

How Much Did Households in the United States Pay for Child Care in 2012?

An Examination of Differences by Child Age

Key Findings

- In 2012, 50 percent of infants and toddlers and 63 percent of 3-to-5-year-olds were in regular nonparental care. An additional 10 percent of 3-to-5-year-olds were already in kindergarten.
- Within every income level, 3-to-5-year-olds were more likely than infants and toddlers to be in regular nonparental care.
- Among children in regular nonparental care, infants and toddlers were more likely than 3-to-5-year-olds to only use care provided by an individual, such as a family member, friend, or family child care home.
- Among children using regular nonparental care, 3-to-5-year-olds were more likely than infants and toddlers to be in center-based care only.
- Among children using regular nonparental care, about half of infants and toddlers and one-third of 3-to-5-year-olds had no out-of-pocket costs associated with their care. Free care was much more common among households with lower incomes than households with higher incomes. Still, 27 percent of infants and toddlers from higher-income households had no out-of-pocket costs associated with their care.
- Considering only children whose care had out-of-pocket costs, the median weekly cost of care was about \$100 for an infant or toddler, and about \$80 for a 3-to-5-year-old.

Data and Methods

This Snapshot is based on information collected by the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), a nationally representative study of American households and early care and education providers conducted in 2012. The information in this Snapshot is based on a report on nonparental care usage and costs from the NSECE household survey (NSECE Project Team, 2016) as well as supplemental analyses conducted by the NSECE Project Team for this Snapshot.

This Snapshot focuses on care for children under age 6.¹ Costs are calculated based on how much parents pay, in total, for a child's regular nonparental care arrangements.² Regular nonparental care arrangements are those that a child attended for at least 5 hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. In the case of children with multiple regular care arrangements, this includes the cost of all regular care arrangements combined. In cases where there is subsidized care, cost calculations include only the out-of-pocket costs to parents. Because these costs are calculated at the child level, households with more than one child may have higher total out-of-pocket expenses.

Though comparisons by child age are discussed throughout this Snapshot, tests to identify statistically significant differences were not conducted.

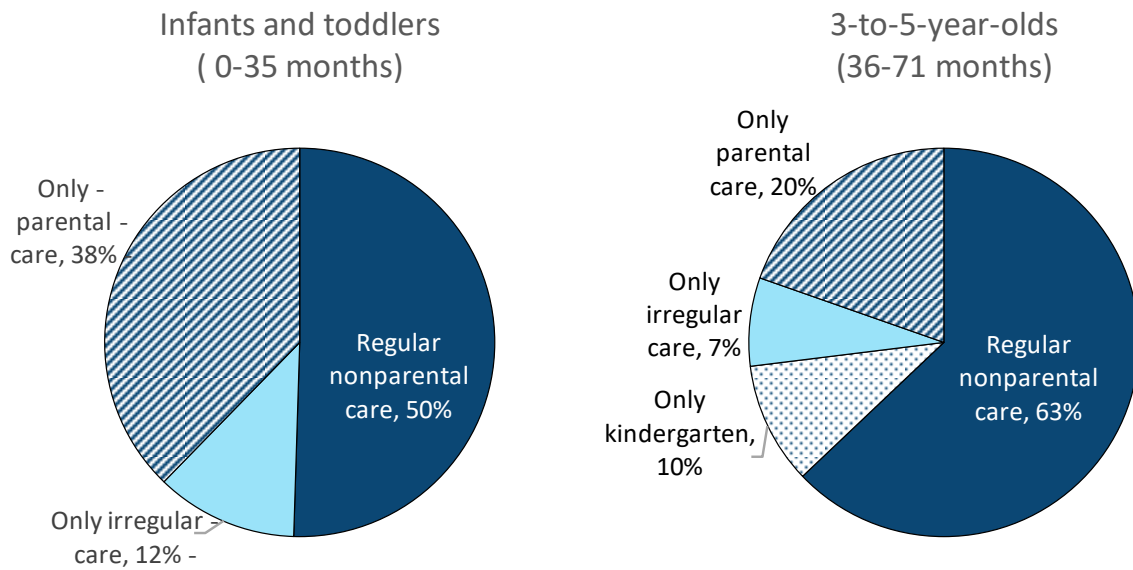
¹ Other Snapshots in this series focus on costs of care at the household level, summing across the costs for all children under age 13 (Forry, Madill, & Halle, 2018; Madill, Forry, & Halle, 2018).

