How Are Lower-Income Households Using Nonparental Care for Children Under Age 6?

An Analysis of Primary and Combinations of Care Types

This Snapshot uses data from the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) household survey to elucidate the types of nonparental care that lower-income households with at least one working parent are using, either solely or in combination, to care for children under age 6.[1] This Snapshot also identifies the primary type of nonparental care that low er-income households use and the extent to which children from lower-income households access center-based care. Lower-income households are defined as those with an annual income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) and at least one working parent.

Key Findings

- In 2012, higher-income households (at or above 200% FPL) were more likely to use nonparental care than lower-income households (below 200% FPL).
    - In lower-income households with at least one working parent, 58 percent of infants and toddlers (birth to 35 months) and 72 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds (36-71 months) were cared for using nonparental care.
    - In higher-income households with at least one working parent, 73 percent of infants and toddlers and 83 percent of 3-to-5-year-olds were cared for using nonparental care.
- Among children in lower-income households using nonparental care:
    - Most children (infants and toddlers: 92%; 3- to 5-year-olds: 81%) were cared for by one or more providers within a single nonparental care type (e.g., center-based care, paid individual, unpaid individual, other organizational early care and education). However, 8 percent of infants and toddlers and 19 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds were cared for using a combination of nonparental care types.
    - The most common primary care type for infants and toddlers (39%) was unpaid individual care. The most common primary care type for 3- to 5-year-olds (46%) was center-based care.
    - Fewer infants and toddlers (19%) accessed some form of center-based care, either solely or in combination with another care type, than 3- to 5-year-olds (53%).

[1] In this Snapshot, children age birth through 5, not yet in kindergarten, are referred to as children under age 6.

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Data and Methods

This Snapshot focuses on understanding the nonparental care arrangements lower-income households, with at least one working parent, used to care for children under age 6. The data summarized in this Snapshot were collected using the 2012 NSECE household survey, a nationally representative study of households with children under the age of 13.

NSECE respondents reported all nonparental care arrangements used in the week prior to the survey for each child in their household under the age of 13. These data were used to identify the *types* of nonparental care arrangements used for children under age 6 (Table 1).[2] This Snapshot is focused on examining the *types of care* households used, rather than the individual providers. Therefore, it is possible that a child may have been cared for by more than one provider (e.g., Head Start and community-based center) within a single care type (e.g, center-based care).

NSECE respondents also reported the total number of hours each child spent in each nonparental care arrangement in the week prior to the survey. The NSECE assumes that the hours a child did *not* spend in nonparental care were spent with the parent. These data were used to identify the *primary type* of nonparental care where each child spent the most hours in the past week. Children who spent an equal number of hours in two or more care types were excluded from the analysis examining *primary* nonparental care types.[3]

Table 1. Types of nonparental care arrangements

Type of Care	Definition	Examples
Center-based care	All Head Start, Public Pre-K, community-based child care, and/or any other care that is not drop-in or single activity and occurs at least five hours weekly.	Head Start, Public Pre-K, and/or community-based child care.
Paid individual care	An individual with whom the child *may* or *may not* have a prior personal relationship, who receives payment for caring for the child, and cares for the child at least five hours weekly.	A family child care provider, babysitter, family member, or other individual who receives payment or a child care subsidy for caring for the child.
Unpaid individual care	An individual who does not receive payment for caring for the child and provides care at least five hours weekly. The individual *may* or *may not* have a prior personal relationship with the child.	A grandmother who cares for her grandchild without receiving payment or an adult sibling who looks after a younger sibling after school.
Other organizational ECE	Any regular organizational care that does not fit into the center-based care category and provides care for at least five hours weekly.	Drop-in or single-activity care or lessons, church child care during services, and/or recreational activities.

[2] The type of care taxonomy used in this Snapshot is based on a report of Early Care and Education Usage and Households' Out-of-Pocket Costs using the 2012 NSECE household survey (NSECE Project Team, 2016).

