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CHILDCARE REPORT

CONTACT:

GRACE BAGWELL ADAMS, PhD
GRACE.BAGWELL@GMAIL.COM | 864-909-3207

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About AWP

The purpose of the Athens Wellbeing Project (AWP) is to provide comprehensive data from a representative sample of households on our unique needs and assets in Athens-Clarke County. Launched in 2016, the AWP is championed by the Athens Area Community Foundation. Two rounds of survey data collection have been completed--version 1.0 in Fall 2016 and version 2.0 in Fall 2018--with the intent of building a longitudinal dataset across time.

AWP data provide information across all domains of life in our community. These include:

LIFELONG LEARNING
HEALTH
HOUSING
COMMUNITY SAFETY
CIVIC VITALITY

The AWP is pioneering an unprecedented collaboration of community leaders, using a data collection approach that is representative of our community. The research design and community participation incorporates vulnerable populations providing unique opportunities to understand wellbeing across all groups in our county.

AWP Staff & Research Team

Grace Bagwell Adams, PhD, Principle Investigator
Celia Eicheldinger, Sample Framework Design and Sampling Expert
Jerry Shannon, PhD, GIS Mapping
Amanda Abraham, PhD, Survey Instrument Design
Benyamin Gardner, MSW, Program Manager
Anyess Travers, MPH, Graduate Research Assistant
Megan Bramlett, MPH, Graduate Research Assistant

Report Authors

Grace Bagwell Adams, PhD
Megan Bramlett, MPH
Harrison Huang



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between September 2018 and February 2019, the Athens Wellbeing Project launched the second round of data collection; a representative sample of Athens-Clarke County households were surveyed in order to better understand our community across five domains of life: housing, health, education, community safety, and civic vitality. The data presented in this report are focused on both the demand and supply of childcare in Athens-Clarke County. High quality childcare provides social and economic benefits individuals, families, and communities.

Income & Utilization

Monthly pre-tax income was, on average, similar, regardless of whether or not any children under the age of six living in a household. Income was slightly higher for low income households with young children as compared to low income households without. The cost of childcare was higher for households with young children for both the full sample and low income households. On average, households with young children paid 20% (full sample) and 23% (low income) more than households without young children. By all accounts, the cost of childcare in Athens-Clarke County is greater than for Georgia, overall. Low income households with and without young children, were less likely to use childcare during the school year and over summers and school breaks.

Sources

In general, lower income households utilize those in their social circles like siblings, grandparents, and family friends for childcare more often than the full sample. On the other hand, the full sample more often tends to use childcare centers, babysitters, and afterschool care, all of which are generally associated with greater cost compared to childcare sources in social circles. This trend holds true for childcare during holidays, and the difference is even more pronounced in some instances like childcare centers which 29% of the full sample utilizes over the holidays in contrast to the 9.2% by lower income households, a difference of nearly 20%. In general, 35% of the full sample utilizes babysitters, and 24% of lower income households utilize babysitters, an 11% difference. Similar trends also hold true for households with children under 6 years old. Overall, the most commonly used sources of childcare across all groups include grandparents, childcare centers, and afterschool care.

Satisfaction

When asked to discuss any dissatisfaction with their childcare, the most common response among all groups was that more satisfactory childcare arrangements were not available in their community. Hours of availability was more often a barrier for low income households, as was expense. The full sample, both with and without young children, were more likely to report being satisfied with every part of their childcare arrangement.

Supply

There is a **18.4%** reduction in the cost of childcare from infancy to pre-k. There is a great deal of variation in cost of care, especially for very young children. Until the age of 4, the upper limit is more than double that of the lower limit in terms of monthly cost. In most cases, half or less of all centers have any availability.

We would like to thank our community partners, without whom the work of the Athens Wellbeing Project would not be possible. For more information, please visit our website.

INTRODUCTION

Why does this matter?

Quality childcare access is essential for a community to thrive. In 2018, the second Athens Wellbeing Project (AWP) survey was launched in our community. This latest round of data collection included new efforts to measure access to childcare, with questions about the cost, satisfaction, source, and supply of childcare for families in Athens-Clarke County. This report presents new data on the childcare landscape and the strengths and challenges families have when it comes to finding and maintaining safe, affordable, reliable, quality sources of care and early childhood education for their children.

In order for our community to thrive, parents need to be able to provide for their families. Employment, especially full-time employment, requires that employees are present, productive workers. For employees that are parents (especially parents of young children), this is only possible when the parent has reliable, quality childcare. Childcare is not just about having our children taken care of, it is about workforce development.

Quality childcare also benefits our community's children. It is well documented that the first 1,000 days of a child's life is a critical window of opportunity in brain development. When children have quality early childhood education, they are more likely to be prepared for school and to excel across the lifespan in educational and occupational pursuits. Recent research shows that high quality childcare programs serving birth to five year olds have a 13% annual return rate on investment for disadvantaged children. Quality care for children is a "powerful, cost-effective way" to mitigate the worst effects of poverty on child development and adult opportunity.

