mothers

An article by Backett-Milburn et al titled "Caring and Providing: Lone and Partnered working mothers in Scotland" published on the experiences of lone and partnered working mothers in Scotland in March 2001 found that mothers valued work highly, not only for its economic contributions but also for personal identity, social contact and also for sending an important message about women's role in society to their children. For the lone mothers, being in paid work was important because it meant that they were not perceived as "on benefit". For many respondents, their choice of job was constrained by family responsibilities. They required flexibility in

hours and working practices and for many this meant taking low-grade work. Many found managing domestic life alongside paid work onerous and tiring. Lone parents, in particular, said sole responsibility for both home management and parenting could be stressful. Work was valued for four main reasons:

- economic considerations
- personal identity
- social relationships
- appropriate messages for children.

Women in Northern Ireland

A publication by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment "Women in Northern Ireland" (January 2003) has released the most up to date figures of women in the labour force, and a summary of key findings is presented below.

1 Women in the Labour Force

- There are 340,000 (16+) women who are economically active – 43% of all the economically active
- The economic activity rate for women of working age is 65% compared to 80% for men of working age
- The economic activity rate of women of working age depends on the number of dependent childcare and the age of their youngest dependent child.

2 Women in employment (16+)

- There are 322,000 women in employment – 44% of all those in employment
- 304,000 women are employees – 48% of all employees
- 14,000 women are self-employed – 16% of all self-employed

- 42% of female employees work part-time compared to 6% of males. The female figure is up 6.2 percentage points over the last 5 years
- 89% of female full-time employees work in the service sector, compared to 56% of males
- 9% of women in employment are managers or senior officials, compared to 14% of men
- Women's average gross weekly earnings have improved relative to that of men's. They are now 81% of men's compared to 75% compared to 5 years ago

3 Women in Unemployment

- 18,000 women are ILO unemployed compared to 26,000 men
- The ILO unemployment rate for women is 5.2% compared to 5.8% for men
- 68% of unemployed women have been unemployed for less than one year compared with 51% of unemployed men
- At October 2002, 8,200 women were claiming Jobseekers Allowance compared to 26,900 men
- The seasonally adjusted claimant count for women at October 2002 was 2.4% of the workforce compared to 6.1% of the male workforce

4 Economic inactivity of women (16+)

- 326,000 women are economically inactive – 64% of all the economically inactive compared to 67% 5 years ago
- 89% of the female economically inactive do not want a job
- 23% of the female economically inactive who do not want a job, gave as their reason, family/home commitments
- 11% of the female economically inactive want a job but did not meet the criteria in terms of availability or job search to be deemed economically active, compared to 8% of men

5 Childcare provision

- In 2002, there were 42,652 daycare places in Northern Ireland – a rise of 39% since 1992
- The average weekly amount of childcare charges paid to eligible families was £70.46
- The number of day nursery places per 1000 children aged 0 – 4 years in Northern Ireland in 2001 was 62.4 compared with 95.0 in England

6 Educational standards of women

- In 2000/01 66% of girls left school with at least 5 GCSE grades A* - C compared to 50% of boys
- 44% of girls left school with 2 or more A-Levels compared with 36% of boys
- After leaving school, 70% of girls went to further/higher education compared to 50% of boys (2000/01)
- 59% of all students enrolled in Northern Ireland universities are women (2001/02)

7 Economic in/activity rates

- This table overleaf shows the economic in/activity rates for the period December 2002 – February 2003 across Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland, England and the UK as a whole

	NI	WALES	SCOTLAND	ENGLAND	UK
Total aged 16 and over	1284	2300	4030	38939	46560
Total economically active	788	1348	2543	24628	29305
Total in employment	745	1282	2387	23401	27811
ILO unemployed	43	65	155	1227	1494
Economically inactive	496	952	1488	14312	17255
Activity rate (%) 16 - 59/64	73.9	75.2	79.4	78.9	78.6
Claimant count rate	4.3	3.5	3.8	3.0	3.1
Employee jobs	659	1068	2257	21808	25792
ILO unemployment rate (%)	5.5	4.8	6.1	5.0	5.1

Women's Work and Childcare

In western societies both past and present, within the nuclear family almost invariably the mother is expected to take primary responsibility for both the provision of care for young children and the making of day to day decisions about their lives. Accordingly, it is nearly always the mother's work career that is interrupted if someone has to stay at home with the children; it is the mother who works part-time when children are young, who foregoes opportunities for advancement, or who neglects the acquisition of skills that might permit moving to a higher income. Of course, young children also make life forever different for fathers; often they may work harder or longer hours, or there may be a considerable amount of off-shifting, where fathers and mothers adjust work schedules to avoid having to hire paid caregivers while they both work. The evidence, however, seems overwhelming that

changes in childcare policy will have more dramatic direct effects on the daily lives of mothers than on fathers.

