The Childcare Crisis in the US

Our country is suffering a childcare problem, and it is affecting more than just our families. It is hard enough to be a working parent, but now parents have to worry about how they are going to go to work and have their children taken care of. Parents are often placed on waitlists for months or even years to return to work, leaving parents having to find childcare options before they get pregnant. This has left many parents leaving their jobs, with the weight of this situation relying heavily on the mothers' shoulders. Some states have incorporated government programs to make this easier on parents, but Ohio is experiencing this problem the worst. In most households it is not sustainable to live off one income, so the difficulty of having childcare options leaves families stressed as they encounter further financial difficulties. Will there be any solutions to the problems we are encountering?

What Parents are Concerned About

Affordability

The cost of childcare varies across the United States and depends on the region you live in and the age of your children. It is more expensive for younger children (infants) to be cared for than older children (toddlers). It is also more expensive if there is a lower child-to-teacher ratio, as the children are expected to receive more attention.

In Ohio, the average monthly cost of childcare is $800 for infants, $750 for toddlers, and $700 for pre-kindergarten children. If you think pre-school may be a more affordable option, you would be somewhat wrong. The average cost of pre-school in Ohio is $700 per month.

Parents ranked affordability as the top concern when looking for childcare. Cost was particularly a concern for women and parents who worked hourly jobs and had to find care for their children.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers 7% of a family's income to be spent on childcare to be deemed as affordable. That means that the average annual cost of childcare for one child ($9,400) is not affordable unless a family is bringing home an income of $130,000.

Quality

Parents ranked quality as the next large concern when looking for childcare. Parents want their children to be well-taken care of, safe, and in supportive educational environments. The problem is that only 13% of two-year olds attend childcare settings that are deemed to be of high quality.

Reliability

Industry data shows that about 35% of childcare centers were shut down during the pandemic, leaving parents uncertain of their ability to work. When primary childcare centers shut down, parents need to rely on backup options, so they don't must change their schedules or completely stop working. However, only 8% of working parents in a survey by McKinsey & Company reported that their employer provided access to emergency and backup childcare, and only 13% reported that their employer provided paid emergency-care days.

The lack of childcare backup during the pandemic may explain why 50% of the women with children aged five and under believed their childcare responsibilities became somewhat more difficult or more difficult and 40% of the men saying the same. Approximately 34% of working

mothers and 20% of working fathers reported childcare concerns as a top reason to voluntarily leaving the workforce. Other reasons parents decided to leave the workforce include wanting to spend more time with family, dissatisfaction with work-life balance, and dissatisfaction with employer, role, or career advancement opportunities.

Convenience

28% of parents with children aged five and under reported convenience as a top concern when looking for childcare. While convenience is not as large of a concern as affordability and quality, parents are still concerned about how far away the centers may be from their jobs or home and if their hours of operations match with their work schedules. If the childcare centers do not align with their lives, then parents may be discouraged from signing up their children for caregiving programs.

Accessibility

According to the Center of American Progress, more than half of US residents live in a childcare desert - communities where there is not enough childcare for the children. These deserts are almost equally situated in both urban and rural communities. This leaves parents to be on waitlists for months or years before their child is born.

What Companies Can Do to Support Employees' Childcare Needs

The issue of finding childcare that is affordable, high-quality, and accessible is still a problem occurring. Many parents have decided to not return to work after the pandemic, which is also affecting our economy. Parents involved in the survey reported ways that they think can help this problem.

The employers who pay attention to these solutions may gain a competitive edge against other employers and current prospective employees. They may even establish themselves as a destination workplace due to employee satisfaction.

Recruitment and Attraction

69% of women with children aged five and under who are currently looking for employment said they would be more likely to choose an employer who helps with the costs of childcare or offers on-site childcare. About half of the respondents reported flexibility as a large factor when

considering a job opportunity, and that they would choose a flexible job over other jobs. 26% of respondents reported that predictable work hours and scheduling were a priority, while assuming that their compensation would stay the same.

Retention

When deciding to stay with a company or switch to another one, 83% of women and 81% of men said that childcare benefits would be a very important or somewhat important factor in their decision. 40% of respondents that were considering moving to a less demanding job said that on-site childcare at their current company may cause them to reconsider leaving their job. 38% of respondents said that companies that help with childcare expenses would also be a key factor in deciding on a job.

Advancement

The working mothers in the research reported that they received fewer advancement opportunities due to their childcare responsibilities. In fact, 57% of mothers feel held back professionally for this very reason and 38% of fathers feel held back. 40% of respondents said that if they had the option of on-site childcare, they would have pursued promotions.

Why is there a Childcare Crisis?

For a short period of time during the Covid-19 pandemic, society acknowledged that childcare workers are the workforce behind the workforce, making it possible for parents to pursue their careers.

The childcare industry received $24 billion from the federal government to offset the concern during the pandemic. This funding allowed childcare centers to stay open and allowed parents to keep their positions. But this funding expired last fall, leaving many states in a spiral on how to permanently fix this problem. Some states have increased childcare allocations, but many have not. An analysis by the National Women's Law Center found that more families are unable to access childcare due to the ending of federal funding. Nearly a quarter of families can't find or pay for childcare.

Childcare Workers' Incomes

The average hourly wage for a childcare worker in this country is $14.60. While the numbers may vary from state to state, these professionals are earning less than any other professionals. Scholars blame their wage on a “pay penalty,” due to the country needing professionals to care for children while their parents pursue their careers. The pay penalty is especially pronounced among women of color, who account for much of the childcare workforce.

Prices of Childcare Centers

According to USA Today, one in five Americans spend $36,000 per year on childcare services. The report found that nearly half of parents spend more than $18,000 per year on care expenses, making these costs unaffordable for young families.

The vast majority of children whose parents are eligible for subsidies through the largest childcare program don’t receive support in a given month due to the Child and Devlopment Block Grant being severely underfunded.

According to a federal report from 2023, 75% of parents’ income is spent on infant care in some regions of the country. On the low end, 25% of parents’ income is spent on infant care. These high costs force parents to leave their jobs. Even if parents decide to stay, they resort to the cheapest options for childcare, which is usually provided by unlicensed professionals.

The Number of Children Enrolled in Childcare Centers

There are 14.4 million US children aged five and under that have children in the workforce and need to be cared for during workdays. That is roughly two in every three children in this age group.

Many parents feel that they need to choose between work and their children. In a poll, respondents said that they or a family member had to miss work due to a childcare issue. Nearly 60% of participants that are working part-time or left the workforce said they would return to work full-time if they had access to quality and affordable childcare.

The Economy

According to a report by ReadyNation, $122 billion is stripped out of our economy due to the childcare crisis. The crisis forces parents to leave their jobs and undermines young children’s

learning trajectories. It’s not just the parents that are suffering through this, it is also the businesses and taxpayers that are suffering.

Will we ever solve the problem of the childcare crisis, or will parents have to continue leaving their jobs? If childcare workers were paid more, they would have to raise the tuition, which would hinder affordability even more. Most families experiencing the childcare crisis want to return to work and provide for their families but are forced to stay home to care for their children. There are several solutions to this problem, but it is up to companies and government officials to implement these solutions.

September 26, 2025; Written by: Kaitlyn Keenan, McGregor Marketing and Communication Intern

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