



ISSUE BRIEF

BARRIERS TO CHILD CARE FOR YPSILANTI PARENTS AND GUARDIANS

JUNE 2023
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MIMACS MICHIGAN METRO AREA
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OVERVIEW

This report is part of a series of reports from the Center for Racial Justice using data from the [Michigan Metro Area Communities Study \(MIMACS\)](#). The survey was fielded between Feb. 24 and April 19, 2022, and captures the views of a representative sample of 752 Ypsilanti households. This report explores the experiences that 117 parents and custodial guardians had with child care, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹ The report pays particular attention to how access to child care varied based on the number of adults living in a household, ethnoracial identity, and income. In addition to the responses collected in the MIMACS survey, we also drew from in-depth interviews with 12 parents and individuals working in the child care industry across Washtenaw County.²

[See full results from MIMACS surveys here.](#)

INTRODUCTION

Michigan, like many states, faces a child care crisis. There are at least four children under 12 for every available opening at a child care center in the state.³ Some analyses suggest that these numbers underestimate the problem and that when accounting for both the number of child care spots a center is licensed to provide and the number of spots that centers have staffing to support, the true picture of child care availability in Michigan is much more grim.⁴ Importantly, the challenges presented by the limited number of openings in child care centers are exacerbated by a range of other impediments, including the cost of child care and the need for back-up and emergency care.

The challenges of finding and affording child care has harmful effects on both individual families and the larger economy. In particular, access to high-quality care can be an important determinant of labor force participation for parents, and especially mothers, in the United States.⁵ These challenges became particularly clear during the COVID-19 pandemic, when racial and economic disparities in access to child care widened.⁶ Disparities in access to child care at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to widening racial disparities in the labor market.^{7,8,9} Because of the broad implications of child care inaccessibility, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has expanded access to free or low-cost child care for Michigan families and allocated \$2.4 million in Regional Child Care Planning Grants to enhance and expand child care infrastructure across the state.^{10,11}

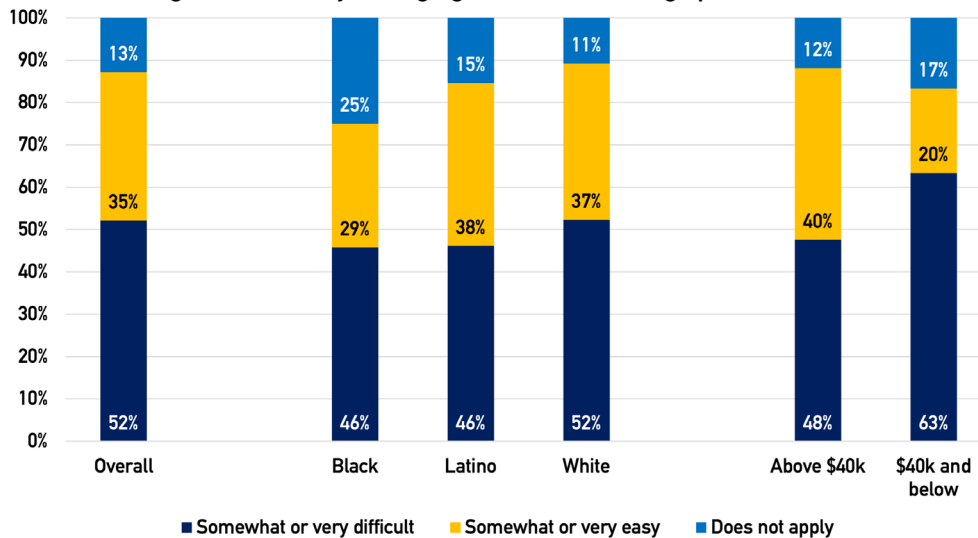
In this brief, we examine parents' experiences with child care in Ypsilanti (including both the city and township) and the child care-related issues they report are the most important.