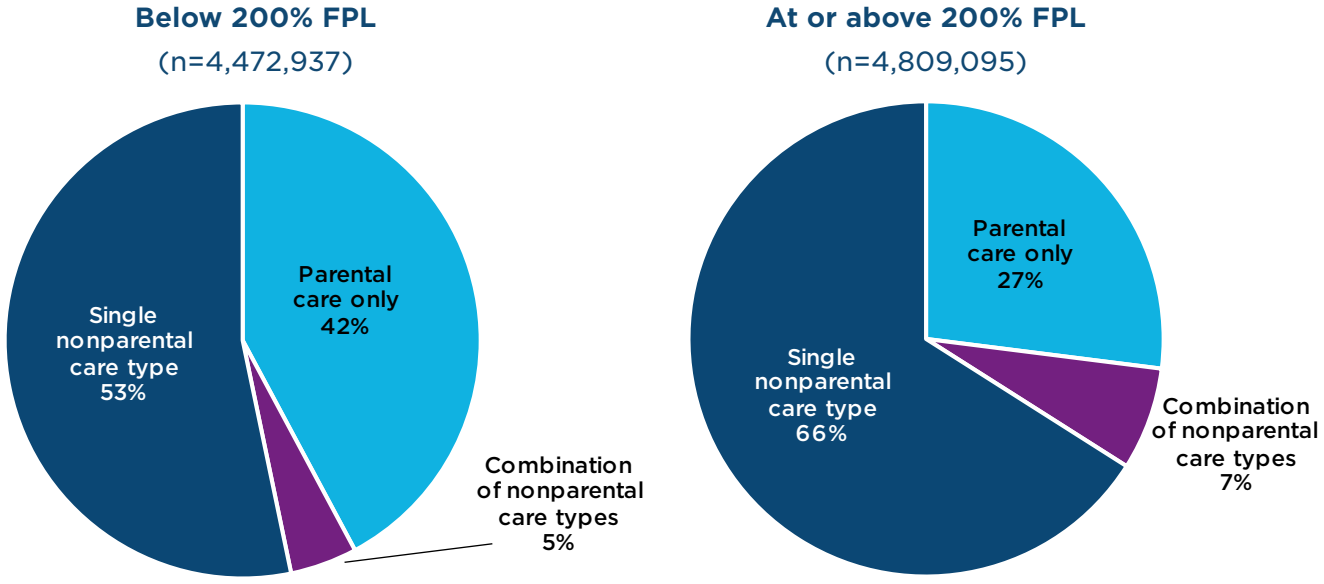
[3] No infants and toddlers were excluded from the analysis examining primary nonparental care types. Fewer than 1% (n= 4,661) of 3- to 5-year-olds spent an equal number of hours in two or more primary nonparental care types and were excluded from this analysis.

Type of Care	Definition	Examples
Irregular care only	An irregular care provider cares for the child fewer than five hours weekly. The care arrangement may otherwise meet the requirements for one of the care types listed above. This care type is reserved for children who were not cared for by an individual or organization for at least five hours weekly. However, the child may have had multiple irregular care arrangements that sum to five or more hours weekly.	Any individual or organization that provides care for fewer than five hours per week.
All other settings unknown	Regular ECE setting, but information is inadequate to assign the provider into a specific care type category.	Respondent did not provide enough details to classify the type of care.

What percentage of children under age 6 were cared for using nonparental care?

Figure 1 shows the percentage of infants and toddlers (age 0-35 months), by household income level, who were cared for using parental care only, a single type of nonparental care, or a combination of nonparental care types. Nonparental care, received through one or more care types, was more common in higher-income households (73%) compared to lower-income households (58%).

