

Canadian daycare desires, Part II

Attitudes toward daycare in Québec

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THE INSTITUTE of Marriage and Family Canada recently released a poll about parental attitudes toward daycare. It revealed that 76% of Canadians believe the best place for children under six is at home with a parent. This belief is remarkably consistent across age, income, gender and working arrangements.

Regionally, however, there is some variation. Some of the most significant differences are in Québec. There, only 70% hold that the best place for children under six is at home with a parent. While this is still seven in ten Canadians, it is the lowest of all the regions polled.

Furthermore, the differences widen with other questions. When a parent can't stay home, only 34% of Québécois prefer a relative as caregiver. This is low

compared to an average of 55% across the rest of the country.

The most surprising difference comes when asking about the best way to fund child care. Forty-five percent of Québécois prefer cash payments to parents compared to an average of 25% elsewhere in Canada. This desire stands in contrast to the system they have, which funds daycare centres, not parents.

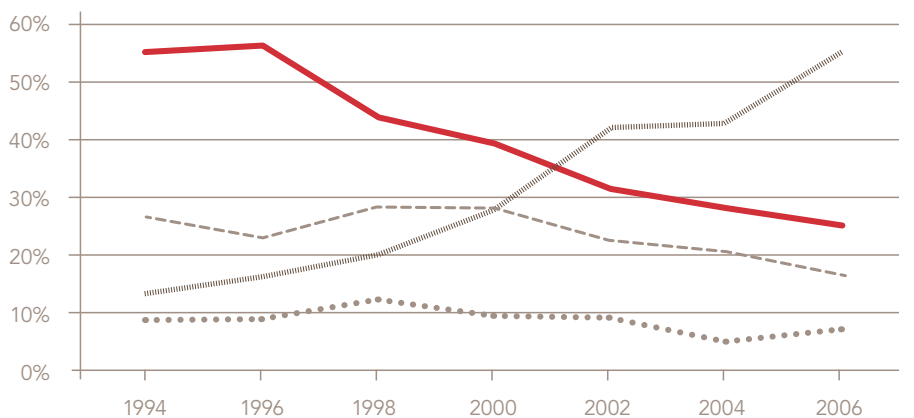
Québec—distinct in many ways—is clearly also distinct with regards to childcare preferences. It could be that the creation of a provincially-funded daycare system has played a role in changing this result. Further research is required to probe to what extent Québécois actually want the system they have, where funding goes to daycares, not parents.

Why so different?

THERE COULD BE many reasons for this difference in attitudes. One might be Québec's heavy subsidizing of institutional daycare. Created in 1997, initially the daily parental cost of the provincial daycare was \$5 per child, which later rose to \$7 per child. This policy of heavily subsidizing institutional daycare is partly responsible for transforming parental behaviour.

The chart to the right shows how childcare choices changed in the nine years following the introduction of subsidized daycare. The percentage of children in centre-based care grew from fewer than 20% to almost 55%.¹

Québec: Primary care arrangement
 CHILDREN AGED 1-4 YEARS



Source: Lefebvre, P., Merrigan, P. and Roy-Desrosiers, F. (2011, January). Québec's childcare universal low fees policy 10 years after: Effects, costs and benefits.

1. Lefebvre, P., Merrigan, P. and Roy-Desrosiers, F. (2011, January). Québec's childcare universal low fees policy 10 years after: Effects, costs and benefits, p. 40. Retrieved from http://cirano.qc.ca/icirano/public/pdf/20101202_P-Lefebvre_2.pdf

It is likely that Québécois have “chosen” the government-subsidized child care in some part because it is now the only affordable option. Prior to 1997, Québec had a range of family benefits, which were removed in order to pay for the provincial daycare plan.²

State-subsidized daycare programs are expensive because child care is expensive. The creation of such programs calls for more government revenue. In Québec, these funds have been attained through high levels of taxation and debt.

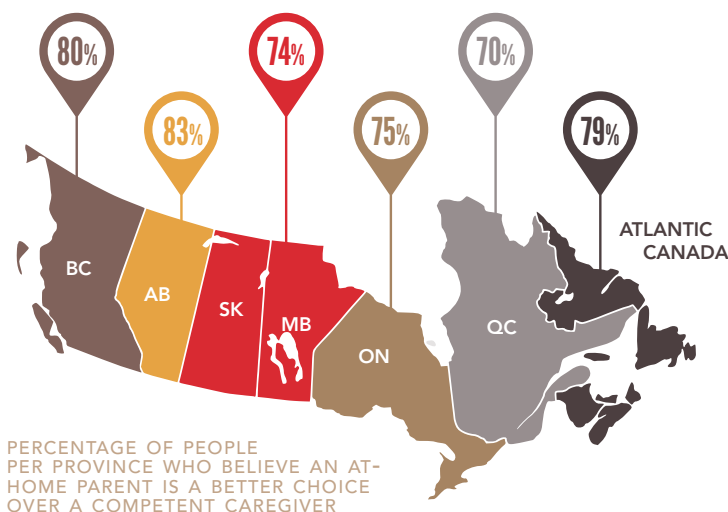
The HST in Québec is 15%, compared to 13% in Ontario and 0% in Alberta.³ Income tax rates are also noticeably higher in Québec than either Ontario or Alberta.⁴ The Conference Board of Canada found that Québec’s debt to GDP ratio was 50% in 2012, highest of all provinces.⁵

Ironically, the low cost of daycare to parents in Québec may create barriers to making other family choices. Government-funded daycare systems act as a monopoly, eradicating other childcare options.