This high quality care is not only important for the child, but also for the parents and for our workforce. 89% of mothers who were able to utilize a childcare program were employed. In contrast, only 77% of mothers who did not utilize a childcare program were employed. This contrast is even more stark among single mothers. Mothers also often choose not to look for higher-paying jobs, promotions, and more work due to the limited nature of childcare availability, locations, and hours. These are people who could be contributing to our economy and workforce, but often cannot due to lack of access to high quality, affordable childcare programs. (Schochet)

Moreover, infancy is critical period for the development of our brains. A newborn's brain is about 25% the size of an adult, but a 5 year old's is 90% adult size. This age range holds the most aggressive brain development than any other time in our lives. This development is in large part dependent on a child's environment and interactions. Therefore, it is crucial to form well-socialized, healthy, and strong neural connections through quality childcare, which has been associated with reduced special education placement, and lower incidences of dropping out of high school. Early education and quality care have tremendous implications for children's futures. (Julius)

The childcare-related measures on the most recent round of AWP survey were developed with survey research experts and community partners from Family Connections-Communities in Schools, Clarke County School District, and the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning. This descriptive report is meant to supplement other sources of data on childcare access and use and give our community a deeper understanding of these issues.

INTRODUCTION

Community Characteristics

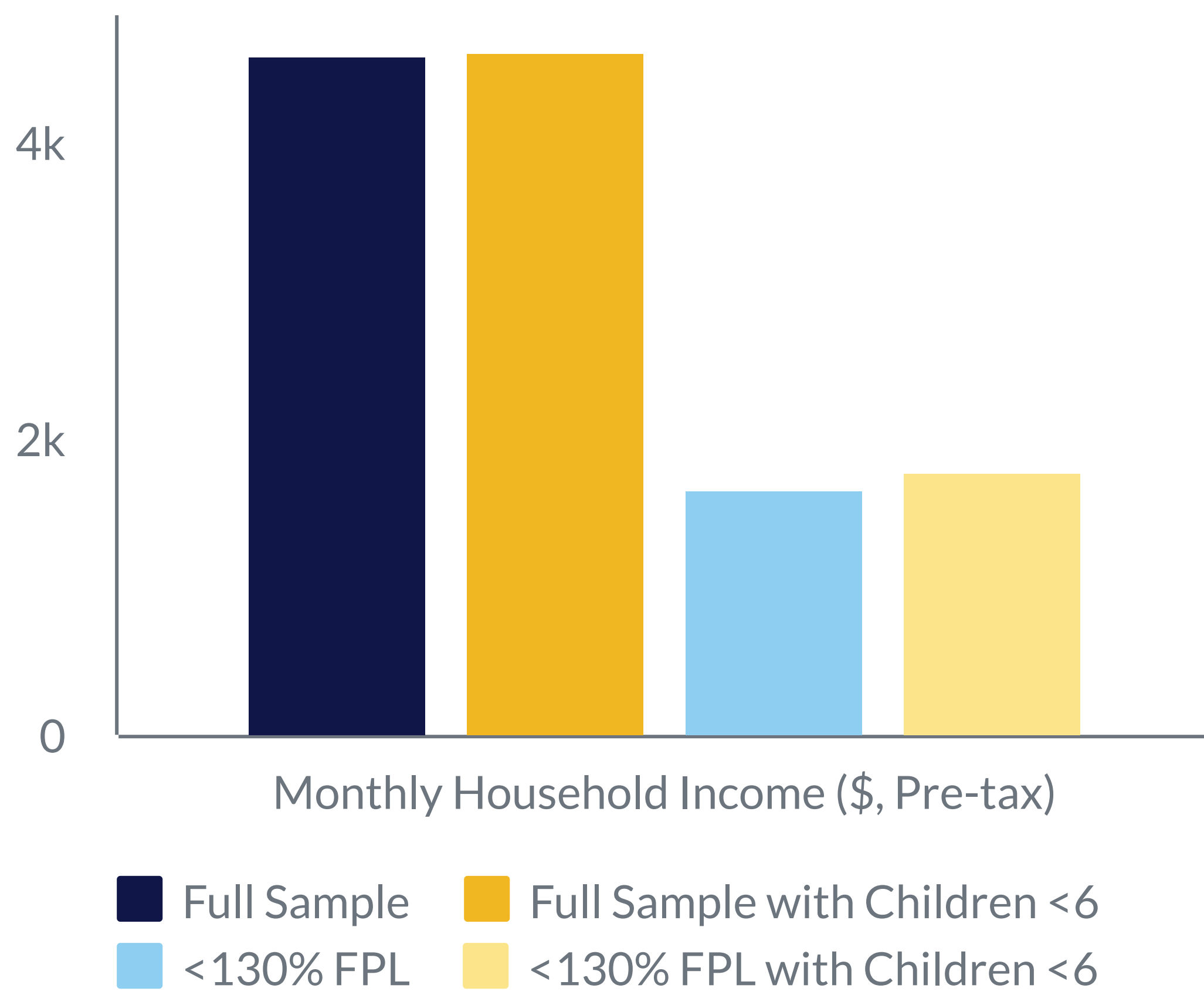
Athens-Clarke County is a diverse community with significant variation in income, education, health access and outcomes, housing, and civic participation. While the focus of this report is on childcare, a demographic overview of population characteristics is provided for two reasons: 1) this information is useful for descriptive context; and 2) AWP recognizes and promotes understanding of the intersectionality of domains across all aspects of life in our community.