With this in mind, Gunderson (1986) has identified six dimensions of female labour market behaviour that are potentially affected by changes in childcare policies:

- 1 Labour force participation
- 2 Hours of work
- 3 Acquisition of general labour force experience and company-specific seniority
- 4 Human capital acquisition
- 5 Earnings
- 6 Occupational status

Since the Second World War there has been a revolution in the labour force participation of women. In 1946, the female participation rate (the percentage of all women of labour force age who are currently either employed or unemployed and seeking work) was 20.2%, and women constituted about 22% of the labour force. By 1997, the female participation rate was 57.4% and women comprised 45.1% of the labour force. Over the same period, the male participation rate fell from 85% to 72.5%.

The growth in participation rates has been particularly strong among married women with children, including those with preschool children e.g. 31.2% of all mothers with the youngest child between 3-5 years were in the labour force in 1975 compared to 68.8% in 1997; 48.2% of mothers with youngest child between 6-15 years were in the labour force in 1975, compared to 77.7% in 1997. While labour force participation rates have increased rapidly, nearly all studies of mothers' employment decisions have found that the

cost of childcare is one key element of that decision, and it is towards cost that we now turn.

Childcare Cost and Women's Labour Force Participation

There is a considerable research literature on the effects of childcare costs on mother's labour force participation, much less on hours of work and very little on other dimensions of labour market experience. Hofferth & Collins (1997) have studied the effects of children and childcare on mothers' job stability. Among other things they found that mothers relying on parental or self care of children were more than twice as likely to leave a job, than mothers using centre care. Further, mothers who did not have convenient local access to centre-based childcare were almost twice as likely to leave their jobs as those who did. Hofferth & Collins found particularly strong effects of childcare problems on job stability for mothers with moderate, rather than low or high wages. There is only sparse evidence on the effects of the convenience and quality of childcare on any aspect of mothers' labour market decision-making.

The current cost of childcare for many families in Northern Ireland is considerable. Nearly half of families with pre-school children use non-market forms of childcare (off-shifting by the child's father, care by other relatives inside/outside the child's home) to allow mothers to work. Although the monetary cost of these arrangements is generally minimal, this may be misleading. The use of non-market care is strongly and inversely associated with the mothers' income, suggesting both that women are more likely to take only a part-time job when using family members to care for children and women with low earning capacity may be compelled to use unpaid care. Cleveland & Hyatt (1994) have calculated the

annual monetary cost of childcare for those families using paid arrangements. On average, childcare costs eat up 7.9% of family income. However, since the mother's work decision frequently involves a comparison of her potential income to the expected cost of care, it may be more relevant to consider childcare costs as a fraction of the mother's income alone; on average childcare costs amount to 17.9% of the mother's annual income. Increased expenditure is strongly and positively associated with the number of preschool children in the family, the mother's participation in full-time work and family income. It seems obvious therefore that the price of childcare is sufficient to affect both decisions about labour force participation and hours of work.

There is not much evidence about how childcare costs, convenience and quality affect whether a mother works full-time or part-time. Powell (1997) reports on evidence suggesting that full-time work is quite sensitive to childcare costs, while part-time work is less so. Simulation results show that if all childcare costs were fully subsidised, the rate of full-time employment (as a percentage of all mothers) would increase from 29% to 52%, suggesting that childcare subsidies will have a particularly strong positive effect on full-time work. As Powell notes, this finding is even more significant in a lifetime context, because substantial experience of part-time working has been shown to affect a mother's career path, leaving her with a permanently lower lifetime income stream.

Nearly all the statistical evidence cited above comes from cross-sectional studies (with data from a single point in time) in which the decisions of mothers facing different opportunities and having different characteristics are compared with one another. These studies do not, by their nature, consider the lifelong effects of changes in the anticipated cost, availability and quality of childcare.

However, decisions about the acquisition of labour force skills through education and job training, about marriage and having children, and about whether a mother will stay at home while children are young, are long term decisions which are, at least in part, made when mothers (and fathers) are still girls (and boys). Accordingly only a part of the effect of any permanent change in childcare policy is contemporaneous.

Childcare and Housing

The Social Policy Research Unit carried out a survey in 1995 on the subject of affordable childcare and housing. They found that childcare was the biggest and potentially the most expensive obstacle to paid employment outside the home for women who did not have access to free childcare. The majority of mothers said that childcare difficulties were an obstacle to their employment. More than half perceived childcare to be the greatest barrier they faced. Although childcare and financial considerations were usually regarded as the greatest disincentives to work, the mothers interviewed faced a number of other barriers to employment – cultural, social and religious, family, educational qualifications, low expectations and discrimination. Although only a small number of mothers perceived their own lack of qualifications to be a barrier to their employment, the research demonstrated a very strong link between formal qualifications and current employment status. This indicates that lack of appropriate qualifications and experience are, in practice, an obstacle to employment.