Parents, relatives or competent caregivers?

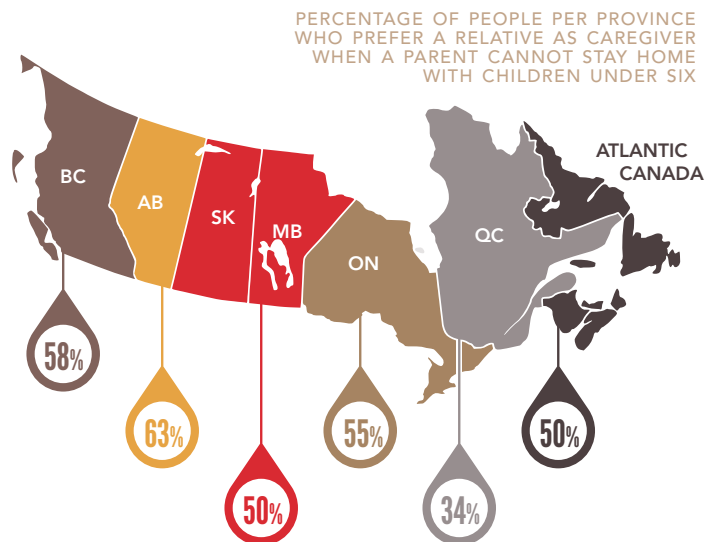
HOW EXACTLY ARE Québécois different from the rest of Canada with respect to their childcare opinions? A closer look at the poll results tells us.

When asked which arrangement is best for children in general – a parent or a competent caregiver – 70% of Québécois say a parent. In the rest of Canada, over 79% say a parent.



If a parent can’t stay home in Québec, only 34% of respondents prefer a relative as caregiver. An average of 55% in the rest of the country holds the same opinion.

Québécois in general support out-of-home child care more than any other part of Canada.



2. Malvern, P., Mrozek, A. and Benesch, C. (2011, November). A Quebec family portrait. Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, p. 8. Retrieved from <http://www.imfcanada.org/issues/quebec-family-portrait>

3. Révénue Québec. (2013). Consumption taxes. Retrieved from http://www.revenuquebec.ca/en/entreprise/taxes/tvq_tps/

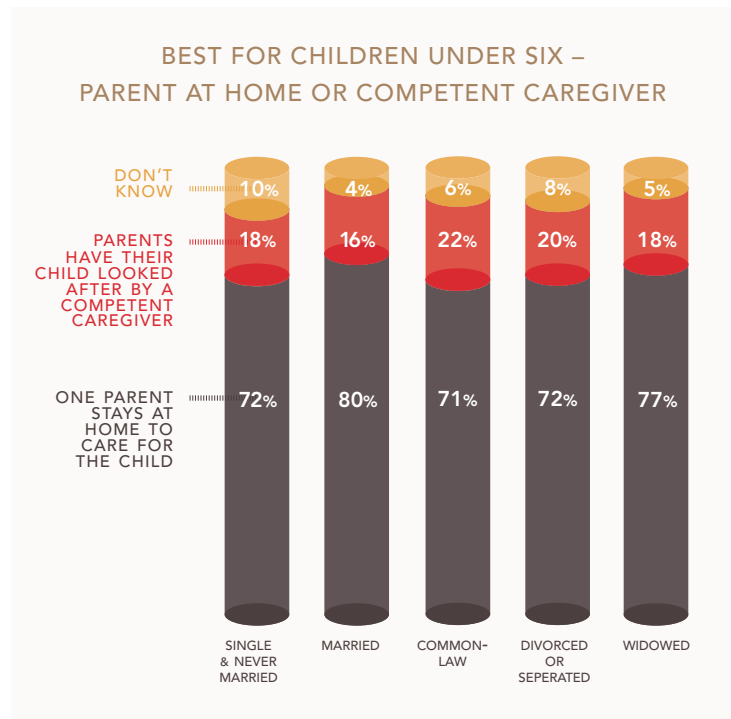
4. TaxTips.ca. (2012). Personal income tax rates for Canada and Provinces/Territories for 2012 and 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.taxtips.ca/marginaltaxrates.htm>

5. Hodgson, G. (2012, September 6). Quebec’s economic future: A hard road ahead. Retrieved from http://www.conferenceboard.ca/economics/hot_eco_topics/default/12-09-06/quebec_s_economic_future_a_hard_road_ahead.aspx

Marital status as a factor in the poll results

MARITAL STATUS MAY mean different attitudes toward child care.