Across all categories of data presented in this report, there are four levels of analysis. The full sample (all respondents with children) is always presented for context and comparison to sub-groups. Three additional categories of families are presented, based on household composition and income. The first subgroup represents households of all income levels with children under the age of 6, the typical age at which full time schooling begins. The second subgroup includes households below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) with a child of any age. The third subgroup includes households earning less than 130% FPL with children under the age of 6. Income thresholds were calculated using reported household monthly income (pre-tax) and household size.

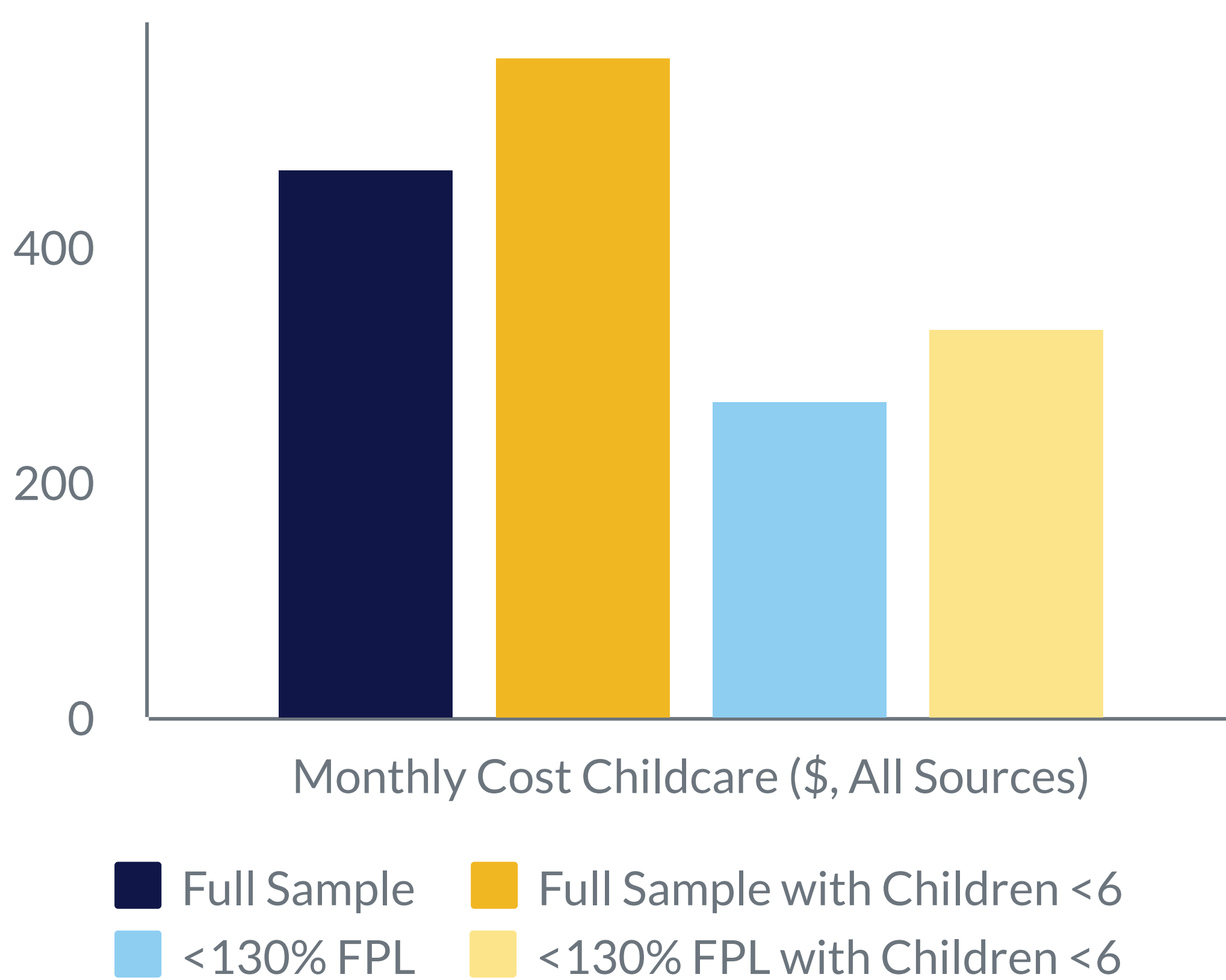
The unit of analysis is the household, which means that the all variables are reported at the household level with the exception of a few individual measures answered from the individual respondent's perspective (e.g. age). Overall, 71% of the individuals responding to the survey on behalf of the survey were female. The average age of individual respondents was approximately 43 years. Thirty-six percent of respondents were single, 46% were married, 14% were separated or divorced, and 4% were widowed.

Racial composition of households in the full sample include 20% Black, 93% White, 3% Asian, and 4% other (Asian Pacific Islander or American Indian). Approximately 8% of respondents are Latinx households. Forty percent of respondents have school-aged children in the household and 9% have a veteran in the household. College enrollees are present in 17% of households. Over 77% of respondents were employed, and 81% of responding households health insurance coverage. While most respondents (93%) rely on a personal vehicle for transportation, many respondents use multiple sources of transportation in addition to personal vehicles, including public transportation (bus system), taxis or Uber/Lyft, or bicycles.