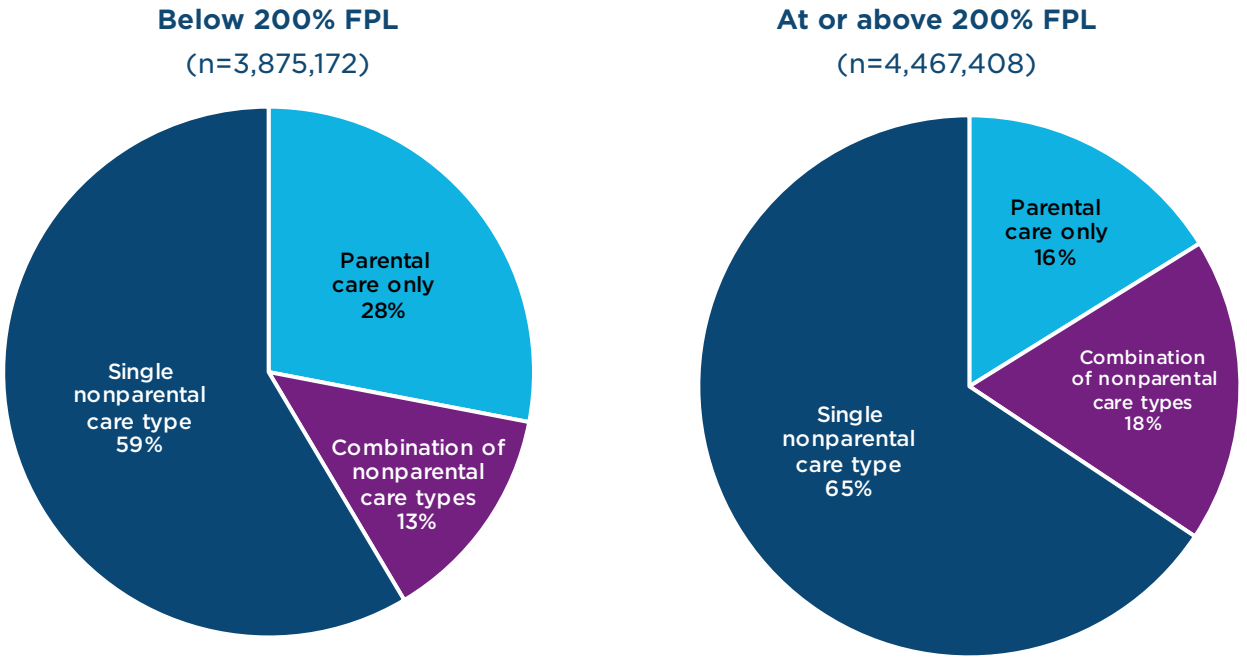
Figure 1. Percentage of infants and toddlers using parental and nonparental care, by household income level



Source. NSECE 2012 household questionnaire.
Note: Infants and toddlers include children age 0-35 months. Nonparental care types are those that a child attended for at least five hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. A single nonparental care type is defined as one or more providers within a single type of care (Table 1). A combination of nonparental care types is defined as two or more providers that are classified under two or more types of care (Table 1). The NSECE assumes that the hours a child does not spend in nonparental care were spent with the parent. The sample was restricted to households with at least one working parent. FPL = federal poverty level.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds (age 36-71 months, not yet in kindergarten), by household income level, who were cared for using parental care only, a single type of nonparental care, or a combination of nonparental care types. Nonparental care, received through one or more care types, was more common among higher-income households (83%) compared to lower-income households (72%). Across both household income levels, nonparental care arrangements were more common among 3- to 5-year-olds than among infants and toddlers.

Figure 2. Percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds using parental and nonparental care, by household income level



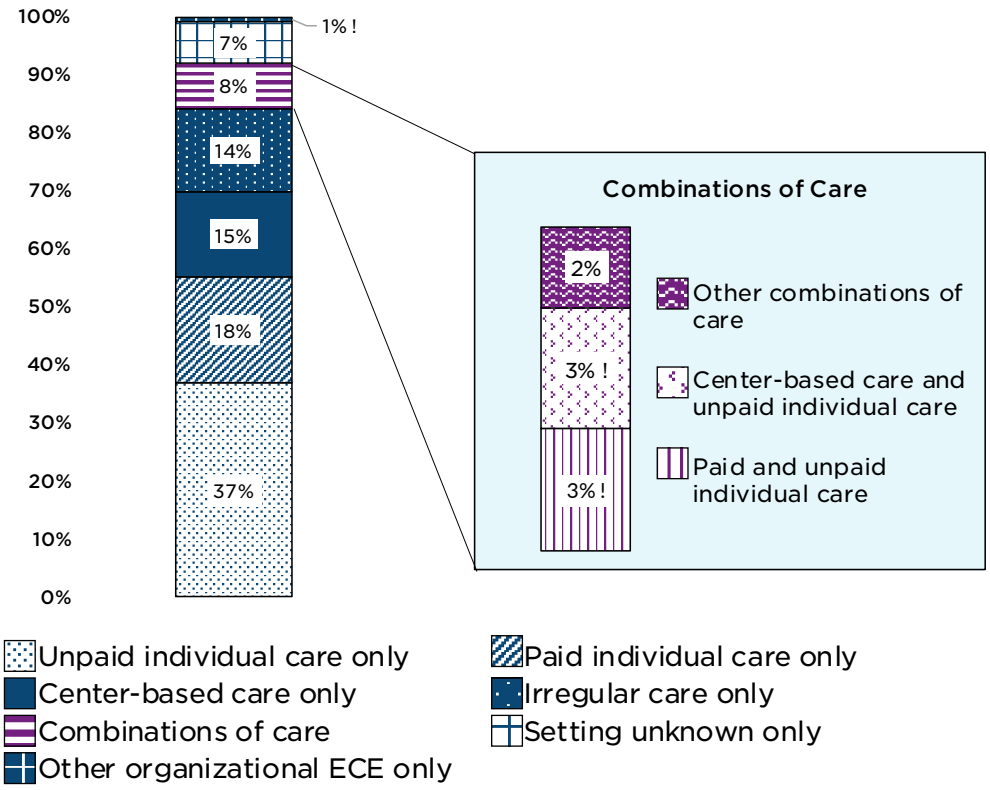
Source. NSECE 2012 household questionnaire.
Note: Three- to five-year-olds include children age 36-71 months, not yet in kindergarten. Nonparental care types are those that a child attended for at least five hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. A single nonparental care type is defined as one or more providers within a single type of care (Table 1). A combination of nonparental care types is defined as two or more providers that are classified under multiple types of care (Table 1). The NSECE assumes the hours a child does not spend in nonparental care were spent with the parent. The sample was restricted to households with at least one working parent. FPL = federal poverty level.

