

Policy Brief

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Childminding Services and Childcare: Parents Needs



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Introduction

In this brief, three main aspects of the needs of parents in relation to the childminding service and childcare are examined. These are: access to childminding services, finding a childminder and institutional support for childcare.

The indicators used for this brief are derived from information in the Childminding Study, particularly, the Parent Questionnaire. Data was collected from 763 parents from the six regions to gain a national perspective on some of the needs of parents. At the same time, it would be possible to identify regional differences on the type and locality of childminding services available so as to make decisions about the support required by parents to improve access and to enhance social and health provisions for early childhood care and education.

Background

With emphasis on early childhood care and education as the foundation for successful lifelong experiences of the individual and the economic growth of a nation, there has been worldwide investment in supporting parents as the best ECCE provider. Many countries have developed policies to raise parental awareness, to develop programmes and engage parents.

In Seychelles, following the development of the ECCE Framework, the irreplaceable role of parents in ECCE in general and for children in the 0-3 age-group, in particular, is being evaluated. In the framework gaps have been identified in the provision of information to parents, on quality of Childminding Services,

childminding facilities at work, maternity leave, facilities for breastfeeding mothers, and parent education programme. The Systems Approach for Education Results – Early Childhood Development (SABER-ECD) Report from the World Bank has proposed an integration of parenting programme, breastfeeding promotion, and Maternal and Child Health Programme which would include information on day care and childminding programmes.

This study investigates the type and locality of childminding services parents require, how parents gain information on childminding and what institutional support is available for parents (prenatal, postnatal and beyond) to ensure quality ECCE for their children.

Selected Indicators

There are nine indicators grouped under three headings: access, finding a childminder, and support.

Access is concerned with the type of service that parents are likely to use. Parents had to respond to a list of services offered by childminders. It included full-time, part-time and other types of short drop-in services and childminding services during the weekend and the school holidays. Also, in order to gain an idea of location, and, perhaps, distance, parents had to record how they got to the childminder.

For 'finding a childminder' two main indicators were used. First, parents were asked how they chose a childminder by answering 'yes' or 'no' to a variety of options; second, parents had to rate the level of difficulty in finding a childminder.

With regards to institutional support parents were asked about the medical leave they have when their child was sick, additional leave they took after maternity leave, and parenting programme they had attended.

Table 1: Percentages of parents accessing childminding services and childminding establishments

| Region | Type of service | | Travel | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Full-time | Part-time | On foot | By car | By bus |
| | % | % | % | % | % |
| Central 1 | 97.9 | 2.7 | 65.2 | 26.7 | 20.3 |
| Central 2 | 98.1 | 3.8 | 76.9 | 21.0 | 18.1 |
| East/South | 98.6 | 2.7 | 47.9 | 45.2 | 31.5 |
| Islands | 97 | 17 | 60.5 | 21.8 | 17.1 |
| North | 96.8 | 4.2 | 25.3 | 45.3 | 35.8 |
| West | 96.2 | 4.5 | 65.9 | 34.6 | 21.8 |
| SEYCHELLES | 97.4 | 4.6 | 59.1 | 30.3 | 22.5 |

Key Findings

The data on the nine indicators were analyzed and the results are depicted in Tables 1 to 3.

Access

Childminding has developed as an essential community service and it is clear in Table 1, that the large majority of parents (97%) require full-time childminding services. The variations amongst region were minimal and this would indicate that these figures were reflecting the national trend. This is not surprising since most parents were employed (87% from additional analysis). On the contrary, the need for part-time childminding services was very low nationally (about 5%) except for Islands region where 17 percent of parents were using the service.

It was possible to explore other services offered by the childminder (from further analysis). There were, for example, concerns that some of those other services might be placing more stress on the childminder and interfering with the quality of care. However the need for these service was minimal. Only about 5 percent of parents used the afterschool, overnight, and drop-in services. There was a greater need for school holidays (about 8%) and week-end childminding services (over 10%). Interestingly enough, regional variations worth mentioning refer to the Islands region where almost

one-quarter (just over 21%) of parents send their children for childminding over the week-end "some of the time" or most of the time".