Supply of and Demand for Childcare in Northern Ireland

The Local Economy Policy Unit at South Bank University recently completed a study of the supply of and demand for childcare in

Northern Ireland, commissioned by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Department for Employment and Learning and the four Childcare Partnerships in Northern Ireland. The study included a survey of childcare providers, a survey of parents and the analysis of data from the Family Resources Survey (for Great Britain) and the Labour Force Survey (for the UK). These were used to measure the supply of and demand for childcare, the influence of childcare provision on women's employment rates and the extent to which lack of affordable childcare constitutes a barrier to equality of opportunity in the labour market. The survey of 1395 parents has shown that there has been a considerable rise in the use of formal childcare in Northern Ireland since the PPRU study in 1994. Formal childcare is now used by 47% of all families with children under 12, 52% of couples and 37% of lone parent families. It is hardly used by parents of children aged 12 – 14, except in a few cases for after-school schemes. The 47% figure compares to 57% in the study made by La Valle et al (2000) of parents of children up to and including 14 in Great Britain. This lower use in Northern Ireland reflects the lower childcare provision, compared to the rest of the UK. Formal childcare is used by 50% of employed mothers and 33% of non-employed mothers. Amongst partnered mothers who are working, formal childcare is used by 53% and amongst working lone parents; formal childcare is used by 42%. Most of the childcare used by mothers in employment takes the form of registered childminding, unregistered childminding and day nurseries.

The study predicted that the number of childminding places will need to rise by between 654 and 695 between 1999 and 2005 – equivalent to a 4% increase. However this prediction does not take into account the excess demand revealed in both the provider survey and the survey of parents. It also predicted that the number

of day nursery places will need to rise by 609 to 646 – equivalent to 12% increase up to 2005. This shows a rapid increase in this category, related to the shift in composition of the female workforce towards professional and managerial jobs. The number of after school places will need to rise from 400 to 424 up to 2005 – equivalent to at least 13% increase. The proportion of mothers working full-time in Northern Ireland is higher than the UK average, despite slightly larger families. Several mothers in the survey said they would like to work term time only, but found it difficult to obtain a job of this kind.

Mothers will no doubt welcome the overall growth of part-time jobs in the Northern Ireland economy which is predicted for the next few years. It will, none the less, be a challenge to ensure that these jobs offer working time patterns which are suitable for mothers of young children and that affordable childcare is available to help them move towards equality of opportunity in the labour market.

Benefits for Employers

- A DFEE Research Brief (1999) and the Department of Trade and Industry (2000) have highlighted the business benefits of flexible employment practices. These include reduced casual sickness absence, improved retention, improved productivity, improved morale and commitment. Other research by the Department of Trade and Industry (2000) supports the view that employers who have introduced measures to support working parents find that they are beneficial (or at least neutral) in cost-benefit terms
- Remuneration Economics (2000) has found that the number of female executives is increasing - the level of 22% (April 2000) is more than double that recorded years prior
- Research conducted by Barclays PLC (2000) found that women being active in the business community, accounts for about one

third of the business start-ups. In addition, a third of the businesses with a turnover of up to £1 million are owned by women.

Set against these research findings and mindful of the obvious benefits to employers and the economy generally of greater female participation in the labour market, the present research will attempt to address the following issues:

Research Questions

- 1 Is childcare the main barrier for women who want to participate in the labour market?
- 2 What other factors/barriers to employment do women identify e.g. Cost of childcare, flexibility of work hours, travel arrangements etc?
- 3 Is there a relationship between the length of unemployment and perceived barriers to employment?
- 4 Are women attending community and women's groups receiving all the training they need to get them (back) into employment?
- 5 Is there a relationship between the length of time respondents have been unemployed and their reasons for seeking employment?
- 6 Is there a relationship between the number of children in a family and the barriers women perceive to employment?
- 7 Is there a relationship between the ages of children in a family and the barriers women perceive to employment?

Method – Community/Women’s Groups – Belfast area

Contact via letter was made with all community and women’s groups managers in the 3 target areas of Northern Ireland (North/West Belfast, Greater Craigavon and Ballycastle/The Glens) and the purpose of the survey explained. 30 copies of the survey were posted to each group and women who would come in to look for job vacancies or to get together with other mums in the local area or take part in training opportunities provided in the group were asked by staff to complete the survey. The only criteria women had to meet was that they were parents and were actively seeking employment. The anonymity of the answers were ensured as was confidentiality of the data received. Once completed the surveys were returned in a sealed box clearly marked “Completed surveys for EFC”. Each community/women’s group had approximately 6 weeks to get as many surveys completed as possible, after which time they were posted back to the Research Officer in Employers For Childcare for analysis in freepost envelopes already provided.

Descriptive Results – Community/Women’s Groups – Belfast area

There were three areas of Northern Ireland targeted. These were North & West Belfast, Greater Craigavon and The Causeway areas. These three areas were chosen as our joint project work with NICMA has set up childminding networks in these 3 areas. In order to assess the efficiency of the networks we wanted to be able to identify the current needs of women in these areas in relation to childcare and training in order to facilitate their move into the labour market.

A total of 5340 surveys were sent out in January 2003 and 1304 were received back, giving a response rate of 24%. The following tables give a breakdown of the survey.

