

Flexible work requires flexible childcare – but is it working?

June 12 2015, by Lesley Whitteker



Research is needed to design the best childcare system possible.

Policymakers have little detailed understanding of the kind of flexible childcare arrangements families need, says University of Queensland researcher Dr Michelle Brady.

Dr Brady, from UQ's School of Social Science, is investigating lower-income families' experiences, against a backdrop of significant changes in federal childcare policy.

"Many Australian parents cannot access the flexible childcare they

need," she said.

"Parents who work weekends or rotating shifts face particular challenges, but we have little detailed understanding of what kind of arrangements they require.

"The issue of childcare flexibility is on the Australian Government's agenda, but much work needs to be done to design the best system possible.

"Childcare flexibility and affordability is particularly important for low-income families, including solo parents, dual-earner families and those who have one earner but would like both parents to be able to engage in paid work.

"Understanding families' experiences is vital in developing better policy."

Dr Brady and her team are researching childcare arrangements, how well they fit with parents' work hours, and what happens as children get older and need different care arrangements.

She said the government's recently announced Nanny Subsidy Pilot Scheme beginning in 2016 sought to address the Productivity Commission's recommendation that "government assistance to families should be extended to home-based care services (such as approved nannies)", in order to enhance the accessibility and flexibility of early childhood care.

This would be particularly helpful for parents working irregular or non-standard hours, including shift workers or those required to travel for work.

However, Dr Brady said it remained unclear whether a nanny subsidy would meet the needs of lower-income families.

"Other recent childcare policy changes may actually reduce flexibility," she said.

Family Day Care provided some parents with more [flexibility](#) than centre-based childcare, but many FDC schemes would lose operational funding from July and some were predicted to close.

Dr Brady is seeking to interview low-income couple families about their [childcare](#) arrangements.

Families with incomes lower than \$1200 a week after tax are invited to participate in the research.

Provided by University of Queensland

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