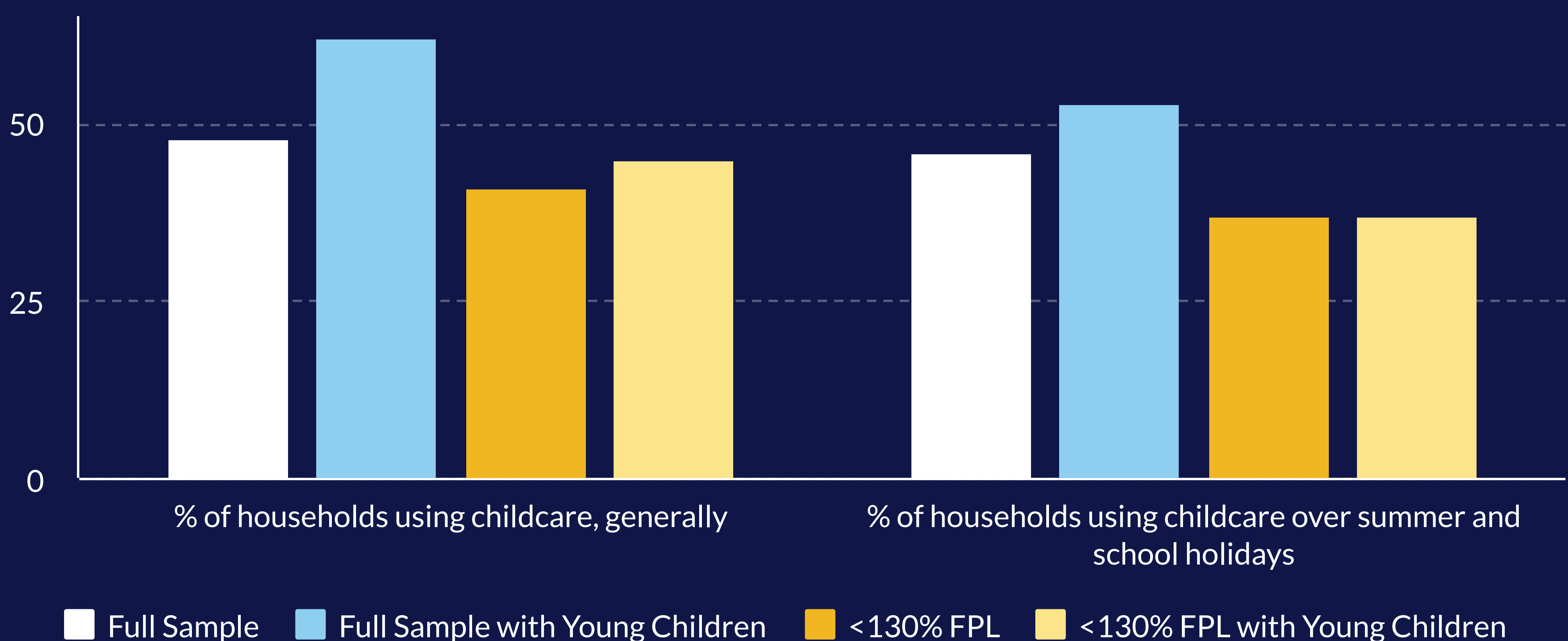
INCOME & UTILIZATION



The **average monthly household income**, before tax, was similar regardless of having a young child in the house - though less similar for lower income households. For the full sample, average income was \$4,565 without and \$4,603 with (1% greater for households with young children). For households with monthly income below 130% of the Federal Poverty Limit, average monthly income was \$1,664 without and \$1,771 with (6% greater for households with young children).



The **average monthly cost of childcare**, was less similar. For the full sample, average monthly cost was \$464 without and \$559 with (20% greater for households with young children). For households with monthly income below 130% of the Federal Poverty Limit, average monthly cost was \$269 without and \$331 with (23% greater for households with young children).



SOURCES

Who are parents relying on for general childcare?

Childcare source	Full sample	Full sample w/ children <6 years old	100% FPL	100% FPL w/ children <6 years old
Childcare Center	35%	48%	24%	30%
Grandparent	42%	37%	60%	59%
Afterschool Care	38%	32%	31%	28%
Family Friend	18%	16%	41%	45%
Babysitter/Nanny	31%	30%	12%	12%
Other Relative	11%	11%	16%	21%
Older Sibling	11%	5.1%	15%	10%
Other Childcare	2.4%	0.17%	5.7%	0.0%

With regard to caring for children over the summer and other school holidays, lower income households typically utilize those in their social circles such as siblings, grandparents, and family friends for childcare more often than the full sample. Conversely, the full sample more often tends to use childcare centers, babysitters, and afterschool care, all of which are generally associated with greater cost compared to childcare sources in social circles. Several types of childcare are similarly utilized regardless of child age, including afterschool care, babysitter/nanny, and family friend. There is an increase in variation between families with and without young children (< 6 years of age) in utilization of childcare centers, older siblings and other childcare--these differences are similar between the full sample and low income households. The proportion of households who use another relative was lower for families with young children in low income households but the same for the full sample. Both the full sample and low income households without young children utilized other forms of childcare as compared to households with young children, but this difference was much greater for low income households.

