

# Canadian daycare desires, Part III

## How education affects attitudes toward daycare

BY ANDREA MROZEK

AN INSTITUTE of Marriage and Family Canada poll released earlier this year showed that 76% of Canadians believe it is best for children under six to be cared for at home by a parent. This result was consistent regardless of income, gender or working arrangements. It also held, to a lesser extent, across regional lines.

In this analysis, we examine how the poll results are affected by education level.<sup>1</sup>

### E-PENDIX

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## What is better for children in general – a parent or a competent caregiver?

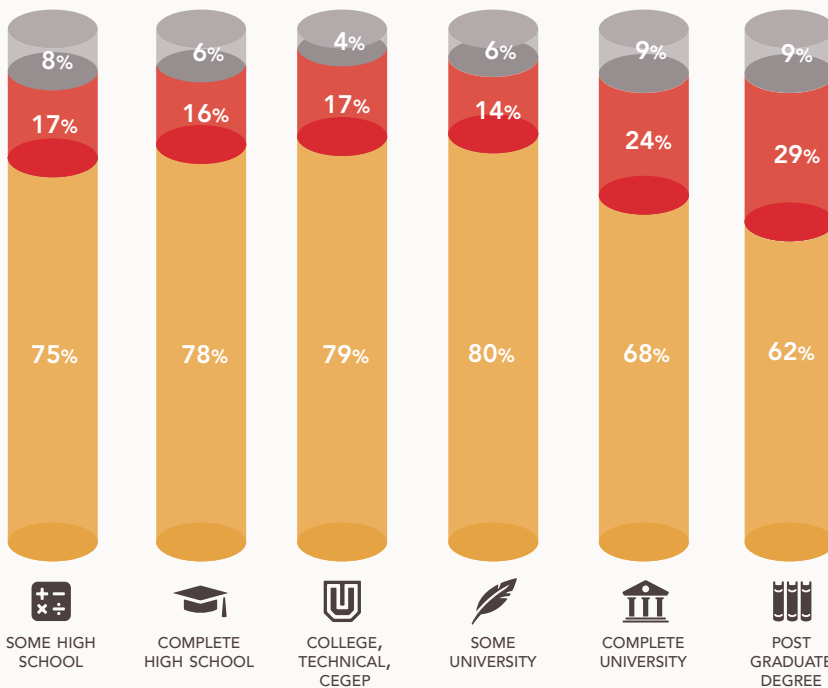
THE MAJORITY of educated Canadians believe a child under six is better off at home with a parent. Canadians prefer this over a competent caregiver. However, support for parental care drops at higher education levels.

While 76% of Canadians as a whole prefer parental care, that number dips

to 68% for those who have completed a university degree. For those who have a post-graduate degree, it is 62%.

The greatest support for parental care was found among Canadians with technical degrees (79%) and those with some university experience but not a complete degree (80%).

BEST FOR CHILDREN IN GENERAL  
PARENT AT HOME VS. COMPETENT CAREGIVER  
BY EDUCATION



■ DON'T KNOW  
■ PARENTS HAVE THEIR CHILD LOOKED AFTER BY A COMPETENT CAREGIVER  
■ ONE OF THE PARENTS STAYS AT HOME TO CARE FOR THEIR CHILD

1. In Part I of the daycare poll we released the general attitudes of Canadians. In Part II, we examined Quebec specifically.

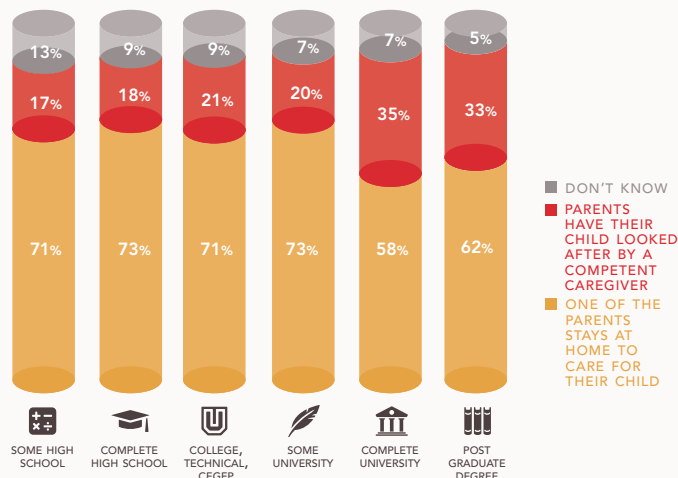
## What is better for your own children – a parent or a competent caregiver?