² Each *child-provider pair* is a different arrangement. For example, a child may have one arrangement in a Head Start program and a second arrangement with a neighbor.

How many children under age 6 were in some form of regular nonparental care arrangement in 2012?

Figure 1 shows that fifty percent of infants and toddlers (ages 0-35 months) were in regular nonparental care in 2012. Regular nonparental care was more common for 3-to-5-year-olds: Sixty-three percent of 3-to-5-year-olds attended regular nonparental care, and another 10 percent attended kindergarten but had no regular nonparental care.

Figure 1. Share of Children in Various Care Arrangements, by Child Age.



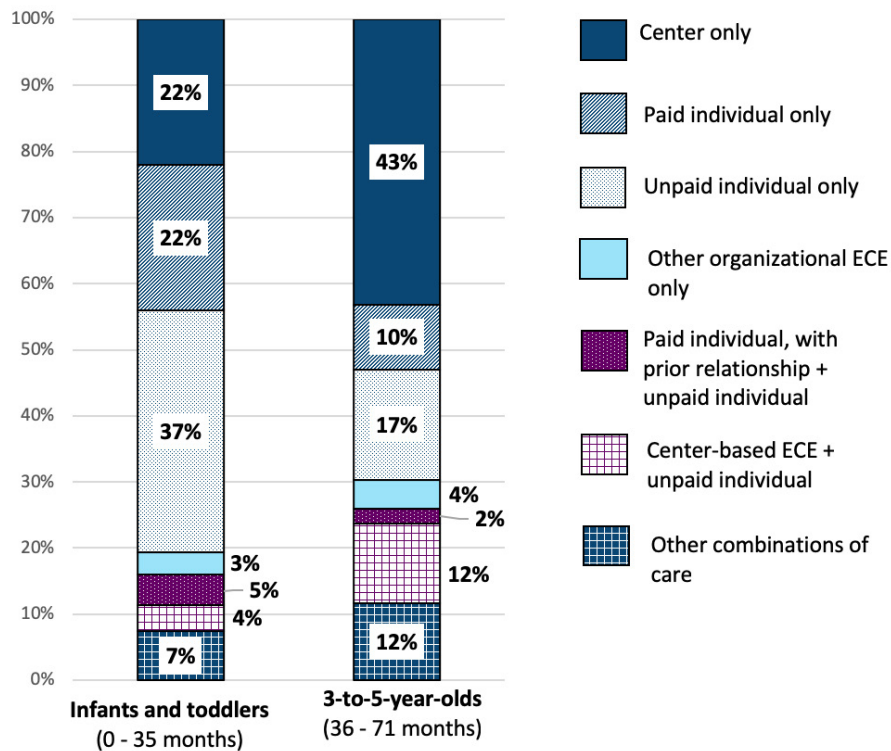
Source: NSECE Project Team, 2016. Table 13.1.1 (Common Combinations of Care, Child-Level Estimates, Age 0 through 35 months, by Household Poverty Ratio) and Table 13.2.1 (Common Combinations of Care, Child-Level Estimates, Age 36 through 71 months, by Household Poverty Ratio).

Note: Regular nonparental care arrangements are those that a child attended for at least 5 hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. Irregular care was used fewer than 5 hours per week. Due to the inclusion of 5-year-olds in kindergarten in these data, “only kindergarten” is included in this figure, and both “only irregular care” and “regular nonparental care” include care used by children in kindergarten, such as before-school and after-school care. Due to rounding, cumulative percentages may not equal 100 percent.

What types of regular nonparental care did children under age 6 use in 2012?

Compared to 3-to-5-year-olds, infants and toddlers in nonparental care were more likely to rely on care provided by a paid individual only, such as a family child care home. Infants and toddlers were also more likely than 3-to-5-year-olds to rely on care from an unpaid individual only, such as a family member or friend. In contrast, 3-to-5-year-olds were more likely than infants and toddlers to be in center-based early care and education (ECE) only. Three-to-five-year-olds were also more likely than infants and toddlers to be in combinations of care, such as center-based ECE and unpaid individual-based care. See Figure 2.

