

Conclusion: There is no good reason for public policy to discriminate in favour of day-care and against other options. It is not supported by what people actually want, as the above results show. In addition, it is not supported by any Irish evidence showing that young children in day-care have markedly better outcomes than children being looked after at home during the working day by a parent, another family member or another adult.

An important new study from the ESRI called 'Childcare, Early Education and Socio-Emotional Outcomes at Age Five', shows little difference in outcomes whether a child was in day-care, or at home, or in some other arrangement. (There appear to be small detrimental effects if they are in daycare for 30 or more hours per week, and small beneficial effects if the children are from disadvantaged backgrounds or lone-parent households.)

This being so, there is no good reason for the State to favour day-care over the other choices parents make about the care of their children, especially when day-care is the first choice of only a small minority of people.

It would be far better to adopt a more neutral policy in respect of the various child-care preferences of parents. In Finland, for example, day-care is subsidised but parents who mind their young children at home, receive a generous monthly supplement. In other words, Finland supports both choices financially.

Obviously, we cannot do more than resources allow, but the political class should reassess the growing and unjustified bias in favour of day-care and move towards a more neutral policy. A more neutral policy would presumably also find considerable electoral support.

State policy should be neutral between different child-care choices and not discriminate in favour of day-care



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Child-care: What do the public really want?

49 percent want
to mind their young children at home

27 percent want
a family member to look after their
children during the day

17 percent want **to use day-care**

(Source: Amarach Research poll, 2013)

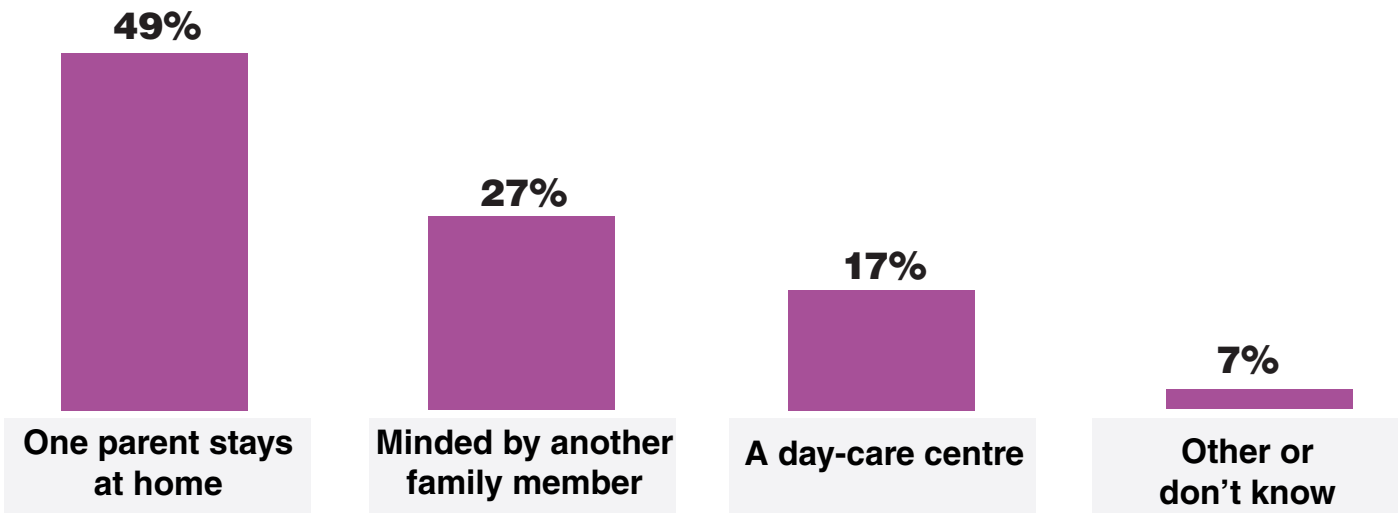


Introduction

The State rightly wishes to help working parents with young children. One way it can do so is by facilitating high quality, affordable day-care. But is this fair if it neglects other options such as at-home-care? The State should not assume that most people want to put their children into day-care. So what do people really want? The Iona Institute commissioned a number of polls conducted by Amarach Research to find out. The answers are below.

The public's preferred child-care options

Q. Below are some possible arrangements for caring for children under five (i.e. not attending primary school) during the working day. Please tell me which arrangement you would ideally prefer for your children if circumstances allowed, even if you don't have children under five.