Surveys sent out

	Community Groups	Women’s Groups	Total
Belfast area	1020	990	2010
Craigavon area	1020	870	1890
Causeway area	900	540	1440
Total	2940	2400	5340

Surveys returned

	Community Groups	Women’s Groups	Total
Belfast area	249	152	401
Craigavon area	182	161	343
Causeway area	259	301	560
Total	690	614	1304

The following table shows the response rates for both community and women's groups from all three areas:

Response rates

	Community Groups	Women's Groups	Total
Belfast area	24%	15%	20%
Craigavon area	18%	19%	18%
Causeway area	29%	56%	39%

As we can see the response rate was best from both community and women's groups in the Causeway area. The following gives a breakdown of the survey questions asked and the responses received from the Belfast area. Out of 1304 surveys received from all three areas, 401 were returned from Belfast area i.e. 31% of total response. 401 is 100% for Belfast figures below.

1 How long have you been attending the group?

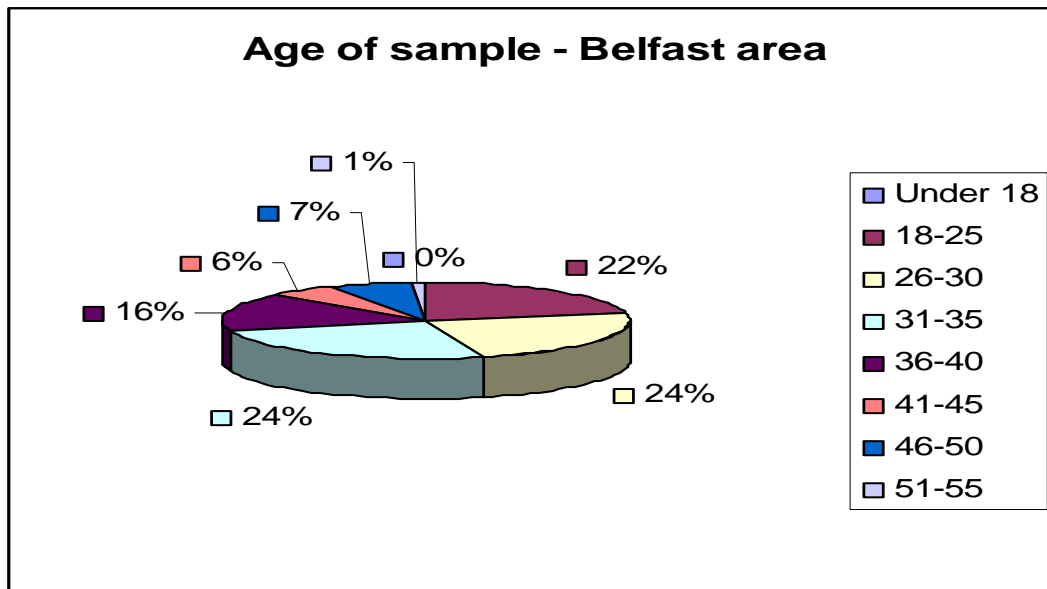
Most women had been attending the group for between 19 months and 3 years (45%). 14% said they attended every now and then and 31% attended regularly once a week.

2 What sort of activities do you engage in while at the group?

The most popular reason given for attending the group was that it let them participate in ICT training (22%). Other reasons included letting the children play together (10%), mums getting together and chatting (9%), to improve their chances of getting a job (18%), to get out of the house (19%) and to have some "ME" time (7%).

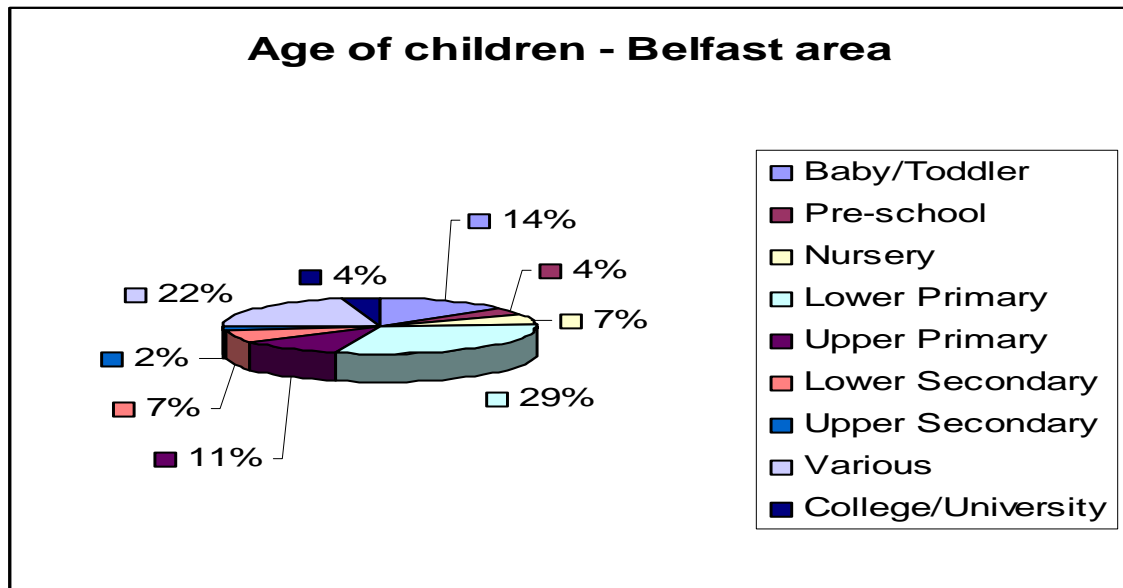
3 Age of sample

Almost a quarter of the sample were parents aged between 26 – 30 years (24%) with none being under 18 years and only 1% being between 51 – 55 years.