Figure 2. Share of Children in Each Type of Care, Among Children with at least One Regular Nonparental Care Arrangement, by Child Age



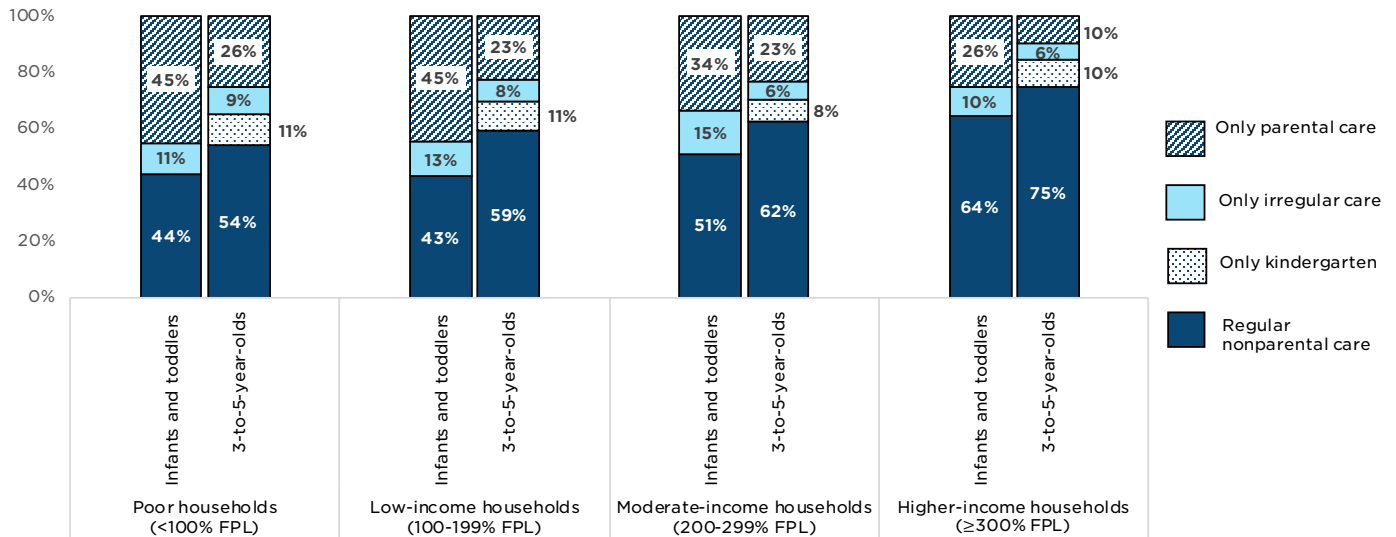
Source: NSECE Project Team, 2016. Table 13.1.1 (Common Combinations of Care, Child-Level Estimates, Age 0 through 35 months, by Household Poverty Ratio) and Table 13.2.1 (Common Combinations of Care, Child-Level Estimates, Age 36 through 71 months, by Household Poverty Ratio).

Note: Regular nonparental care arrangements are those that a child attended for at least 5 hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. The sample is limited to children who were enrolled in at least one regular nonparental care arrangement. The sample excludes children attending kindergarten who did not have a regular nonparental care arrangement. Due to the inclusion of 5-year-olds in kindergarten in these data, regular nonparental care includes care used by children who were in kindergarten, such as before-school and after-school care. For “paid individual” and “unpaid individual” arrangements, the child may or may not have had a prior personal relationship with the provider. For “paid individual, with prior relationship” arrangements, the child had a prior personal relationship with the provider. “Other organizational ECE only” refers to drop-in or single activity care or lessons, church child care during services, and recreational activities. Due to rounding, cumulative percentages may not equal 100 percent; however, the graphic is based on unrounded estimates.

Did age differences in the use of nonparental care vary by household income?

Regular nonparental care was much more common in higher-income households compared to lower-income households. Infants and toddlers in the two lowest income levels were more likely to be cared for only by parents, compared to their peers in the two highest income levels. Within every income level, however, 3-to-5-year-olds were more likely than infants and toddlers to use regular nonparental care. See Figure 3.³

Figure 3. Share of Children Using Various Care Arrangements, by Age and Household Income



Source: NSECE Project Team, 2016. Table 13.1.1 (Common Combinations of Care, Child-Level Estimates, Age 0 through 35 months, by Household Poverty Ratio) and Table 13.2.1 (Common Combinations of Care, Child-Level Estimates, Age 36 through 71 months, by Household Poverty Ratio).

Note: Infants and toddlers include children age 0–35 months. Three-to-five-year-olds include children age 36–71 months. Regular nonparental care arrangements are those that a child attended for at least 5 hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. Irregular care was used fewer than 5 hours per week. Due to the inclusion of 5-year-olds in kindergarten in these data, “only kindergarten” is included in this figure, and both “only irregular care” and “regular nonparental care” include care used by children in kindergarten, such as before-school and after-school care. Due to rounding, cumulative percentages may not equal 100 percent; however, the graphic is based on unrounded estimates. FPL = federal poverty level.