What types of regular nonparental care did lower-income households use to care for children under age 6?

This analysis identified the types of nonparental care lower-income households used to care for children under age 6.

Among infants and toddlers from lower-income households using nonparental care (Figure 3), most were cared for by one or more unpaid individuals (37%) or by one or more paid individuals (18%). When these infants and toddlers were cared for using a combination of care types (8%), most were cared for using center-based and individual unpaid care (3%) or individual paid and unpaid care (3%).

Figure 3. Percentage of infants and toddlers from lower-income households in each nonparental care type, among those using nonparental care (n=2,586,458)

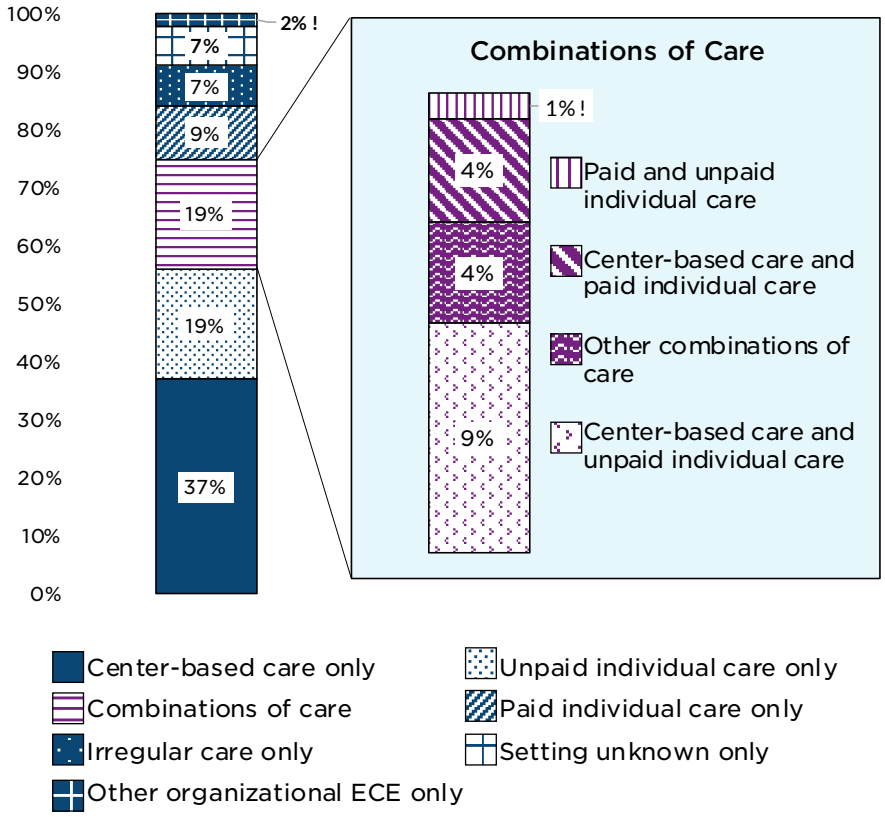


Source. NSECE 2012 household questionnaire.
Note: ! Interpret data with caution due to small n. Nonparental care types are those that a child attended for at least five hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. Infants and toddlers include children age 0-35 months who were cared for using at least one nonparental care type. The sample was restricted to households with an annual income below 200% of the federal poverty level and at least one working parent.