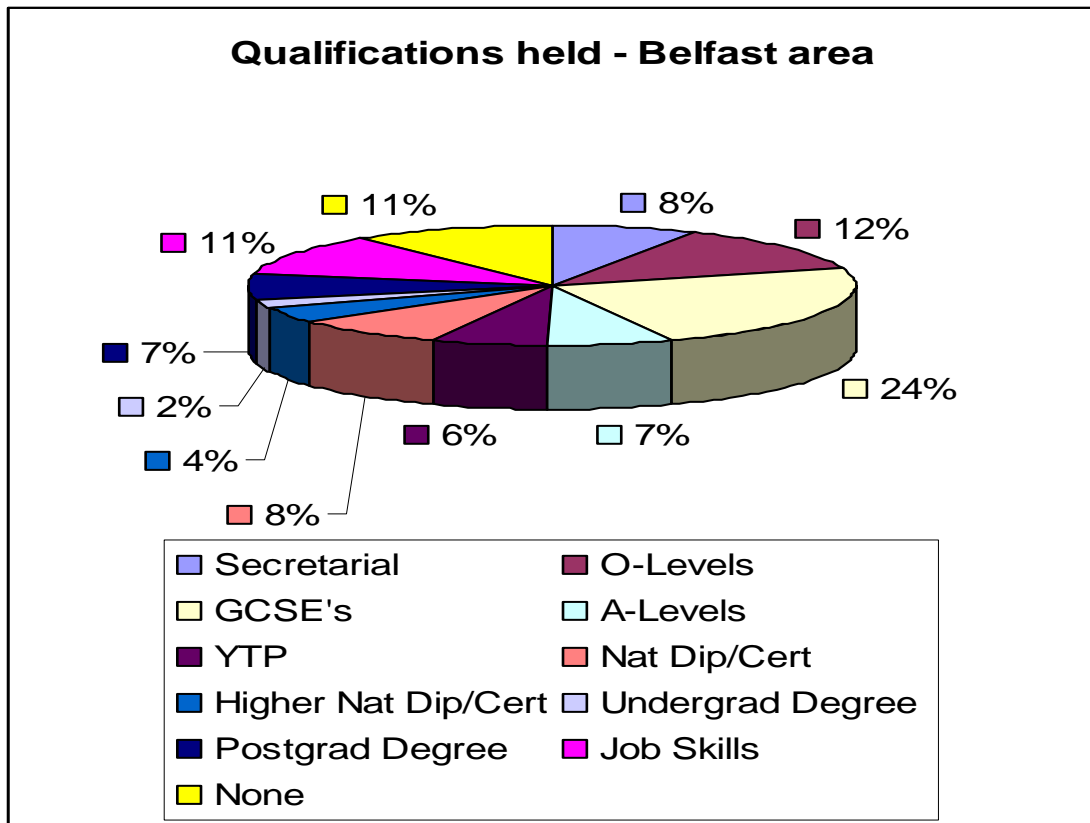
4 Children of respondents

More than half the respondents had both 1 son and 1 daughter (52%) with very few having more than 4 children (5%). Almost a quarter of the children (22%) were of lower primary school age although there were children in every age category up to College/University.



5 Qualifications held

Again, as for the job centre survey this was categorised according to the highest qualification held by each respondent. The highest possessed by the majority of the sample was GCSE's (24%), followed by O-Levels (12%). Equal numbers had National Diplomas/Certificates and Secretarial qualifications (8%). Only 2% of the sample had an undergraduate degree while 7% possessed either a higher/postgraduate degree. A further 11% had job skills qualifications and a further 11% possessed no formal qualifications.