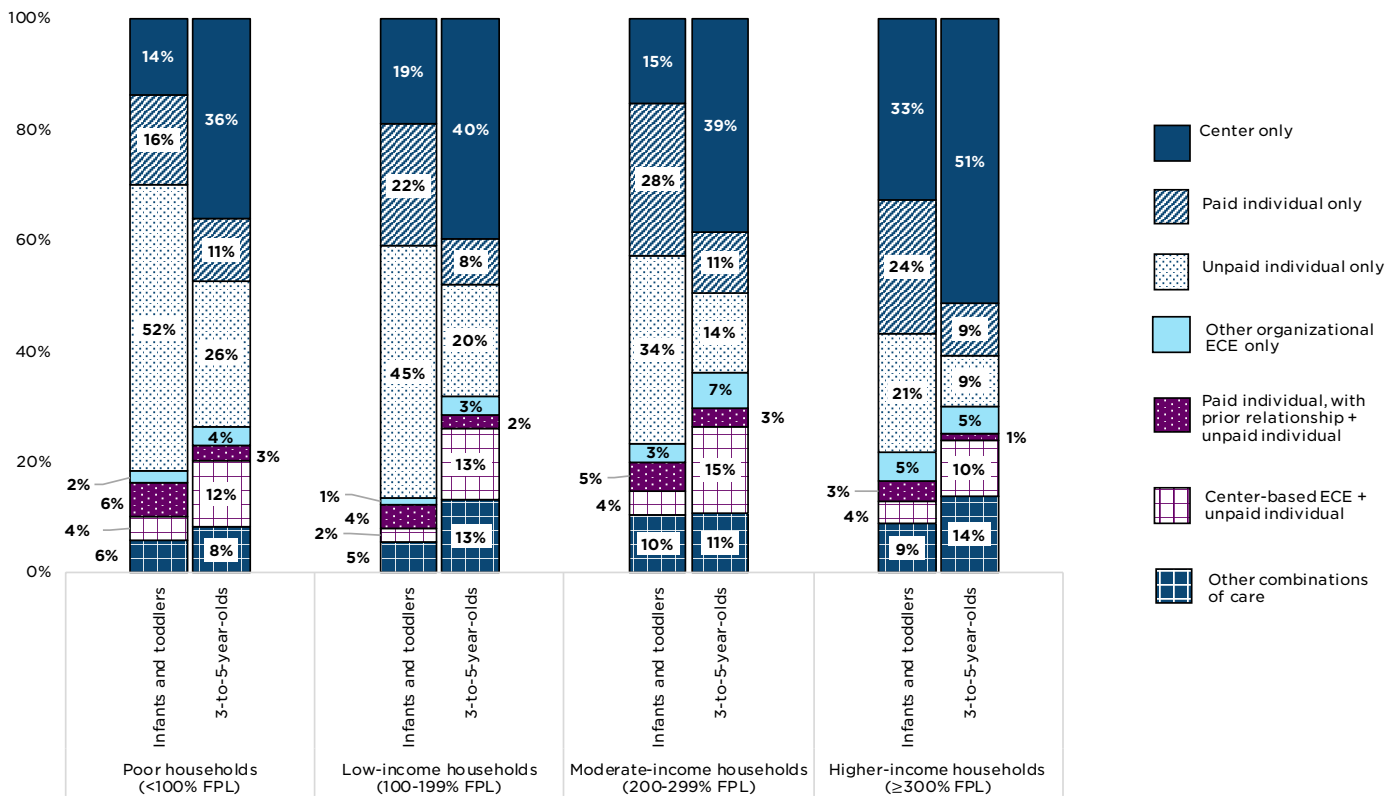
³ These data are also presented in a complementary resource in this series (Forry, Madill, & Halle, 2018).

Did the types of care used for different age children vary by household income?

Among children under age 6 using some form of regular nonparental care, 3-to-5-year-olds, as well as all children in higher-income households, were most likely to use center-based care as their only care type. See Figure 4.⁴

Across all income levels, using only individual-based care for infants and toddlers was quite common. Whether these arrangements were paid or unpaid varied by household income. Among poor and low-income households with infants and toddlers in regular nonparental care, most individual-based arrangements were unpaid. Among higher-income households with infants and toddlers in nonparental care, however, those relying on a single care type used paid and unpaid individual-based arrangements at about equal rates.