SUPPORT FOR parental care is slightly less when talking about the care of one's own child.

Sixty-nine percent of Canadians regardless of education level believe it is best for their own child under six to be cared for at home by a parent.

While 73% of Canadians with some university agree, that number drops to 58% once their degree is in hand.

PREFERRED FOR THEIR CHILD  
PARENT AT HOME VS. COMPETENT CAREGIVER:  
BY EDUCATION



## If a parent can't stay home

INTERESTINGLY, if a parent can't stay home, university-educated Canadians are the least likely to see a relative as the next best option.

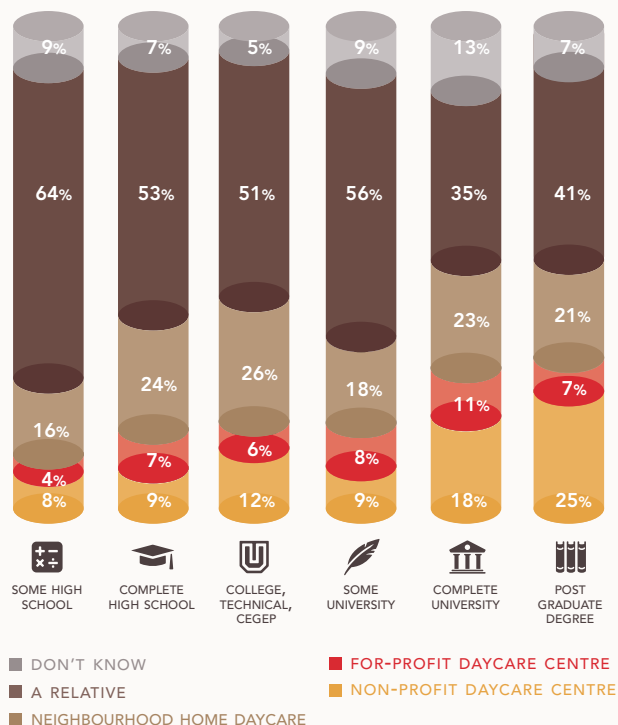
In *Canadian Daycare Desires (Part I)* we learned that in general, 51% of Canadians believe a relative is the next best choice if a parent cannot stay home. After a relative, the next choice is a neighbourhood home daycare at 23%.<sup>2</sup> Both of these options involve a home environment.

The home environment is similarly popular amongst those with technical degrees or some university.

Among those with university or post-graduate degrees, the neighbourhood home daycare keeps its appeal, but the preference for relatives drops. Only 35% of Canadians with a university degree and 41% with a post-graduate degree choose a relative as the next best option if a parent cannot stay home.

While 18% of those with some university choose a neighbourhood home daycare as the next best option, 23% of those with university degrees and 21% of those with post-graduate degrees do.

BEST FOR CHILDREN IN GENERAL  
OUT OF HOME CARE OPTIONS  
BY EDUCATION



2. Institute of Marriage and Family Canada. (2013, May). *Canadian daycare desires (part I)*, p. 3. Retrieved from [http://www.imfcanada.org/sites/default/files/monthly\\_release/DaycareDesiresMay2013.pdf](http://www.imfcanada.org/sites/default/files/monthly_release/DaycareDesiresMay2013.pdf)

## Funding preferences

SIX FUNDING OPTIONS were given. The most popular, chosen by 31% of Canadians, was for government to provide cash payments directly to parents. (Regionally, this option was most popular in Quebec, at 45%.)

The second most popular option (21% of Canadians) was for government to provide all parents with a child tax deduction whether they work or stay home.