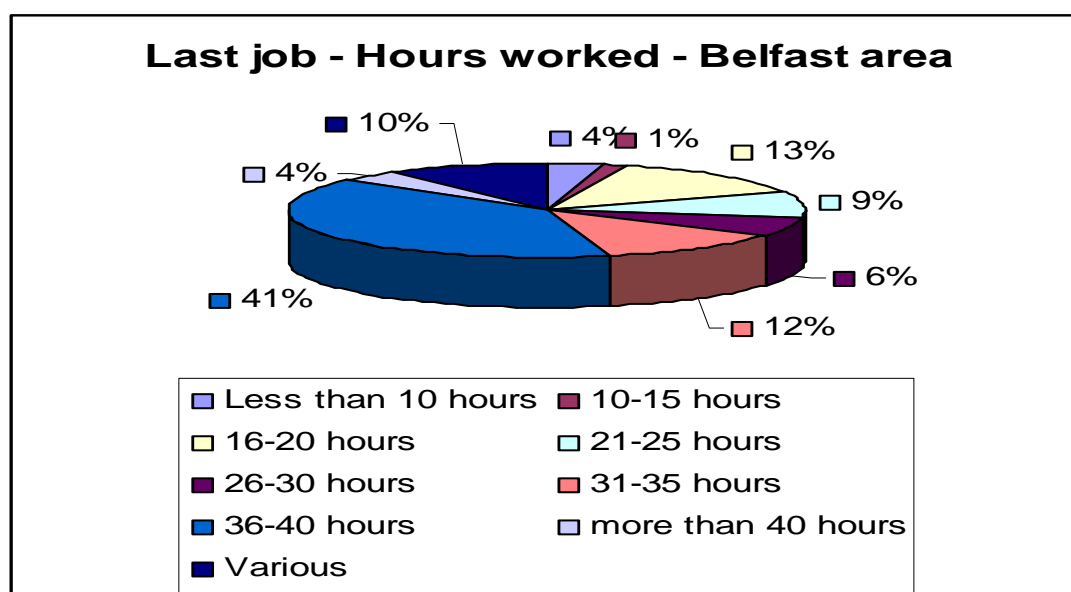


6 Length of time unemployed

Just over a quarter of the sample had been unemployed for between 1 – 2 years (28%) with 18% being unemployed for more than 4 years and 4% of the sample claiming to have never worked. Financial reasons were the most common incentive for seeking employment (78%) and 29% wanted to contribute to the household. 41% wanted to further their own careers and a further 34% said they were seeking employment as their children were not as dependent. Of those that had previously been active in the labour market, for the majority it was in a non-skilled capacity (44%). Only 9% had previously held professional jobs and 1% had occupied managerial positions.

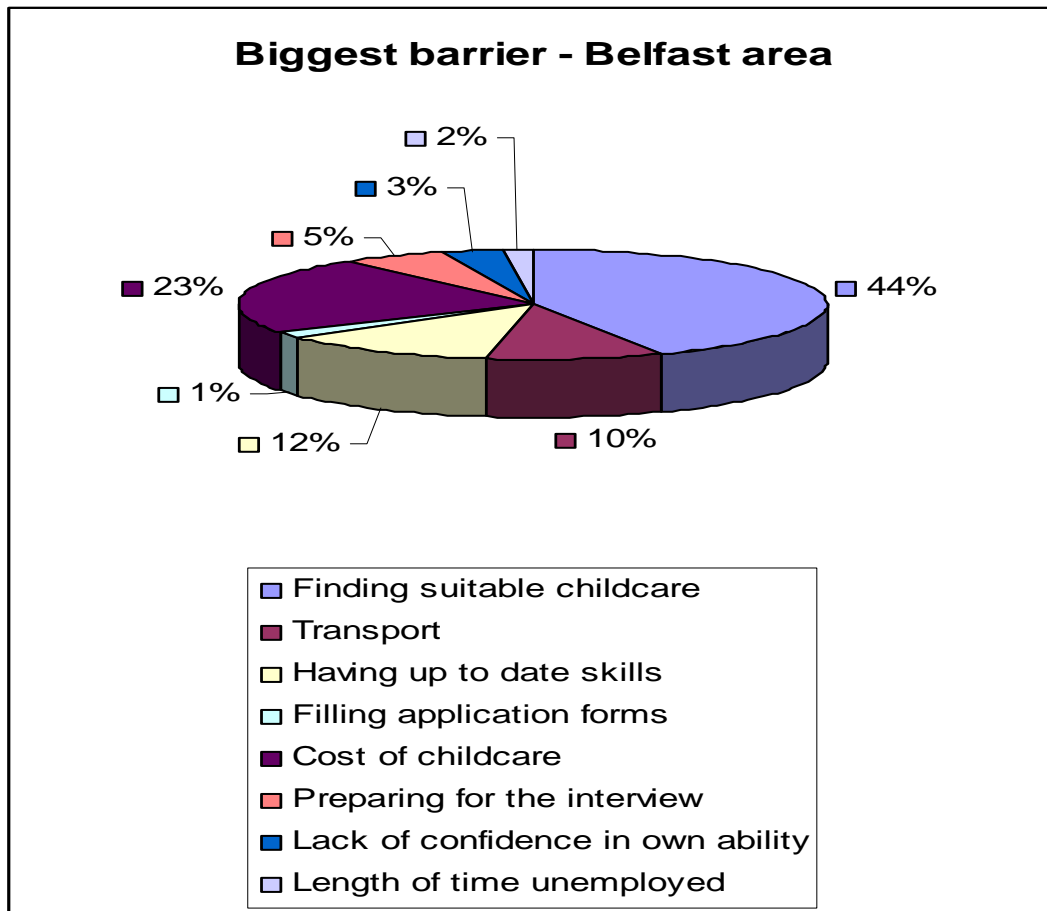
7 Last job – hours worked

In previous employment 41% of the sample worked between 36 – 40 hours per week. Most of them worked day shifts (80%), on a full time basis (67%) and had temporary contracts of employment (61%). The majority did not work shifts (76%), did not have access to job share (90%) and were not able to avail of flexi hours (77%). Only 12% of the sample said they could avail of flexi hours.