Figure 4. Share of Children Using Each Type of Regular Nonparental Care, by Child Age and Household Income



Source: NSECE Project Team, 2016. Table 13.1.1 (Common Combinations of Care, Child-Level Estimates, Age 0 through 35 months, by Household Poverty Ratio) and Table 13.2.1 (Common Combinations of Care, Child-Level Estimates, Age 36 through 71 months, by Household Poverty Ratio).

Note. Infants and toddlers include children age 0-35 months. Three-to-five-year-olds include children age 36-71 months. Regular nonparental care arrangements are those that a child attended for at least 5 hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. The sample is limited to children who were enrolled in at least one regular nonparental care arrangement. The sample excludes children attending kindergarten who did not have a regular nonparental care arrangement. Due to the inclusion of 5-year-olds in kindergarten in these data, regular nonparental care includes before-school and after-school care that was used at least 5 hours per week. For “paid individual” and “unpaid individual” arrangements, the child may or may not have had a prior personal relationship with the provider. For “paid individual, with prior relationship” arrangements, the child had a prior personal relationship with the provider. “Other organizational ECE only” refers to drop-in or single activity care or lessons, church child care during services, and recreational activities. Due to rounding, cumulative percentages may not equal 100 percent; however, the graphic is based on unrounded estimates. FPL = federal poverty level.

⁴ These data are also presented in a complementary resource in this series (Forry, Madill, & Halle, 2018).

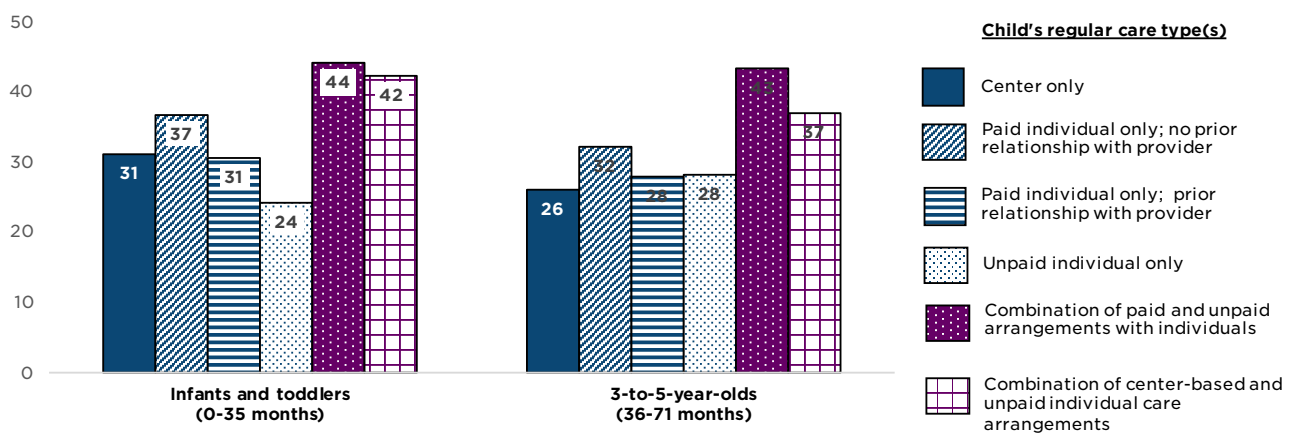
How much time did children spend in care?

Figure 5 shows that, among children who used a single type of paid care, such as center-based ECE, infants and toddlers spent more time in care, on average, than did 3-to-5-year-olds. For example, infants and toddlers using only center-based ECE spent about 31 hours per week in care. In contrast, 3-to-5-year-olds using only center-based ECE spent about 26 hours per week in care.

Parents of infants and toddlers appeared to use unpaid individual-based care when they needed care for a relatively short period of time. The average amount of time in unpaid individual-based care was 24 hours for infants and toddlers, compared to 31 hours in center-based care.

For both infants/toddlers and 3-to-5-year-olds, children in combinations of care spent more time in care overall, compared to children using just one type of care.