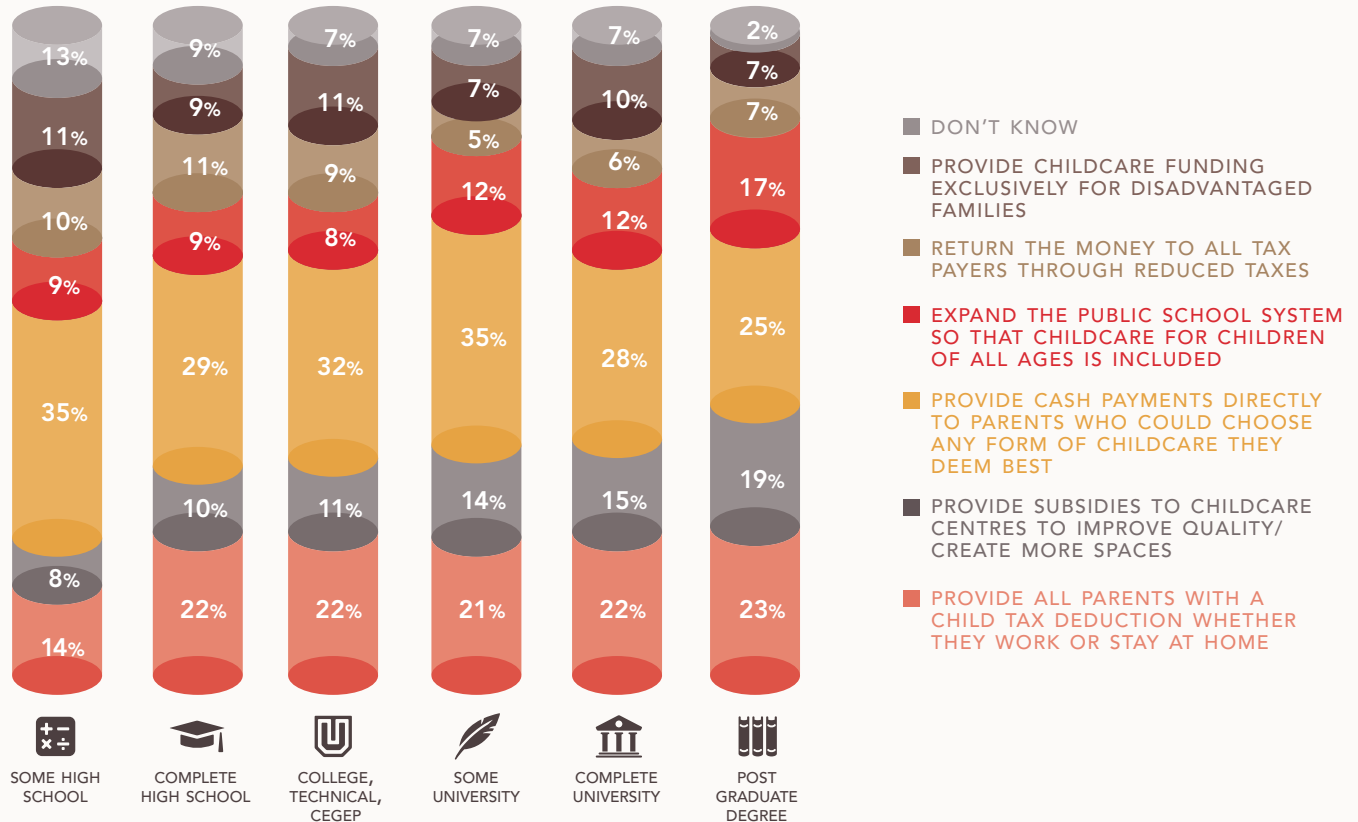
In *Canadian Daycare Desires (Part I)*, we noted that a minimum of 61% of Canadians believe that government funding of child care should go directly to parents. This included those who chose cash payments for parents (31%),

a child tax deduction (21%) and money for all taxpayers through reduced taxes at nine percent. (Sixty-one percent is a minimum since an additional 10% chose targeted childcare funding only for disadvantaged families who need it most. In this category we did not specify precisely how those funds should be administered, whether to parents or institutions.)

For Canadians who have completed university, the 61% falls to 56%. For those with a post-graduate degree, it is 55%.

While this paper reflects on why fewer educated Canadians say a parent with a child under six is best, a majority of educated Canadians still believe this to be true.

BEST WAY FOR GOVERNMENT TO SPEND ON CHILDCARE  
BY EDUCATION



## Daycare desires by gender and education

**HIGHER EDUCATION** affects women’s attitudes toward child care more than men’s.

Amongst Canadians who have completed high school, 78% of both men and women say a parent at home is best for a child under six. Amongst Canadians who have completed university, the number drops to 72% of men and 65% of women. Amongst post-grads, 69% of men and only 54% of women still choose parental care.

The differences are not big enough between the various groups of men to cover the margin of error given the smaller sample size. However, the differences are big enough beyond the margin of error for women.

It is interesting to note that the most likely group to respond “don’t know” to this question was women with a university degree, at 12%.

## Percent of time Canadian mothers of young children spend working

**WE FREQUENTLY HEAR** in the media that approximately seventy percent of mothers of young children are working.<sup>3</sup> This statistic is used as a justification for more public expenditures on centre-based daycare. There is more nuance to that statistic than we are told, as evidenced below. Importantly, where approximately 70% of mothers of young children are working full-time, we don’t know where or when.