8 Most significant barrier to employment

In looking for employment 44% said that finding suitable childcare was the biggest barrier. 23% felt that the cost of childcare was a big barrier. In total, 67% of the sample found childcare issues were the main barriers to successfully securing employment.

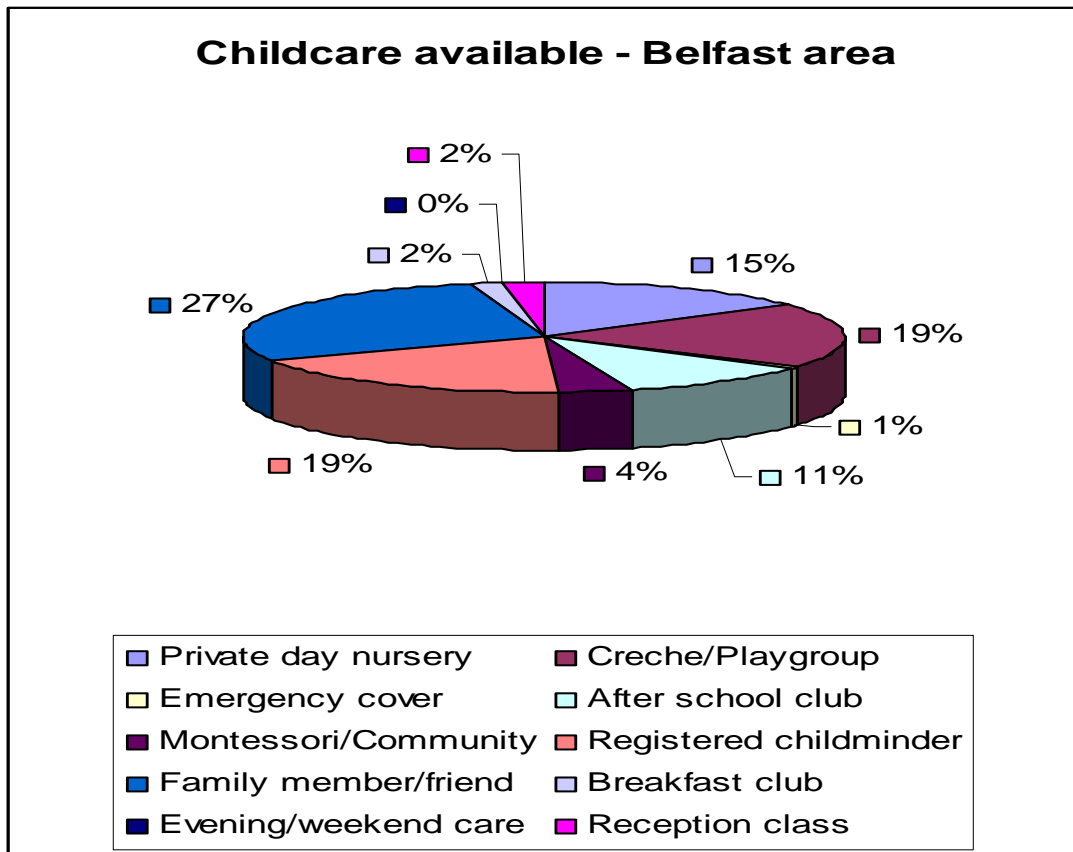


9 Least significant barrier to employment

Preparing for the interview was considered to be the least problematic for respondents who were looking for a job.