Figure 5. Average Weekly Hours Spent in Regular Nonparental Care, by Child's Age and Regular Care Type(s)



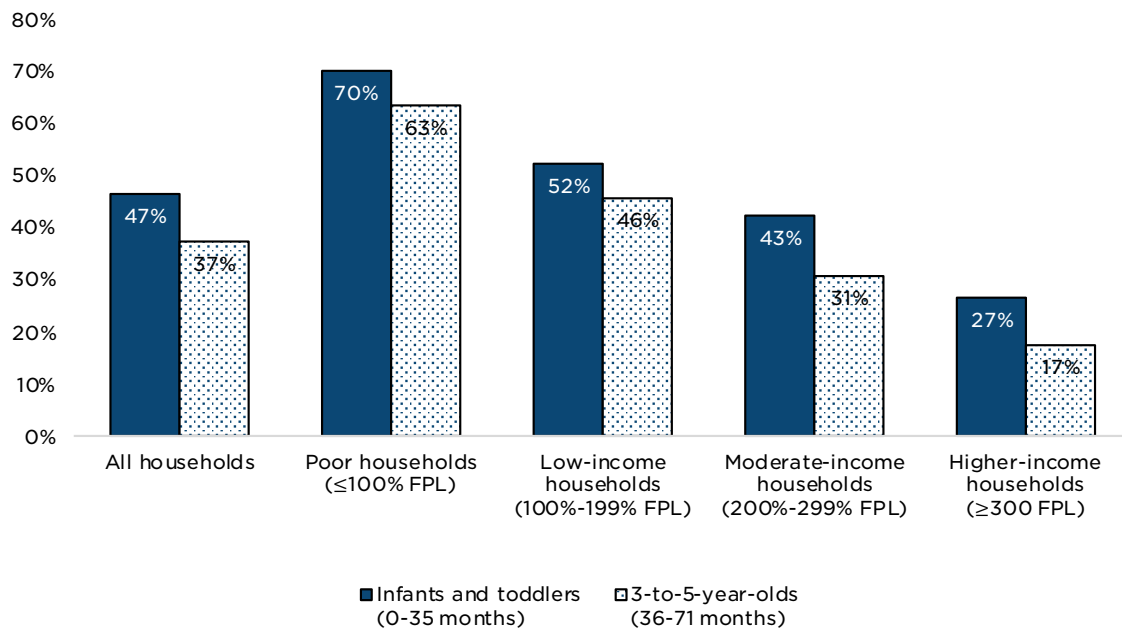
Source: NSECE Project Team, 2016. Table 16.1 (Hours in Type of Care in Reference Week, by Most Common Combinations of Care Used, Child-level Estimates, Age 0 through 35 Months) and Table 16.2 (Hours in Type of Care in Reference Week, by Most Common Combinations of Care Used, Child-level Estimates, Age 35 through 71 Months).

Note: Regular nonparental care arrangements are those that a child attended for at least 5 hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. Hours in irregular care arrangements (i.e., care used fewer than 5 hours per week) are not included in the total number of hours. Due to the inclusion of 5-year-olds in kindergarten in these data, regular nonparental care includes before-school and after-school care that was used by kindergartners at least 5 hours per week. Hours in kindergarten are not included in the total number of hours. Values are rounded.

Did the cost of children’s care vary by age?

As shown in Figure 6, among children in regular nonparental care, about half of parents of infants and toddlers and one-third of 3-to-5-year-olds had no out-of-pocket costs associated with their care. Free care was much more common among households with lower incomes than households with higher incomes. Still, 27 percent of infants and toddlers from higher-income households had no out-of-pocket costs associated with their care. This is expected, as Figure 4 showed that 21 percent of infants and toddlers in higher-income households rely on unpaid care from an individual, such as a grandmother.

Figure 6. Free Care: Percentage of Children for whom Parents had Zero Out-of-pocket Costs, among Children with Regular Nonparental care, by Child Age and Household Income