From the most recent survey of household spending in 2009, we see the following.

For **TWO PARENT** families with at least one child four years old or under:

**73%** of spouses worked **FULL-TIME** for at least **ONE WEEK**

**62%** of spouses worked **FULL-TIME** for at least **26 WEEKS**

**45%** of spouses worked **FULL-TIME** for at least **50 WEEKS** (a full year, full-time worker)<sup>4</sup>

For **SINGLE MOTHER** families with at least one child of four years or less:

**43%** of single mothers worked **FULL-TIME** for at least **ONE WEEK**

**28%** of single mothers worked **FULL-TIME** for at least **26 WEEKS**

**23%** of single mothers worked **FULL-TIME** for at least **50 WEEKS** (a full year, full-time worker)<sup>5</sup>

Economics professor at Nipissing University Chris Sarlo points out there are bigger questions relating to the work statistics. “While the data show that, in two parent families with one pre-schooler, about 73% of spouses work full-time for some of the year and about 44% work full-time full-year, we really don’t know how many of those working spouses work outside the home,” he says.

Better data is needed to truly understand where and when mothers work. Regardless of how mothers of young children work, simply saying that seven in ten mothers are working does not immediately mean they are looking for full-time centre-based care.

3. Statistics Canada. *Table 282-0002 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by sex and detailed age group, annual (persons unless otherwise noted)*, CANSIM (database). Retrieved from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada [http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.lt.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=13#M\\_7](http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.lt.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=13#M_7)

4. According to calculations done for this paper by Professor Chris Sarlo of Nipissing University using the Statistics Canada Survey of Household Spending microdata file

5. *Ibid.*

## A note on daycare, education, gender and freedom

HOW TO CARE for one's children should be a choice freely made, without government interference, which today very often comes in the form of funding.

Research frequently asks questions about the gender gap and the impact of children on women's labour force participation, among other questions.<sup>6</sup> The same questions are less frequently asked about men. This may be because only a small percentage of fathers stay home to care for kids. Statistics Canada tells us that in 2005, 11% of stay-at-home parents were fathers.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, overcoming the gender gap almost always refers to the lack of women in particular industries or in upper echelons of management or politics. Therefore, gender equity is one

reason given for publicly-subsidized daycare and early learning programs.<sup>8</sup>

Importantly, our findings reveal that publicly-subsidized daycare is not the first choice of women in general or women with the highest level of education, like post-doctorate degrees.

It is in defence of freedom for families to make their own choices that the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada actively speaks against government resources being put into one particular system. It is likewise on these grounds that we speak in favour of family income splitting, which reduces the taxes a family pays by recognizing that families work as a unit.<sup>9</sup>

## In her own words: Stories from mothers

OUR POLL DIDN'T ASK why people responded the way they did. So we reached out to Canadians with higher education to ask why they do what they do with regards to caring for their children. We also asked why fewer educated Canadians believe a parent at home is best. This provides an anecdotal narrative behind the poll results.

### MINA<sup>10</sup>, 38, OTTAWA

MOTHER OF THREE, AGES FOUR, TWO AND FIVE MONTHS  
• ELECTRICAL ENGINEER, MANAGER • FULL-TIME WORK  
OUTSIDE THE HOME, CURRENTLY ON MATERNITY LEAVE

"PERSONALLY, MY BIGGEST motivator for going back to work is the fear that it will be very difficult to re-enter my profession if I take more than the one-year protected maternity leave. In discussions with other professional moms, I know this fear is common. If there was some magical guarantee that I could quit my job now, and in five years still get back into my profession, I would leave

the workforce until all our children are in school, no question. The loss of five years of income is not a big concern for me, what I fear is the loss of a career that I spent 16 years (six in school and 10 in the field) building...

I think that educated parents will state a preference for competent caregivers in polls because they are being pragmatic, as they feel the professional and financial pressure to work. I think there is also some guilt over choosing work over children, and I think educated parents sometimes try to convince themselves their children are 'better off' in child care in order to diminish some of the guilt."