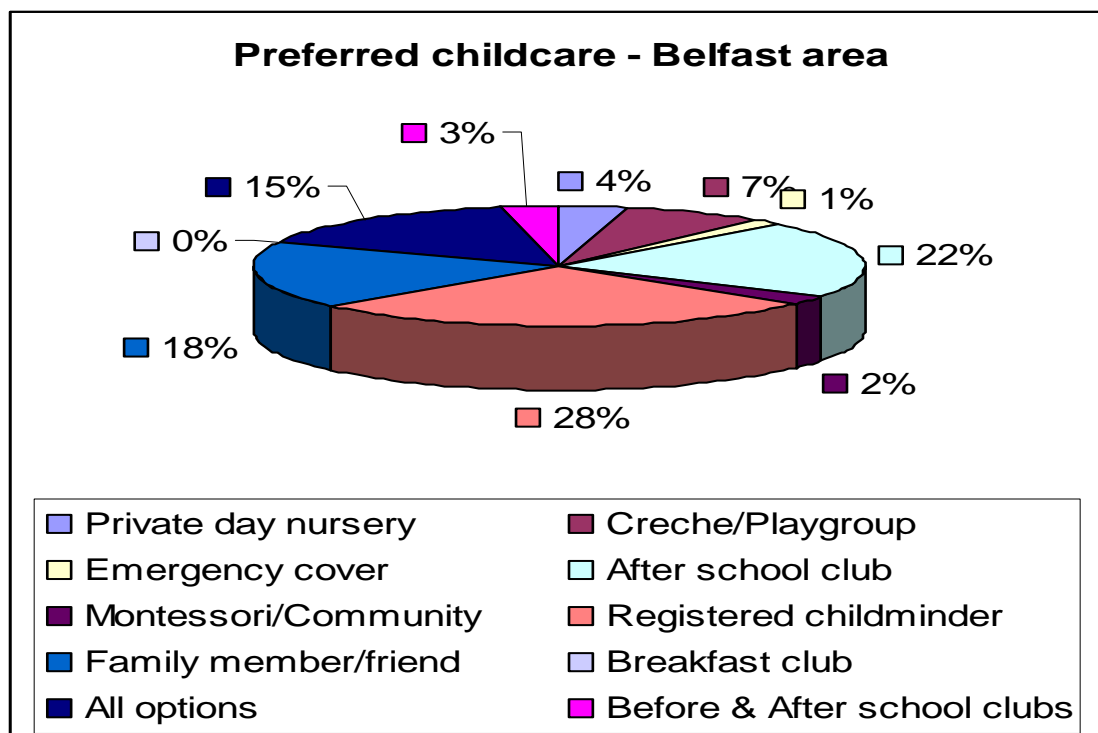
10 Childcare available in local area

Some form of childcare was available in most areas. 93% had access to some form of childcare. The most common one available was care provided by a family member/friend (27%) with equal numbers able to avail of registered childminders and crèche/playgroup facilities (19%). The least available type of childcare was evening/weekend care (0%), care in an emergency (1%), breakfast clubs (2%) and reception classes (2%).



11 Childcare most would be happy with if employment was secured

The type of childcare 28% of mothers would be happy with if they secured employment was care provided by a registered childminder, an after school club (22%), and a family member/friend (18%). A significant proportion (15%) said they would be happy with any of the childcare options listed.



12 Preferred working times

Considering current childcare responsibilities 70% of parents could start work at 9am and 26% could finish at 5pm. If parents had access to good quality, affordable childcare the majority could still start at 9am (72%) but more could work until 5pm (51%). The majority of parents said they were willing to work weekdays (75%) with a significant proportion willing to work every day (43%). Of the different working hours on offer, most parents showed a preference for working normal school hours between 9am – 3pm (76%). A significant proportion showed a preference for working during normal office hours between 9am – 5pm (67%), working during term time only (45%) and availing of flexi hours (67%).

13 Interested in becoming a self-employed registered childminder

In general, the majority of the sample were not interested in becoming a self-employed registered childminder. Reasons were not sought.

Answers to Research Questions

Beyond the basic descriptive statistics a number of inferential statistics were used to consider the influence of eg. Family size, length of unemployment and age of children on barriers to employment. The findings of these analyses are summarised below in relation to the research questions (further details are available on request).

1 Is childcare the main barrier for women who want to work?

For women attending their local women's and community groups in the Belfast area, 49% said that finding suitable childcare was the biggest barrier and a further 17% found the anticipated cost of childcare a major problem.

2 What other factors/barriers to employment do women identify?

There was agreement from women attending women's and community groups in the Belfast area. Other barriers identified in order of most prohibitive to securing employment after childcare issues included transport, having up to date skills, filling in application forms, preparing for the interview, lack of confidence in own ability and the length of time respondents had been unemployed.

3 Is there any relationship between the length of unemployment and perceived barriers to employment?

The length of unemployment was considered in relation to the number of perceived barriers to securing employment. Generally, it was found that the longer women had been unemployed the more barriers they identified in relation to securing employment. It tended to be that childcare issues featured more prominently among those who had been unemployed for longer periods.

4 Are women attending women's and community groups receiving all the training they need to get them back (into) employment?

Only 15% of the women attending local women's and community groups are receiving training that they classified as relevant in order to enter employment for the first time or return to the labour market. This training focused on IT skills as this was identified more than any other training as a pre-requisite for securing employment.

5 Is there any relationship between the length of time respondents have been unemployed and the reasons for seeking employment?

Those unemployed for longer periods of time tended to cite more reasons for seeking employment and in general they were more inclined to mention that financial reasons and wanting to contribute to the household were the main reasons for presently seeking employment.

6 Is there any relationship between the number of children in a family and the barriers to employment as perceived by those women attending jobcentres, women's and community groups?

Those women with larger families were more likely to mention childcare issues as significant barriers to employment. These included childcare costs, finding suitable childcare and transport.

7 Is there a relationship between the ages of children in a family and the perceived barriers to employment by those women attending jobcentres, women's and community groups?

Those women who had younger children in their families were more likely to mention childcare issues as significant barriers to employment. These again included cost of childcare, finding suitable childcare and transport as well as finding a job which fitted in with primary school hours.

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