It is assumed that since childminding is an informal community service parents would tend to enroll their child in a childminder within their vicinity. The Table 1 contains the results of parents' means of dropping-off and picking-up their children.

The figures in column four show that there was a substantial majority (around 60 percent) of parents in Seychelles who accessed childminding establishments on foot. However, regional variation points to a reduction in the number of parents in the East/South (47%) and North (25%) regions travelling on foot to the childminding establishment. From the data in the last two columns the situation in the South/East and North becomes clearer. There were more parents travelling by car than by bus - a national average mean of 31 percent and 18 percent, respectively (column 2 and 3) was registered. However, what is interesting about the figures for bus travel is the elevated variation of 31 percent in the East/South region and 36 percent in the North region from the national mean (22%). These findings confirm the fact that childminders were located within easy reach of many parents thus emphasizing the community aspect of this service: They also suggest that childminding facilities might be lacking in East/South and North region and this may need attention.

Finding a Childminder

Parents must be sensitized to early childhood care and education and need information about childminders. In this brief two indicators have been used to explore parents' source of information in seeking a childminder.

The results in Table 2 seem to fall into two main categories: informal and formal. Informal sources are from a friend (32%), relative (28%), neighbour (22%) These are the contacts from which many parents find their childminders and presumable it is by word of mouth.

Table 2: Percentage of Parents responding to access to childminder

| Region | Finding a childminder | Source of information | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| | Difficulty | Friend | Relative | Neighbour | Working colleague | Previous childminder | Nurse/Social Worker | District Administrator |
| | % | % | % | % | % | % | % | % |
| Central 1 | 59.1 | 26.7 | 29.9 | 28.9 | 5.3 | 5.9 | > 1 | > 1 |
| Central 2 | 55.8 | 39.4 | 23.1 | 26 | 6.7 | 5.8 | 1 | 1 |
| East/South | 53.4 | 16.4 | 27.4 | 26 | 9.6 | 5.5 | 1.4 | 1.4 |
| Islands | 57.4 | 44.1 | 20 | 21.2 | 10 | 6.5 | >1 | 1.2 |
| North | 55.8 | 42.1 | 32.6 | 7.4 | 6.3 | 7.4 | 1.1 | 0 |
| West | 44.4 | 20.3 | 36.8 | 18 | 5.3 | 3.8 | 1.5 | >1 |
| SEYCHELLES | 54.7 | 32.2 | 28.1 | 21.9 | 7.1 | 5.8 | >1 | >1 |

Table 3: Percentage of parents responding to institutional support

| Region | Did not manage to take medical leave when child is sick | Took additional leave after maternity | Received prenatal visits at home | Attended Parenting Sessions |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| Central 1 | 22.4 | 35.5 | 4.8 | 8.6 |
| Central 2 | 24.2 | 34.6 | 2.9 | 11.4 |
| East/South | 14.5 | 32.3 | 13.7 | 12.3 |
| Islands | 9.6 | 43.4 | 8.8 | 5.9 |
| North | 31.1 | 33.8 | 4.2 | 11.6 |
| West | 10.3 | 32.8 | 2.3 | 6.8 |
| SEYCHELLES | 18.8 | 36.0 | 5.8 | 8.8 |

From the extremely low figures for nurse, social worker and District Administrator, one can conclude that professionals in the community or institutions provide very little information on childminding.

These findings confirm the informal nature of the childminding service but it also brings into question the role of community professionals concerning not only childminding but also the level of awareness of the need for early childhood care and education for the 0-3.

Moreover, the national focus on positive early experiences of children in the 0-3 age-group also targets employers and the employment sector to ensure that conditions for parents are favourable for childcare.

Support

The three indicators analysed and presented in Table 3 represent three aspects of institutional support which can be considered for parents with children in childminding establishments and more generally for mothers with children in the ECCE age-group.