6. Some examples include: Hoffman, S. (2009, February). The changing impact of marriage and children on women's labor force participation. *Monthly Labor Review*; Milligan K. and Stabile, M. (2009). Child benefits, maternal employment, and children's health: Evidence from Canadian child benefit expansions. *American Economic Review*, 99:2, pp. 128-132; Hakim, C. (2006, August). Women, careers, and work-life preferences. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, Vol. 34, No. 3; England, P., Gornick, J. and Fitzgibbons Shafer, E. (2012, April). Women's employment, education, and the gender gap in 17 countries. *Monthly Labor Review*; Cohen, P.N. and Bianchi, S. (1999, December). Marriage, children, and women's employment: What do we know? *Monthly Labor Review*.
7. Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-001-x/10706/sharing-1.gif>
8. "Economic, generational and gender equality means creating societal structures to sustain families and children by ensuring that the necessary resources to support them are generated through a fair tax system." Friendly, M. (2012, July 3). Why universal child care is essential for a more equal Canada. *Childcare Resource and Research Unit*. Retrieved from <http://www.childcarecanada.org/blog/why-universal-childcare-essential-more-equal-canada>
9. On April 29, 2013 the IMFC hosted economist Dr. Jack Mintz to discuss income splitting. His presentation is available here: <http://www.imfcanada.org/event/family-income-splitting-dr-jack-mintz>
10. Preferred not to use her real name.

## DR. SUZANA KOVACIC, 42, BURNABY, BRITISH COLUMBIA

MOTHER OF FOUR, AGES EIGHT, SEVEN, FOUR AND THREE MONTHS • PHD CHEMISTRY, RESEARCHER AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY • PART-TIME WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME

"WHEN I COMPLETED my Ph.D. in chemistry from UBC, work/life balance was not something I had ever seriously considered. I wasn't yet married and the career implications of starting a family were not yet a reality for me...

The first day of my first real job after finally finishing 14 years of training (four undergrad, six grad, four postdoc) was also the day I found out I was pregnant. I worked for nine months in a research support position at SFU and then went on maternity leave for one year.

...While I was on leave with my second child, my work contract ended and I effectively had no job to return to. With two kids now, I felt that I didn't want to return

work and expect to be able to return to work when the children were older. Techniques and new developments proceed so rapidly, one really has to be actively involved in the research.

One thing that sticks out in my mind is when a prospective employer remarked during an interview that 16 months was a very long time to have been out of research and that my skills would be rusty. This had a motivating influence on me (actually, it terrified me).

I finally found a position as a part-time researcher at SFU with a professor, herself a mom with young kids, who decided to take a chance and hire me part-time even though she herself acknowledged that she

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*It was difficult for me to realize that unless I started actively pursuing a job, I would remain a stay-at-home mom. It would be impossible for me to take a significant break from work and expect to be able to return to work when the children were older.*

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to work full time. I had, however, never heard of or encountered a researcher who worked part-time. I didn't know what type of work I could return to so I spent a few months considering career options. I attended a networking meeting with my husband during this period - the type of event where everybody exchanges business cards. I had no business card to exchange and if I did, I could only say that I was a stay-at-home mom but that I had once been a biochemist. It was difficult for me to realize that unless I started actively pursuing a job, I would remain a stay-at-home mom. It would be impossible for me to take a significant break from

wasn't sure [it would work]. I now work for a different professor and he has also been very supportive of my working part-time. While I am working, my children are cared for at home by my father, who enjoys spending time with his grandchildren. Without his support I would not choose to work outside the home.

I feel that I have found a balance where I can spend the majority of my week with my children and still retain my skills as a scientist for the day when the children are old enough that I can return to work full-time."

## DR. ANNE-LISE HOLAHAN, 37, OTTAWA

MOTHER OF THREE, AGES EIGHT, SIX AND THREE • PHD PSYCHOLOGY, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST • PART-TIME WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME

“THE MOST CHILDCARE we have ever resorted to was 1.5 days/week. We have always wanted to have them at home as much as possible. ...

I happen to believe that children under six are better off at home with a parent - assuming the parent is able and willing to stimulate their child socially, emotionally and cognitively. Those first few years of life are important years for establishing a strong sense of security with—and attachment to—parents. I have chosen to spend more time at home than at work because I want to have a strong connection with my children. I also want to instill the values that I believe in. I want my children to be raised by my husband and I, and want to parent/teach/praise/give consequences in a way that I am comfortable with. It has been a constant struggle to maintain the balance between home and work life.

Our society still places a lot more value on working parents. Individuals who have spent a lot of time and money on their education and then become parents are faced with the dilemma of whether to give up their current employment and spend time with their young child, knowing that it will likely require extra work to get back to the same level of employment once they return.