SOURCES

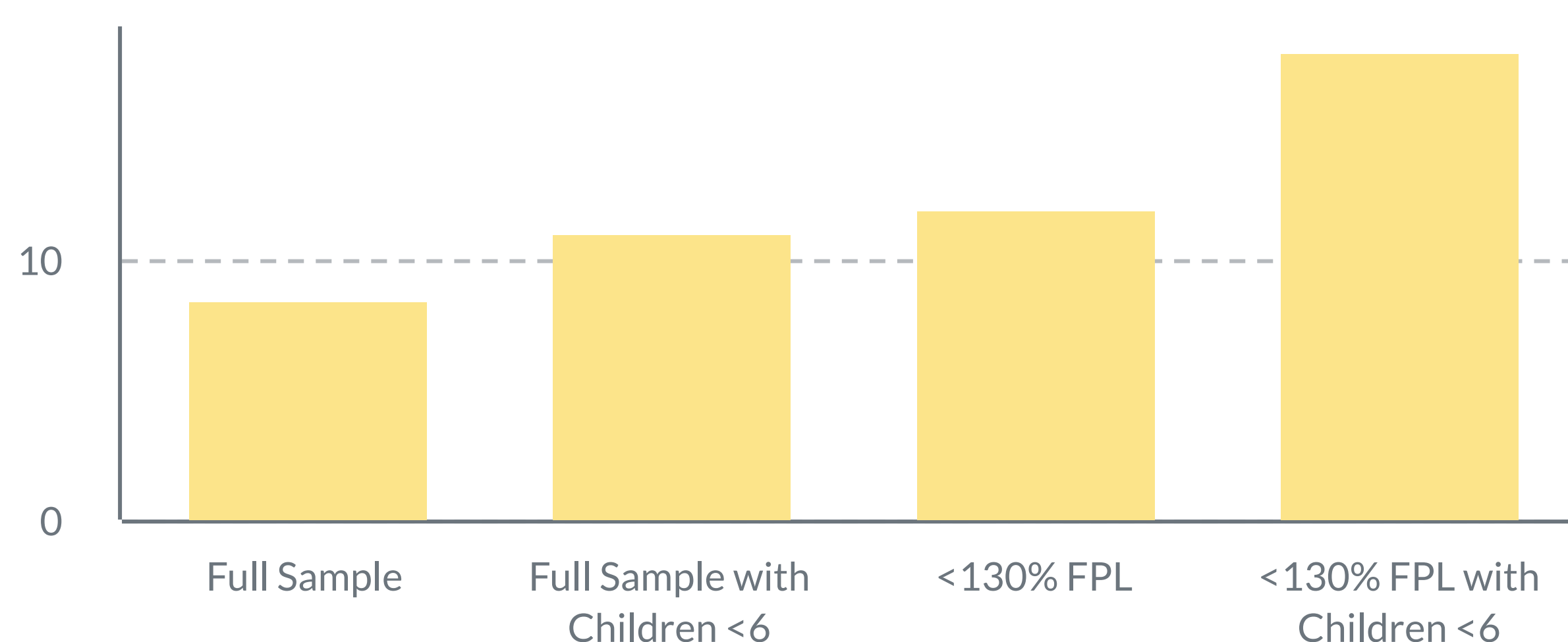
Who are parents relying on for summer/holiday childcare?

Childcare source	Full sample	Full sample w/ children <6 years old	100% FPL	100% FPL w/ children <6 years old
Grandparent	48%	47%	59%	58%
Camp	44%	40%	31%	19%
Childcare Center	29%	45%	9.2%	16%
Family Friend	27%	28%	41%	29%
Community Org	25%	22%	17%	23%
Babysitter/Nanny	24%	25%	2.1%	3.7%
Older sibling	18%	7.5%	19%	18%
Other relative	13%	11%	20%	18%
Summer school	6.4%	6.8%	8.3%	10%
Other	8.2%	6.6%	9.0%	4.5%