The percentages of parents (column 2) who admitted that they did not manage to take all the medical leave when their child in the childminding establishment was sick can be considered to be a concern. Although for Seychelles, a figure of 19 percent was registered, regions such as Central 1 (22%) and Central 2 (24%) had about one-quarter of the parents who were unable to take sick leave for their children: It was worse in North region where close to one-third of parents were in that situation. The reason for not being able to take leave was related to conditions at work. Unfortunately, children in their early years are likely to be ill and if parents cannot stay at home with their children, these children can become a health risk to others in the childminding establishment and can affect the quality of care.

An examination of the percentage figures in the second column reveals that at the national level more than one-third of parents (36%) took additional leave: this is usually in the form of annual leave (about 25%). However, about two percent of parents took leave without pay and about eight percent of parents stopped work. These findings may be related to a

need which many mothers feel - the need to spend more nurturing time with their baby.

The results in the last two columns of Table 3 are disappointing with regards to the maternal education programme. Only about six percent of parents received prenatal visits at home and nine percent had parenting sessions (before and after delivery) in Seychelles as a whole. From regional variations it would appear that parents from the East/South regions managed to have more than twice as many visits when the national average mean is considered. The attendance was slightly better in Central 2, East/South, and North region. It was worse in Islands region with a figure of around 6 percent. The gap in parenting programme was identified in the ECCE Framework and later highlighted in the Seychelles SABER-ECD report. The Social Services sector is implementing a Parenting Programme as part of the National ECCE Plan but there may be a need for a programme which is integrated within the Maternal Health Programme which will consist of prenatal, postnatal, and parenting interventions which will include all relevant documented information about childcare and childminding.

Summary of Findings

There were five important messages associated with the research results presented in this brief:

- First, most parents access full-time childminding services but other services especially for week-end and school holidays were also utilised although on a reduced basis by some parents, particularly those in Islands region.
- Second, parents seem to prefer the convenience of being able to get to the childminder on foot. However, the results for those travelling by bus may be indicating that childminding facilities may be lacking in North and East/South regions.
- Third, informal contact was the usual mode parents used in finding a childminder and the support of community professionals was almost non-existent.
- Fourth, a substantial minority of parents were found to take additional leave after maternity leave. This

may need to be further examined in the light of employment conditions for mothers after maternity leave.

- Fifth, a fairly serious concern was raised regarding the provision of parenting programmes because the results showed that very few parents were attending parenting sessions and this may be linked to the lack of institutional support to improve quality of early childhood care and education.

Recommendations

1. Develop a guide to assist parents in finding childminding services in the community.
2. Carry out a survey in the East/South and North region to identify prospective childminders to assist parents in need.
3. Introduce parenting support specific to ECCE as part of the child maternal health programme.
4. Establish part-time working conditions for parents for three months after maternity leave.
5. Mobilise community professionals and NGOs to provide ECCE parental support and services.

Conclusion

In this brief access, childminding services required by parents and ECCE support have been examined for parents with children enrolled in childminding establishments.

It was found that parents for the most part had the need for full-time childminding services and intermittently, other services such as week-ends and school holidays were also required. However, finding a childminder is mostly an informal affair of talking to relatives and friends or neighbours with no input from community professionals. Nevertheless, one of the most important issues arising from this analysis is a combination of several limited features associated with parent medical leave for sick children, maternity

leave, the parenting programme, and pre- and postnatal support for parents to ensure quality ECCE.

The SABER-ECD report outlines what parents need to help in the development of their children: positive parenting education, parenting education on child health and development (including pre- and post natal care), breast feeding promotion, knowledge about early stimulation and the importance of early learning. The children's and family Bill (February 2013) in UK seeks to introduce a new system of shared parental leave, increased availability of flexible working, improved childcare provisions for working parents, and provide a clearer path for a parent to find and work with a suitable childminder. In the local context these ideas need reviewing in order to provide a comprehensive integrated parenting and family support programme as part of the Social and Moral Renaissance initiative.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---------|---|
| ASSF: | Association for Solid Families |
| CRC: | Conventions on Rights of the Child |
| DA | District Administrator |
| ECCE | Early Childhood Care and Education |
| IECD: | Institute of Early Childhood Development |
| NGO: | Non Governmental Organisation |
| NCC: | National Council for Children |
| Ofsted: | Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills |
| OECD: | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development |