Among 3- to 5-year-olds from lower-income households using nonparental care (Figure 4), most were cared for using only center-based care (37%) or by one or more unpaid individuals (19%). When these 3- to 5-year-olds were cared for using a combination of care types (19%), most were cared for using center-based and unpaid individual care (9%).

Paid and unpaid individual care was more common among infants and toddlers than among 3- to 5-year-olds; center-based care was more common among 3- to 5-year-olds than among infants and toddlers.

Figure 4. Percentage of 3- to 5-year-olds from lower-income households in each nonparental care type, among those using nonparental care (n=2,789,327)

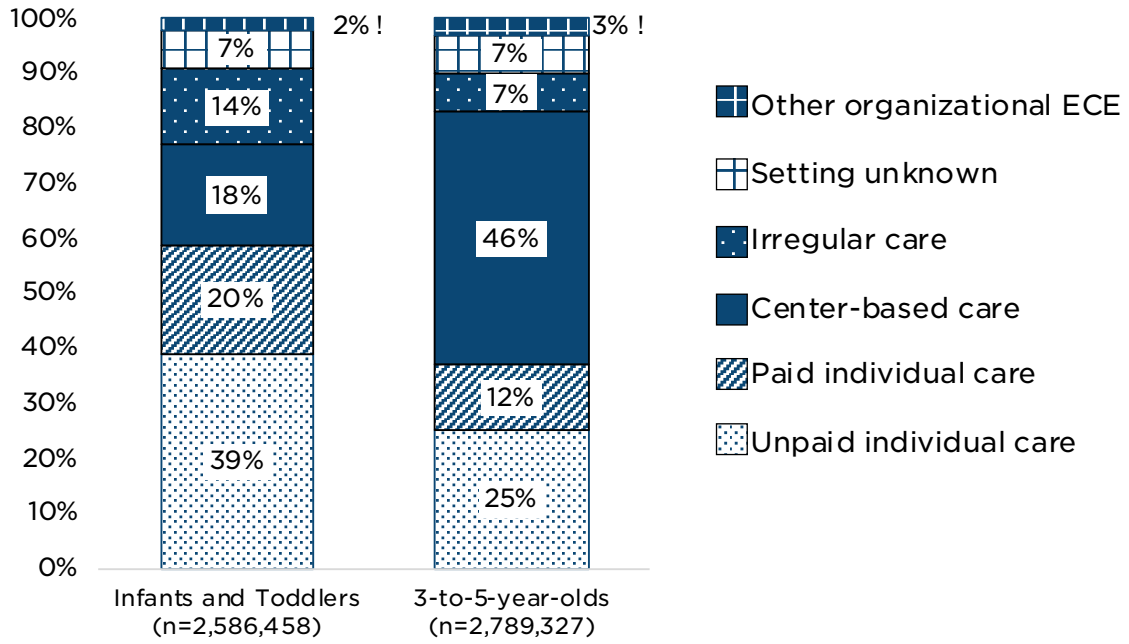


Source. NSECE 2012 household questionnaire.
Note: ! Interpret data with caution due to small n. Nonparental care types are those that a child attended for at least five hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. Infants and toddlers include children age 36-71 months, not yet in kindergarten, who were cared for using at least one nonparental care type. The sample was restricted to households with an annual income below 200% of the federal poverty level and at least one working parent. Displayed percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number; totals may not sum exactly to 100%.

What was the primary type of nonparental care lower-income households used to care for children under age 6?

This analysis identified the primary nonparental care type where each child spent the most hours in the previous week (Figure 5). Children who spent an equal number of hours in two or more primary nonparental care types were excluded from this analysis.[4] Among lower-income households using nonparental care, most chose unpaid individual care (39%) or paid individual care (20%) as the primary nonparental care type for infants and toddlers, while most chose center-based (46%) or unpaid individual care (25%) as the primary nonparental care type for 3- to 5-year-olds.