MORE THAN HALF OF YPSILANTI PARENTS IN OUR SAMPLE SAID MANAGING CHILD CARE HAS BEEN DIFFICULT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

- **Child care has been a widespread challenge in Ypsilanti**, with more than half (52%) of parents in our sample reporting that handling child care responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic has been somewhat or very difficult. Slightly more than one-third (35%) of Ypsilanti parents with children under 12 in our sample said it has been easy to handle child care responsibilities.
- **Child care challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic extended across ethnoracial groups.** Fifty-two percent of White parents in our sample responded that handling child care during the COVID-19 pandemic has been difficult. Slightly fewer Latino (46%) and Black (46%) parents in our sample also reported facing difficulty in handling child care.
- **Parents living in Ypsilanti households that earn below Ypsilanti’s median income of \$40,000 have had more difficulties with managing child care during the COVID-19 pandemic than parents who earn \$40,000 or more.**¹² Just under half (48%) of parents in households earning \$40,000 per year or more in our sample reported difficulties managing child care during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to nearly 2 in 3 (63%) parents living in households earning less than \$40,000 per year.
- **Challenges with child care are often compounded by other challenges.** One individual who works for a Washtenaw County organization that provides child care highlighted that families seeking help often experience a range of basic needs: “I’m talking to families about resources in the community. **Not just regarding child care, but as far as other resources, housing, sometimes DTE, clothing,** things of that sort.”¹³ Another individual who supervises case managers working in a Washtenaw County nonprofit noted the stigma associated with obtaining assistance with child care. When referring families to government resources, including childcare subsidies, she observed that some families “don’t always want to [apply for subsidies] right away. ... And if you know anything about trauma [from generational poverty], ... that just takes a little bit of time to work through.”

Figure 1: Difficulty Managing Child Care, Among Ypsilanti Parents



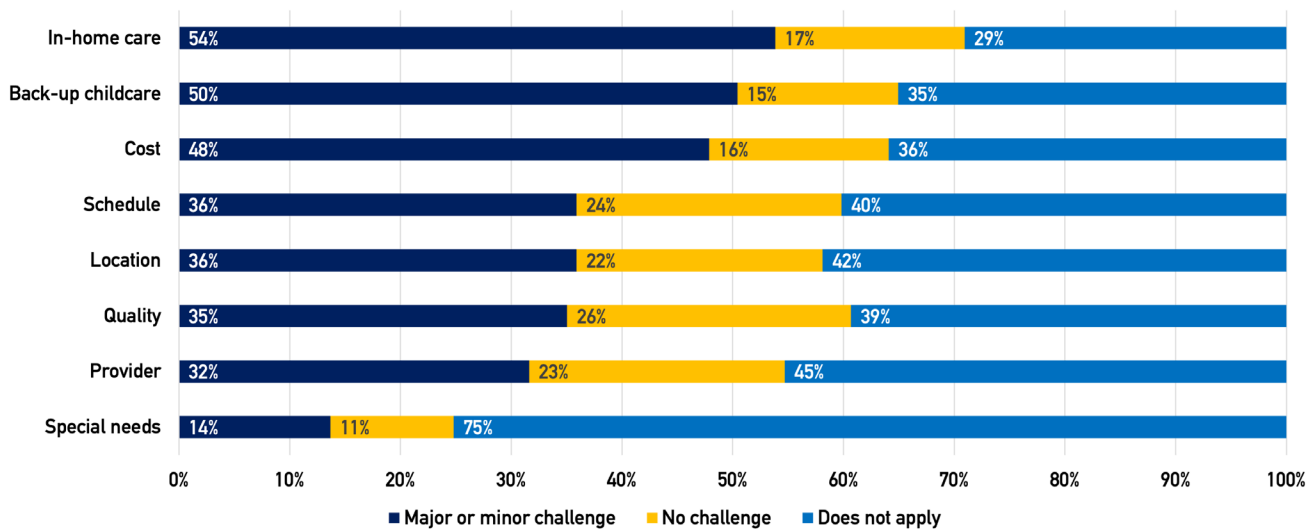
FINDING IN-HOME CHILD CARE WAS THE MOST FREQUENTLY CITED CHILD CARE CHALLENGE AMONG YPSILANTI PARENTS IN OUR SAMPLE.