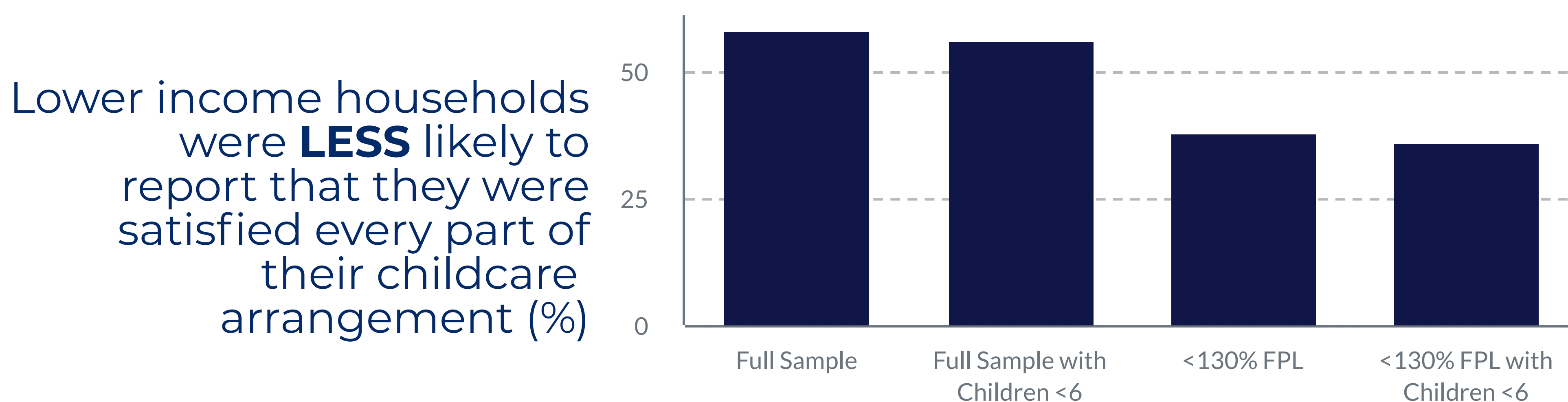
Childcare source trends hold true for childcare during the summer and other school holidays, though in some instances difference between the full sample and low income households are even more pronounced. Childcare centers, which 29% of the full sample rely upon over the summer and school holidays, are utilized by 9.2% by lower income households--a difference of nearly 20%. In general, 35% of the full sample utilizes babysitters, and 24% of lower income households utilize babysitters, an 11% difference. Similar trends also hold true for households with children under 6 years old. Overall, the most commonly used sources of childcare across all groups include grandparents, childcare centers, and afterschool care. Given mounting evidence for the value of high-quality professional childcare programs, this discrepancy in utilization based on income is should be noted, especially with regard to households with young children, who stand to benefit even more from high-quality childcare.

SATISFACTION

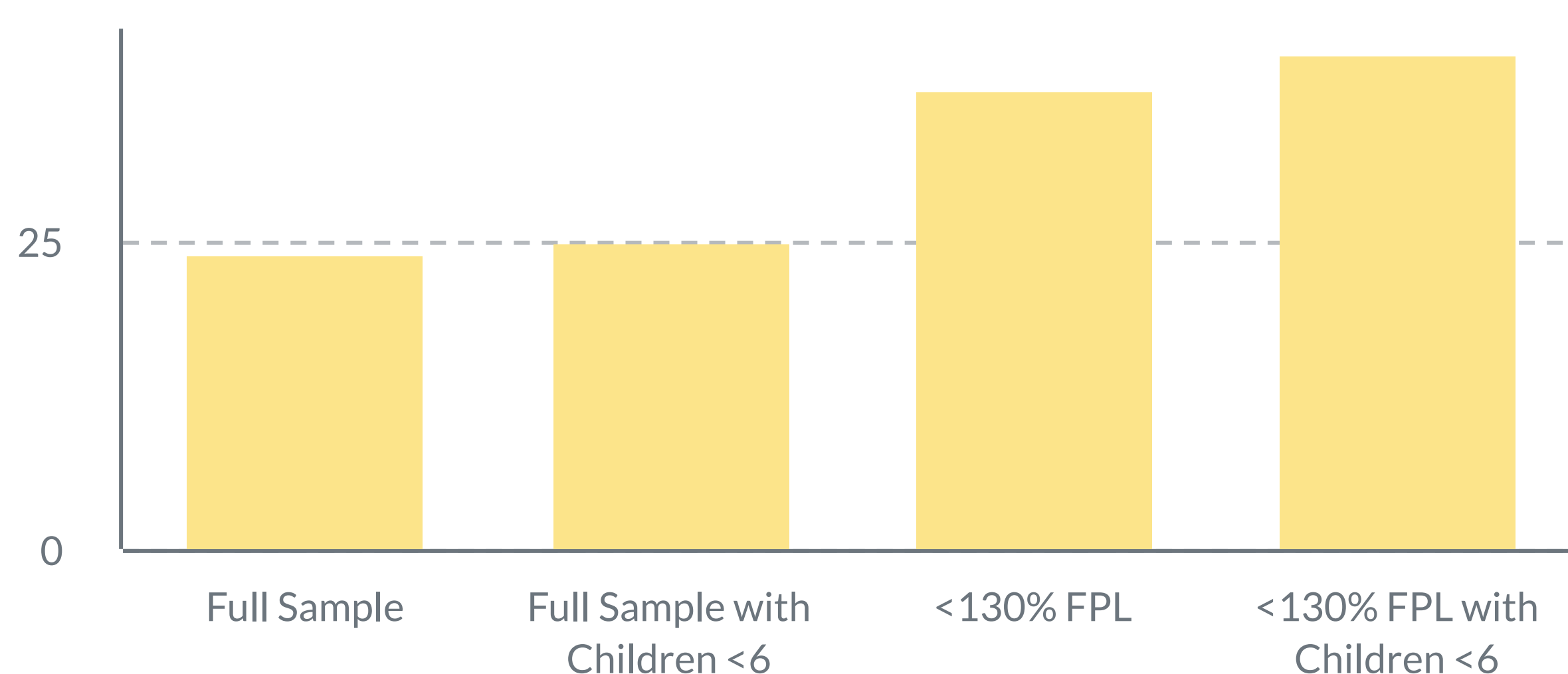
Households utilizing childcare were asked to select all responses that applied to the following question:
If you are dissatisfied at all with any part of your childcare arrangement, what keeps you from changing it?