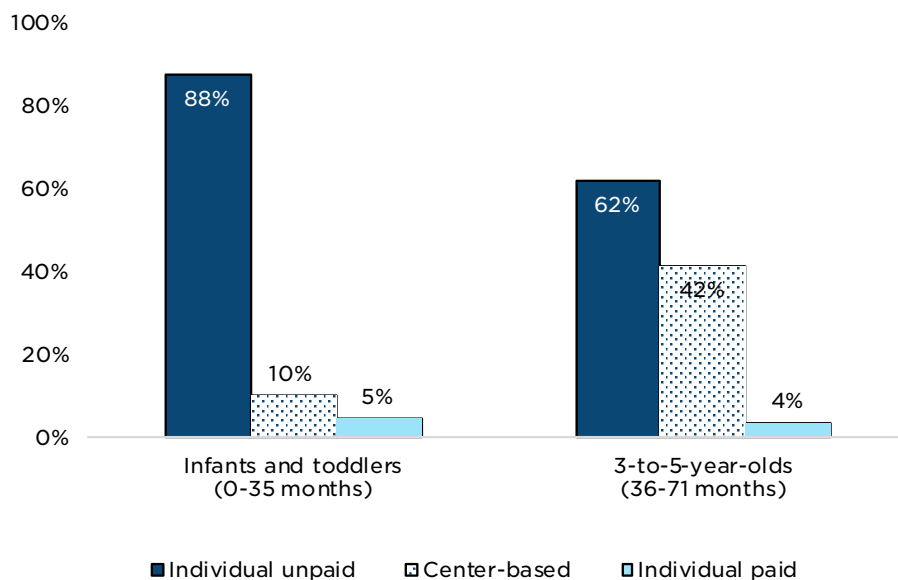


Source: NSECE Project Team, 2016. Table 28 (Child-Level Estimates of Weekly Cost) and Tables 29.1-29.4 (Child-Level Estimates of Weekly Cost, by Household Poverty Ratio).

Note: The sample is limited to children who were enrolled in at least one regular nonparental care arrangement. Regular nonparental care arrangements are those that a child attended for at least 5 hours per week, not including kindergarten. The sample excludes children attending kindergarten who did not have a regular nonparental care arrangement. Due to the inclusion of 5-year-olds in kindergarten in these data, regular nonparental care includes care used by children who were in kindergarten, such as before-school and after-school care. “Free care” includes unpaid individual-based care (e.g., unpaid grandparents who care for children), center-based programs with no fee (e.g., Head Start and public pre-K), and any arrangements that are fully subsidized through public or private programs (e.g., fully-subsidized care in a family child care home or ECE center). Values are rounded. FPL = federal poverty level.

Figure 7 shows that, among children with no out-of-pocket expenses for their regular care, the most common care type was unpaid individual-based care (used for 88 percent of infants/toddlers and 62 percent of 3-to-5-year-olds). Center-based arrangements were less common. Among children with no out-of-pocket expenses for their regular care arrangements, 3-to-5-year-olds were much more likely than infants and toddlers to be in center-based care (42 percent of 3-to-5-year-olds compared to 10 percent of infants and toddlers). A small percentage of children with no out-of-pocket costs received care from an individual who was paid, such as a family child care home, because someone other than the parent paid these costs (e.g., a child care subsidy).

Figure 7. Percentage of Children in Each Care Type, among Children in Regular Care with no Out-of-pocket Costs, by Child Age