- **More than half (54%) of Ypsilanti parents in our sample reported that “finding someone to watch my child at home” was a challenge.** In open-ended responses, parents in our sample mentioned difficulties with school pick-up/drop-off hours, conflicting work schedules, and transportation to/ from child care locations when elaborating on the need to find someone to watch their child at home.
- **Parents who do not live with other adults struggled more often with finding in-home care (73%) than households with multiple adults (50%).** Nearly 3 in 4 Ypsilanti parents (73%) in our sample who do not live with other adults (spouse, partner, parent, etc.) reported that finding in-home care was a challenge. A much smaller, but still quite large, share of Ypsilanti parents in our sample who live with other adults (50%) indicated that finding in-home care was a challenge.
- **Some parents said in the interviews that having at least one family member in the home or very nearby helps mitigate child care challenges.** Parents with family members to help with in-home care used the words “fortunate” and “lucky.” One parent responded that family support and a sympathetic employer were “the only reason” they did not

face greater challenges. In some cases, challenges finding someone to watch one’s child at home directly impacted parents’ income. One single mother shared that she lost her job when virtual schooling started because her children needed supervision during her usual work hours.

- **Finding in-home child care was a common challenge across ethnoracial groups.** Over one-half of Latino (62%) and White (58%) parents reported major or minor challenges in finding in-home care. Slightly less than one-half of Black parents (46%) reported that finding someone to watch their children in their home was a challenge.
- **Families with annual household incomes below \$40,000, the median income, have more difficulty in finding someone to watch their child at home than families whose household income exceeds the median income.** Almost three in four (73%) households with annual incomes below \$40,000 reported challenges finding in-home care. In comparison, less than one-half (47%) of households earning more than \$40,000 in annual income reported similar challenges.

Figure 2: Types of Challenges Managing Child Care, Among Ypsilanti Parents



FINDING BACK-UP CHILD CARE, EMERGENCY CHILD CARE, AND CARE FOR SICK CHILDREN HAS ALSO BEEN A COMMON CHALLENGE FOR PARENTS IN YPSILANTI.

- **Finding “back-up child care or emergency child care or care for a sick child” was the second most commonly cited child care challenge facing Ypsilanti parents.** One-half (50%) of Ypsilanti parents in our sample reported that finding back-up child care, emergency child care, or care for a sick child is a challenge.
- **Latino parents were less likely than Black and White parents to report challenges finding back-up child care, emergency child care, or care for a sick child.** More than one-half of White (55%) and Black (54%) parents in our sample reported major or minor challenges in finding back-up child care or someone to help watch a sick child.
- **One-third (33%) of Latino parents in our sample reported experiencing challenges with finding emergency child care.**
- **Parents living in households earning less than \$40,000 in annual income were more likely to struggle with back-up child care, emergency care, and care for a sick child than households earning \$40,000 or more in annual income.** Only 7% of parents in our sample with household incomes below the median income of \$40,000 reported that finding emergency childcare was not a challenge, compared to 18% of parents in our sample living in households with incomes of \$40,000 or more.

ALMOST ONE-HALF OF YPSILANTI PARENTS IN OUR SAMPLE SAID COST WAS A CHALLENGE IN MANAGING CHILD CARE.