Comment: Public policy should be a response to what the public actually want unless there is a strong, compelling reason to do otherwise. Child-care policy is mainly about early-years care because that is when children are most dependent. This question asked people what they regard as the best child-care option for children under the age of five. It finds that only a small minority (17pc) see placing a child in a day-

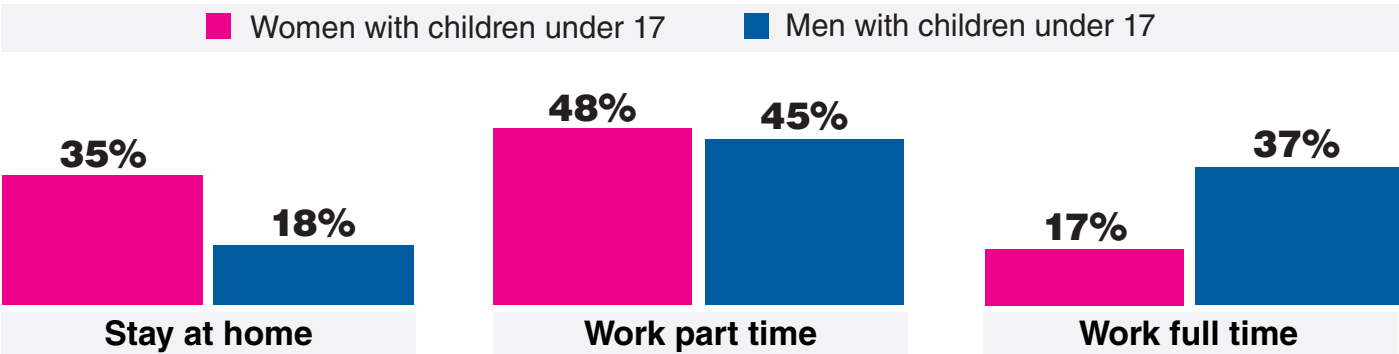
care centre as the best option.

Just under half believe parental care at home is best, and 27pc say their preferred option is care by another family member such as a grandparent. Any policy that favours the minority choice, day-care, over these other choices, is inherently discriminatory, therefore.



Work/Life preferences, marked gender differences

Q. If money were no object, and you were free to do whatever you wanted, would you stay at home, would you work full time or would you work part time?



Comment: This question is identical to one asked in a poll for *The New York Times* in 2013. The purpose of the question is to ask people what their work choices would be if under no financial pressure to work. The above chart looks at the work choices of men and women with children aged under 17.

It finds that only a minority of both sexes would choose to work full-time. For both sexes, almost half would opt to work part-time. However, there are very marked gender differences in regard to who would work full-time or stay-at-home. Only 18pc of men would opt to stay-at-home versus almost twice that number of women. Conversely, twice as many men as women in this category

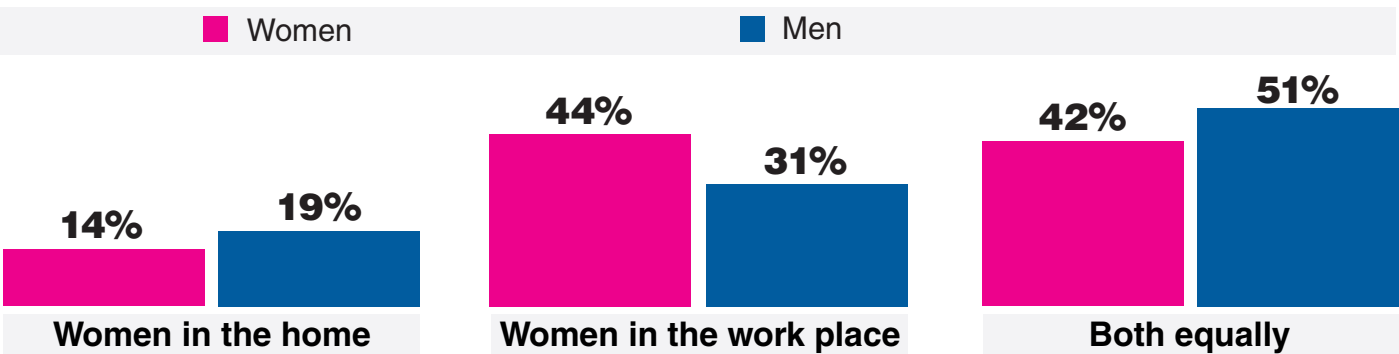
would work full-time.

This marked gender difference directly challenges the notion that men and women, given a free hand, would choose the same work/life balance. Much of the advocacy for universal, State-subsidised child-care is based on this mistaken premise.

The national household survey (3rd quarter, 2016), produced by the Central Statistics Office, showed that 315,000 women were working part-time compared with 146,000 men. Significantly, 83pc of part-time working women did not regard themselves as underemployed. (The equivalent figure for men was 67pc).

Women in the home seen as undervalued

Q. Which does society value more, women who work in the home, women who work outside the home, or both equally?



Comment: This question is identical to one asked by *The Irish Times* in 2013 and the responses are similar. We can see that almost half of people believe that women in the home and women in the workplace are equally valued, but far more people believe women in the workplace are more valued than women in the home.

Again, there is a marked gender difference. Women are more likely than men to say their

stay-at-home peers are undervalued compared with women in the workplace.

This result is not a surprise when we see how invisible, relatively speaking, women in the home are in public debate. This is increasingly seen in public policy as well, which is something of a mystery when public policy, broadly speaking, should respond to what people actually want, as discussed above.