Lower income household were **MORE** likely to report that more satisfactory childcare arrangements were too expensive (%)



Lower income households were **LESS** likely to report that they were satisfied every part of their childcare arrangement (%)



Lower income household were **MORE** likely to report that more satisfactory childcare arrangements were not available in their community (%)

Lower income households were also more likely to report that more satisfactory childcare was not available for the hours they worked/studied.

SUPPLY

In order to understand childcare capacity in formal early education providers in Athens-Clarke County, we collected data from a sample of childcare providers in the community. In the state of Georgia, the state agency Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is in charge of licensure of these facilities and has a program known as Quality Rated, which is an optional program childcare providers can participate in that is "a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early and school-age care and education programs. Similar to rating systems for other service related industries, Quality Rated assigns a quality rating to early and school-age care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards." (1) In August 2019 and January 2020, we obtained a list of all 2 and 3-star Quality Rated Childcare Centers in Athens, Georgia and called each one to gather data on cost, number of slots available, and the age groups served by the center. Data from this effort are provided in the table on the next page. Note: these data serve the purpose of providing the capacity and cost of childcare at two points in time and are only a snapshot of the childcare landscape.

There is an economic element to human development. There is a high return on investment for early childhood education and children for whom quality early childcare is provided have significantly better life outcomes, including health, income, IQ, and quality of life, and have a reduced likelihood of participating in a crime. (2)

According to the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (3), early childhood education improves not only educational outcomes, it can also lead to economic savings for our communities. Early childhood care and education contributes \$4.7 billion annually to Georgia's economic activity. Not only does it create jobs for childcare workers, it also serves to expand the workforce by allowing parents to remain at their jobs. Due to childcare challenges in Georgia: more than one in six parents report having turned down a promotion, about one in twenty report having been fired for missing work, and an estimated \$105 billion is lost each year in tax revenues. (4)

1,000 Days is an international organization focusing on the health and wellbeing of children from before they are born until their 2nd birthday - or, roughly 1,000 days. This period of time is a critical window of opportunity that can impact a person's entire life. According to 1,000 Days, investment into the wellbeing of children in their first two years of life (and before) can add billions of dollars in economic productivity and decrease the cost of health care. Also during this period of time, 1 billion brain connections are formed each second, making affordable quality childcare an absolute must for our community. (5)

(1) <https://qualityrated.dec.state.ga.us/>; (2) https://heckmanequation.org/www/assets/2017/01/F_Heckman_CBAOnePager_120516.pdf;
 (3) <https://gears.org/why-early-childhood-for-communities/>; (4) <https://gears.org/news/opportunities-lost-report-outlines-significant-economic-loss-linked-child-care-challenges-georgia/>; (5) <https://thousanddays.org/about/our-story/>

SUPPLY

ACC Quality Rated Childcare Centers Sampled August 2019 & January 2020

Age	Average monthly cost	Lower limit	Upper limit	Number of centers	Centers with openings
Infant to 12 months	\$674	\$500	\$1035	11	3
13 months to 2 years	\$638	\$400	\$1000	12	7
2 years to 3 years	\$653	\$400	\$975	10	6
3 years to 4 years	\$608	\$380	\$945	12	6
4+ years	\$530	\$460	\$600	2	0

Note: These data were collected prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

As noted in the DEMOGRAPHICS section of this report, while the full sample of households with children under the age of six report spending \$559 on childcare, those below 130% FPL reported spending only \$331. This could suggest that households with lower monthly incomes are subsidizing their childcare in some way, which aligns with <130% FLP households reporting significantly higher reliance upon grandparents or family friends for general childcare. There is a great deal of variation in cost of care, especially for very young children. Until the age of 4, the upper limit is more than double that of the lower limit in terms of monthly cost. In most cases, half or less of all centers have any availability. In the Quality Rated centers sampled (i.e. called for data collection on cost and available slots), less than half had any availability at both points in time of data collection--August 2019 and January 2020.

According to the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, the average cost of infant care is \$364 in rural areas and \$644 in urban areas. Child Care Aware reported an average monthly cost of \$693.92 for infants, \$647 for toddlers, and \$487.33 for 4 year olds for Georgia. **By all accounts, the cost of childcare in Athens-Clarke County is greater than for Georgia, overall.**



There is a **18.4%** reduction in the cost of childcare from infancy to pre-k

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHORS

The data on both perceptions and challenges of childcare access and affordability and the supply of childcare were collected before the COVID19 global pandemic occurred. Of course, this is a significant limitation. However, any challenges or issues with childcare presented here are now, post-COVID19, conservative estimates of the challenges around childcare in our community. Many childcare centers and providers are closed because of the pandemic and some have gone out of business completely. This reality has constricted the supply and decreased the options families have for childcare for their children. This particular issue is exacerbated by two additional factors:

- 1) unemployment has reached record levels in a very short amount of time due to the pandemic, leaving many families in the difficult position of not being able to afford their childcare as a result of their job loss;
- 2) many parents are teleworking from home **or** they have to report to work in person and do not have childcare.

