

SUMMARY

Reasons for Low Utilization of Care Outside School Hours in Australia

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Due to the significant diversity in family types and working styles in Australia, the demand for childcare facilities in the nation is increasing. Care outside school hours in Australia has been the subject of insufficient research in Japan, and this paper therefore provides a brief explanation of the system prior to examining the low utilization of care outside school hours in Sydney and Perth.

Care outside school hours in Australia is doubly regulated, by the state and by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority. Australia has strict regulations regarding who is allowed to work with children, based on checks of criminal records. To provide high quality services, care providers must meet the requisite qualifications for child education and receive additional training. Although the present study of care outside school hours found that both Sydney and Perth have sufficient caregivers and facility space to provide a safe and healthy environment for children, the facilities in Sydney are unappealing to children older than 10 due to a limited number of books and toys. In contrast, the care facility studied in Perth had a large playground, well-being specialists on the staff, and an integrated garden program.

The rate of use of care outside school hours by Australian families is low compared to other countries; only 10 percent of all primary school age children were enrolled in 2007. There are several reasons for this low participation rate. First, many parents do not apply for care outside school hours, even if they have a strong desire to use it. Second, complaints regarding high costs are often heard from parents. Third, some parents do not like childcare facilities regardless of the quality of care because they do not trust the caregivers. The preferred mode of play among school age children has also changed from outdoor to indoor, on personal computers or video consoles, and many parents prefer having their children at home for security reasons. Fourth, research on children has reported that 25 percent of school age children care for themselves outside school hours. These children travel from school unsupervised and mainly stay at home unsupervised. Fifth, parents are uncertain about the quality of care. Although the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority investigates each child care facility, the Authority itself has issues; investigations are announced, enabling each facility to prepare for them. In addition, self-reporting is sometimes substituted for on-site visits. Finally, all outside school hours care facilities close at 6 pm. This is not helpful for parents who have non-traditional working hours and must also arrange informal care (such as supervision by a grandparent or nanny).