- **Almost one-half of Ypsilanti parents (48%) in our sample indicated that “finding affordable child care” presented a challenge.**
 - **The challenges of affording child care were also evident in our interviews.** Some families we interviewed reported that child care costs exceeded their income or rent. One family shared that they “just can’t afford any type of child care, so we’ve struggled a bit with home life recently.”
 - **There are additional hidden costs to child care beyond direct compensation for services.** Another respondent that we interviewed said that she “had to pay a fee of \$20 to get on the waiting list each semester. ... Just paying to keep being on these waiting lists to hopefully have an opening.”
- **Child care costs presented a challenge across ethnoracial groups.** Forty-five percent of White parents and 42% of Black parents in our sample reported challenges with child care costs. More than one-half (54%) Latino parents in our sample reported cost-related challenges.
- **Parents living in households earning less than \$40,000 a year experience more cost-related challenges in managing child care.** Almost 3 in 4 (73%) parents in our sample living in households earning below the median income reported child care cost challenges compared to only 39% of parents living in households earning \$40,000 or more.
- **Parents struggle more with child care costs if they are the only adult in the household.** Seventy-two percent of parents in our sample without another adult in the household struggled with child care costs compared to 42% of parents in our sample with another adult in the household. Nineteen percent of parents in our sample with another adult in the household even reported “no challenges” with child care costs. Only 5% of parents in our sample without another adult in the household said they have “no challenges.”
 - One parent we interviewed who did not live with other adults said, “the cost of child care is unreasonable – \$400-500 a week is not doable, not for a single parent.”
- **Several parents shared in our interviews that high child care costs limited their options for child care providers and locations.** One parent responded that they have to “take my daughter to a facility 30 minutes from our apartment because it’s the only place available and affordable.” Another parent of a child with special needs said in an interview that they “lost out on candidates” even with government support because “the hourly rate the state pays is way too low.”

ENDNOTES

- 1 In this report, parents are defined as adults living with one or more children under the age of 12 for whom they have custody.
 - 2 Interviews were conducted by Dr. Bill Lopez and Karen Kling.
 - 3 Lopez, W., Kling, K., & Nothhaft, A. (October 2022). [The Child Development and Care Subsidy: Challenges and Opportunities](#). Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan.
 - 4 Powell, L. & Kravitz, D. (August 2022). [Disappearing Day Care](#). *MuckRock*.
 - 5 Compton, J., & Pollak, R. (2014). Family proximity, childcare, and women's labor force attachment. *Journal of Urban Economics* 79 (January): 72-90.
- Gelbach, J. (2002). Public schooling for young children and maternal labor supply. *American Economic Review* 92 (1): 307-322.
- Morrissey, T. (2017). Childcare and parent labor force participation: a review of the research literature. *Review of Economics of the Household* 15 (1): 1-24.
- 6 Batioja, K., Elenwo, C., Hartwell, M. Disparities in Pediatric Medical and Childcare Disruption Due to COVID-19. *JAMA Pediatrics* 2023;177(4):432-434.
 - 7 Lee, E.K. & Parolin, Z. (2021). The care burden during COVID-19: A national database of childcare closures in the United States. *Socius*, 7, 1-10.
 - 8 Aaronson, S., Barnes, M., & Edelberg, W. (2021, September 2). [A hot labor market won't eliminate racial and ethnic unemployment gaps](#). *Brookings*.
 - 9 Fry, R. (2022, January 14). [Some gender disparities widened in the U.S. workforce during the pandemic](#). *Pew Research Center*.
 - 10 State of Michigan Office of the Governor. (2023, March 10). [Gov. Whitmer Announces Grants to Help Communities Expand Access to Low or No-Cost Child Care \[Press release\]](#)
 - 11 State of Michigan Office of the Governor. (2022, August 9). [Whitmer Announces 40% of Michigan's Working Families with Kids Under Age 12 Now Eligible for Free or Low-Cost Child Care\[Press release\]](#)
 - 12 Median income for Ypsilanti in the years 2017-2021 was \$40,256. This analysis includes respondents whose total household income is \$0-\$39,999. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ypsilanticitymichigan>
 - 13 Interviewee names have been excluded to preserve anonymity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are grateful for the generous support of the Knight Foundation, The Ballmer Group, Poverty Solutions, and the Center for Racial Justice at the University of Michigan. The MIMACS data collected between June and August 2022 was supported in part by Michigan CEAL: Communities Conquering COVID (MICEAL) (NIH grant 1 OT2 HL 156812). For more on Michigan CEAL, please visit www.michiganceal.org.

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