It is possible that a portion of those parents with higher education who choose to continue working (for fear of losing their high-paying job) actually desire to be at home with their young child, and actually believe that they should. But because they themselves have chosen to work instead of stay at home, it is too uncomfortable to acknowledge in a poll that in their minds, their child would have been better off at home than with a competent caregiver. So they attempt to rationalize their own actions and answer the poll by saying that children are not necessarily better off being at home, and they feel more at peace inside. That is cognitive dissonance for you. It’s an inner drive that we all have that tries to restore harmony between our beliefs and our actions. This could be worth considering as a partial explanation.”

## KATE<sup>11</sup>, 40, TORONTO

MOTHER OF TWO, AGES SIX AND FOUR • TEACHER/LAWYER • FULL-TIME WORK INSIDE THE HOME (AKA “STAY-AT-HOME” MOM)

“I WANTED TO be there consistently and not feel like my time was divided. It was just a gut feeling when holding my baby. Also this was supported by literature on attachment parenting and other parenting books. I thought it would be fun and I knew I would enjoy being there to be a witness to all the miraculous stages. I felt it would be easy to leave and come back to my job later. I had a feeling that my job was less important than this little newborn looking at me.

In my twenties, I had a vision of sitting in a high, glassy office tower, wearing suits and doing something big. But the glamour of the suit does wear off. It forces you to ask ‘what’s really important?’

Hence, I was quite happy to wear sweats for six years while cavorting around parks, wiping kids and surfaces, reading books, dancing, etc. It all seems worthwhile to me.

I should add that being a “stay-at-home mom” makes me realize that

—  
*Someone told me once, ‘it is a sacrifice but it is worth it.’*  
—

there is a lot that goes into making your house a home; you can put in lots or little, and it’s not all the same.

Someone told me once, ‘it is a sacrifice but it is worth it.’ And that’s what I believe.”

11. Preferred not to use her real name.

## CANDACE<sup>12</sup>, 37, OTTAWA

MOTHER OF TWO, AGES FOUR AND TWENTY-TWO MONTHS • PUBLIC SERVANT • FULL-TIME WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME

"I CHOOSE TO work in part because I think I am setting an example for my daughters by being a successful working woman. Also, I love my work and would never want to feel any resentment towards my children, feeling 'stuck' at home. Further, with our mat leave I have had the experience of being at home for two years and know both sides. I enjoy that time, but am ready to go back to work and know my children will be well taken care of, learn things from their caregivers I would never think to teach them and are socializing with other children.

Finally, I have amazing work/life balance so I am able to make dinner every night. We eat as a family, do bedtime routines together and I am very 'present' when I am at home. I absolutely could not do what I do without huge involvement from my husband. He is immensely helpful and we both have jobs that allow for work life balance. I wouldn't choose this lifestyle if I had no support from my spouse.

Do I think they are better off in child care? Maybe not, but I certainly don't think it is worse for them and feel that we have found the right balance for all of us."

## DR. TAMARA PIERCE, 36, CALGARY

MOTHER OF ONE, AGE 10 MONTHS WITH ONE ON THE WAY • PHYSICIAN • PART-TIME WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME

"I SUSPECT educated parents are less likely to stay at home due to many factors. 1) Time invested in education/career with resultant reticence to give up the investment and associated self-definition. 2) Personal career satisfaction. 3) Increased income 'needs' in a society with abundance and sense of entitlement. I say this as a woman who continues to work part-time outside the home for these reasons.

That said, I am able to do this thanks to a mother-in-law whom I trust implicitly who takes care of my little one. If she were not available, I am not sure I could have returned to the work force as I do not trust others with the well-being of my child: My precious, vulnerable, dependent son. I love being able to keep my mind academically active and I so appreciate the chance to socialize with adults, but working outside the home has definitely taken a toll on me and on the home. Welcome, chaos. There was such a sense of security and grounding when I ponder my mother's presence throughout my childhood and I want to emulate this with my own children."

## Recommendations

- Current public policy does not mirror Canadians' desires. Taxpayer dollars preferentially fund a form of care a majority of Canadians say they do not prefer. The discriminatory use of public funds must end.
- If government should be involved in helping to care for kids, a majority of Canadians believe that cash payments to parents, tax credits or child tax deductions are a better way to do so than funding national or provincial systems.
- Further polling/research to more conclusively examine why Canadian parents make the choices they do with regards to the care of their own children would be valuable. 🍁

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12. Preferred not to use her real name.