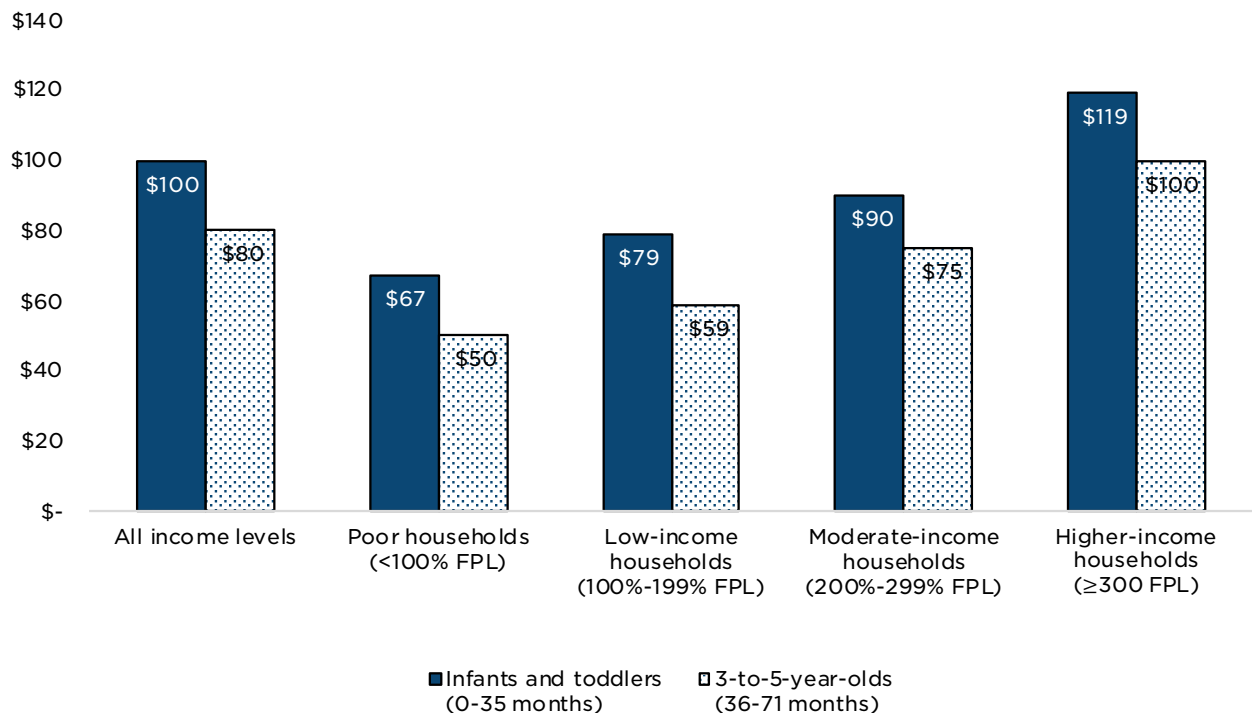


Source: Original analyses of the NSECE Household Survey conducted by the authors of the NSECE Household Survey data.
 Note: Regular nonparental care arrangements are those that a child attended for at least 5 hours per week, not including kindergarten. The sample was restricted to children with at least one regular nonparental care arrangement whose parents had no out-of-pocket costs for the child's care. Due to the inclusion of 5-year-olds in kindergarten in these data, regular nonparental care includes care used by children who were in kindergarten, such as before-school and after-school care. "Individual paid" and "center-based" arrangements can be free to parents if they are fully subsidized; for example, the federal child care subsidy program or a private child care subsidy from an employer may cover all costs. "Center-based" arrangements are also free to parents when they are provided through a program that does not charge parents, such as Early Head Start, Head Start, public pre-K, or a school-sponsored program. Values are rounded. Because one child could be using more than one care type, percentages are not intended to add up to 100 percent.

Considering only children whose care had out-of-pocket costs, parents spent more money on care for infants and toddlers than care for 3-to-5-year-olds. As shown in Figure 8, parents spent about \$100 per week on care for an infant/toddler and about \$80 per week for a 3-to-5-year-old.

As household income increased, so too did the amount that parents spent on care for infants and toddlers, as well as for 3-to-5-year-olds.

Figure 8. Median Weekly Cost per Child for Regular Nonparental Care, by Child Age and Household Income



Source: NSECE Project Team, 2016. Table 28 (Child-Level Estimates of Weekly Cost) and Tables 29.1-29.4 (Child-Level Estimates of Weekly Cost, by Household Poverty Ratio).

Note: Regular nonparental care arrangements are those that a child attended for at least 5 hours per week, not including K-8 schooling. The sample was restricted to children with at least one regular nonparental care arrangement and any out-of-pocket costs for regular nonparental care. Costs for irregular care (i.e., care used fewer than 5 hours per week) are not included in the weekly cost of care. Due to the inclusion of 5-year-olds in kindergarten in these data, regular nonparental care includes care used by children who were in kindergarten, such as before-school and after-school care. Costs for K-8 schooling are not included in the weekly cost of care. Values are rounded. FPL = federal poverty level.

Reference

NSECE [National Survey of Early Care and Education] Project Team. (2016). *Early Care and Education Usage and Households' Out-of-Pocket Costs: Tabulations from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE)*. OPRE Report #2016-09. Washington DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/resource/early-care-education-usage-households-out-of-pocket-costs-tabulations-nsece>

Other Snapshots in this Series

Forry, N., Madill, R., & Halle, T. (2018). *Snapshots from the NSECE: How Much did Households in the United States Pay for Child Care in 2012? An Examination of Differences by Household Income*. OPRE Report #2018-112. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Madill, R., Forry, N., & Halle, T. (2018). *Snapshots from the NSECE: How Much Did Households in the United States Pay for Child Care in 2012? An Examination of Differences by Community Urbanicity*. OPRE Report #2018-111. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Suggested Citation

Forry, N., Madill, R., Shuey, E., Halle, T., Ugarte, G., & Borton, J. (2018). *Snapshots from the NSECE: How Much Did Households in the United States Pay for Child Care in 2012? An Examination of Differences by Child Age*. OPRE Report #2018-110. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.