Figure 5. Percentage of children from lower-income households in each primary nonparental care type, by age



Source. NSECE 2012 household questionnaire.
Note: ! Interpret data with caution due to small n. Infants and toddlers include children age 0-35 months who were cared for using at least one nonparental care type; 3- to 5-year-olds include children age 36-71 months, not yet in kindergarten, who were cared for using at least one nonparental care type. Children who spent an equal number of hours in two or more primary nonparental care types were excluded from this analysis. The samples in both age groups were restricted to households with an annual income below 200% of the federal poverty level and at least one working parent.

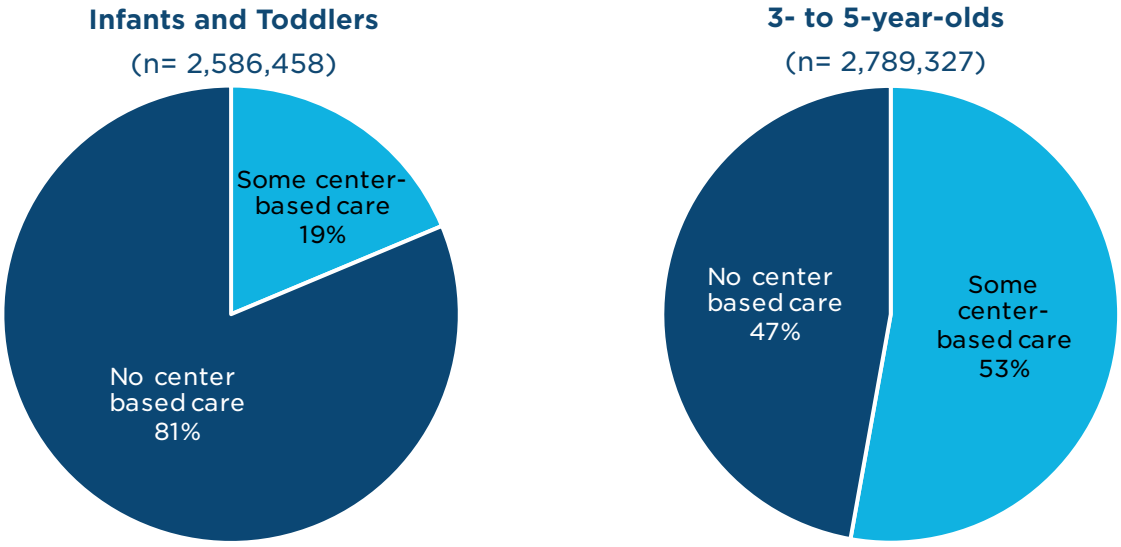
[4] No infants and toddlers in the restricted sample were excluded from this analysis. Fewer than 1% (n= 4,661) of 3- to 5-year-olds in the restricted sample spent an equal number of hours in two or more primary care types and were excluded from this analysis.

What percentage of children under age 6 from lower-income households accessed center-based care?

This analysis examined the extent to which children under age 6, from lower-income households with at least one working parent, accessed *any* center-based care. This includes children who received center-based care either solely or in combination with other nonparental care types.

Among lower-income households using nonparental care, 19 percent of infants and toddlers and 53 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds received at least 5 hours of center-based care in the past week.

Figure 6. Percentage of children from lower-income households using some form of center-based care, by age



Source. NSECE 2012 household questionnaire.
Note: Infants and toddlers include children age 0-35 months who were cared for using at least one nonparental care type; 3- to 5-year-olds include children age 36-71 months, not yet in kindergarten, who were cared for using at least one nonparental care type. The samples in both age groups were restricted to households with an annual income below 200% of the federal poverty level and at least one working parent.

References

National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team. (2016). *Early Care and Education Usage and Households' Out-of-Pocket Costs: Tabulations from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. OPRE Report #2016-09. Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Suggested Citation

Miranda, B., Gebhart, T., Madill, R., & Halle, T. (2020). *Snapshots from the NSECE: How Are Lower-Income Households Using Nonparental Care for Children Under Age 6? An Analysis of Primary and Combinations of Care Types.* OPRE Report #2020-150. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services