These realities have made the issue of childcare and the need for affordable, quality, safe care more salient than ever.



APPENDIX:
AWP Methods
& Overview

AWP 2.0 DATA OVERVIEW

More about the Athens Wellbeing Project.

The sampling plan for the Athens Wellbeing Project (AWP) was designed to obtain a random sample of county residents representative of the total population of Athens-Clarke County. The first step in selecting the AWP sample was to create a list of all residence or living communities (i.e. apartment buildings, public housing communities, mobile home parks, and retirement communities) in Athens-Clarke County. This list, hereafter referred to as the sampling frame, was used to select a residence. For the purposes of the AWP, the unit of analysis is conceptualized as the household. Within each selected residence, a single resident living in the household received the AWP survey and was asked to respond on behalf of all residents living in the household. This person is hereafter referred to as the respondent.

To create a sample that represented the population of interest the sampling frame needed to include all Athens-Clarke County residences. Sources for these lists included the Athens Clarke County Unified Government Department of Housing & Community Development and the Athens Housing Authority. The list of residences was comprised of the following types of dwellings:

- Single family residences, condos, and duplex buildings
- Apartment complexes
- Public Housing communities
- Mobile home parks
- Retirement communities

Next, the sampling frame was evaluated to determine which Athens-Clarke county residents might be underrepresented or missing from the frame completely.

During the evaluation of the sampling frame, we determined that homeless and transitional residents could be missing from the frame. For the purposes of AWP, we defined homelessness according to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (Pub. L. 100-77, July 22, 1987, 101 Stat. 482, 42 U.S.C. § 11301).

Using the McKinney-Vento definition means that we defined homelessness more broadly than only including individuals with no shelter or residing in homeless shelters. This definition also encompasses individuals who might be living with friends or family members or otherwise “transitional” situations. The vulnerable nature of homeless and transitional residents presented special challenges in constructing the sampling frame, and as a result we had to “select” them into the AWP sample differently from other residents.

The AWP data collection strategy used both postcard mailings and in-person, door-to-door follow up. Four rounds of postcard mailers were sent to each household in the sample. The postcards included information on the project, instructions to complete the survey online (or to request a paper copy), the household's unique Survey ID to complete the survey, and information on chances to win the incentive for completion.

The second mechanism for data collection was in-person follow up and administration of the survey instrument, conducted by data collection teams. Data collection teams were composed of a Neighborhood Leader—an infrastructure already existing in the community under Family Connection-Communities in Schools. Each neighborhood was assigned a Neighborhood Leader who has experience living and working in Athens and engaging with their local community. The Neighborhood Leader was the manager of each data collection team, composed of the NL and students from the University of Georgia. All data collection team members received training in Fall 2018 to prepare them for in-person collection.

AWP 2.0 data collection resulted in 1,078 households completing the survey, with a +/-3% margin of error. Sampling weights were created and are utilized for all analysis and reporting to ensure representativeness of the data. The analysis weights account for variation in the probability of being included in the sample, and for varying rates of response across the sampling strata. The resulting sample from this round of collection is one that is robust and representative of Athens-Clarke County households.

A critical component of executing this work was achieving approval from the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the project. The project was submitted to IRB in June 2016, and after being reviewed was determined that it was not deemed "research," but rather was a project designed to provide research and analysis to stakeholders in the Athens Clarke County community. Thus, the project was exempt from further IRB oversight (IRB Study ID #00003747).

AWP 2.0 DATA OVERVIEW

METHODS

1

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The survey instrument was developed by the research team in conjunction with all institutional stakeholders. The instrument was specifically designed to collect information not available from other secondary data sources. Where available, validated measures from other nationally-representative surveys were utilized to ensure validity and the ability to compare Clarke-County to those sources.

2

DATA COLLECTION

Online and paper surveys were available for respondents. Random sampling of single family homes and a census of vulnerable populations were conducted. Selected families received postcards notifying them of selection. Door-to-door data collection teams of University of Georgia students, led by Neighborhood Leaders, followed up with families to increase responses. A total of 1,078 households responded.

3

DATA ANALYSIS

Once data were collected, they were cleaned and coded for analysis. Sample weights were created by the research team to increase representativeness of the sample. The resulting sample has a margin of error of +/-3%. Additional variables for analysis were created (e.g. a poverty measure using income and household size). Summary statistics were estimated for all variables in the sample, for the full sample and for sub-categorizations.

4

INTERPRETATION

The data presented in this report are descriptive in nature. Measures are presented for the full sample and by sub-categorization based on income and age of children in the household for comparison purposes. AWP data are meant to be used in conjunction with other existing data sources-- both primary and secondary, qualitative and quantitative--in order to get the most comprehensive understanding possible of outcomes of interest and general levels of wellbeing in our community. Where possible, data visualizations are used for ease of interpretation.

The full survey instrument and technical documentation of data collection methods are available online at www.athenswellbeingproject.org/data.



Visit our website:

WWW.ATHENSWELLBEINGPROJECT.COM

to learn more.