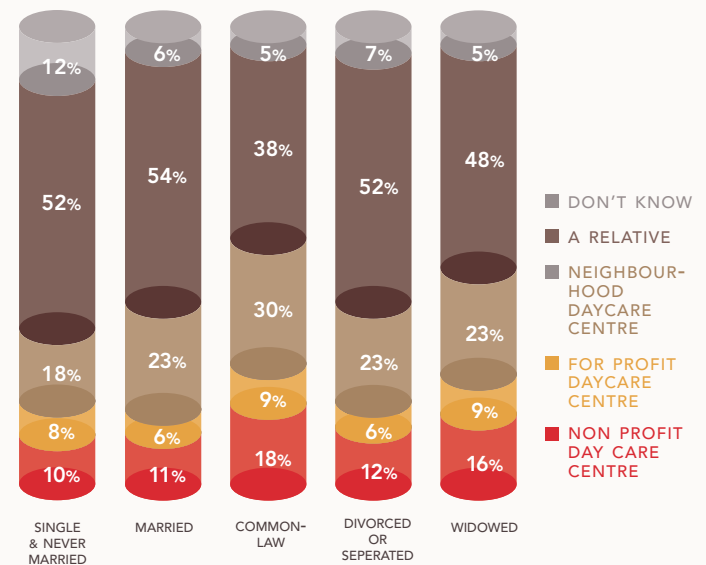
Across Canada, common-law couples view child care differently than married couples.



On the question of what's best for children under six, our poll found that support for parental care is 9% lower among Canadians living common-law as contrasted with married respondents. Common-law support is also 6% lower than widowed respondents, and virtually on par with support among divorced/separated and single/never married respondents.

Across Canada, common-law attitudes also differ when considering what to do if a parent can't stay home to look after their child. Of common-law respondents, only 38% prefer a relative. On average, 51% of all other respondents

BEST OPTIONS FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN UNDER SIX WHEN A PARENT CANNOT BE HOME



(single/never married, married, divorced/separated, and widowed) support a relative as caregiver in this situation.

However, common-law respondents in Québec differ from common-law respondents in the rest of Canada.

When a parent can't stay home to look after their child, just 27% of common-law respondents in Québec support the relative as caregiver option. Over 46% of common-law respondents outside Québec choose the same.

The sample size of Québec common-law respondents in this poll is small and should be viewed cautiously.

Still, these findings are significant when you consider that Québec has by far the greatest number of cohabiting couples in the country. There, 37% of couples are common law, compared to an average of about 20% in the rest of Canada.⁶

6. Statistics Canada. (2011). Legal marital status, common-law status, age groups and sex for the population 15 years and over of Canada, provinces, territories, census divisions, census subdivisions and dissemination areas, 2011 Census. Catalogue no. 98-312-XCB2011039. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/dp-pd/tbt-tt/Rp-eng.cfm?TABID=1&LANG=E&APATH=3&DETAIL=0&DIM=0&FL=A&FREE=0&GC=0&GK=0&GRP=1&PID=102090&PRID=0&PTYPE=101955&S=0&SHOWALL=0&SUB=0&Temporal=2011&THEME=89&VID=0&VNAMEE=&VNAMEF=> with author's calculations

Why might marital status matter?

WE KNOW THAT common-law couples across Canada support non-parental care more than all other respondents.

We can only muse about why common-law couples in Canada and particularly those in Québec have different attitudes.

It may have to do with the higher break up rates of cohabiting relationships.

A 2004 study by Céline Le Bourdais of the University of Québec and Évelyne LaPierre-Adamyck of the University of Montréal found that the risk of separation for Québec couples was two times greater for common-law couples

than for those who had married without living common-law.⁷

In the rest of Canada, the likelihood of separation was almost five times greater for the former than for the latter.⁸ It may be that if a person feels their relationship has a good chance of breaking up, they need to be more concerned about working to protect their own financial wellbeing.

Other studies point to how relationships can influence work habits. A 2002 study by Lorien C. Abroms, assistant professor of Prevention and Community

Health at the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services, examined mothers' motivations for working. She found that "the other adult's resources appear to reduce a mother's financial motivations for employment only for women who live with a spouse."⁹ In the study, the term "spouse" is used for those who are married, not those living common-law.

We do know that marital status influences childcare choices from the poll. However, we can only speculate as to why.

Conclusion

OUR POLL FOUND that Québécois stand apart from the rest of Canada in their views on child care. Québécois are less likely than other Canadians to say the best place for a child under six is at home with a parent. When a parent cannot be at home, Québécois are less likely than other Canadians to choose a relative as caregiver.

Marital status also influences views on child care, and this is true across Canada. Common-law respondents are the least likely to say that children are best cared for by a parent at home. When a parent is not available, common-law respondents are by far the least inclined to choose a relative as caregiver.

Common-law respondents in Québec, however, are even less likely to choose a relative as caregiver than common-law couples elsewhere in Canada.

From this we can conclude that marital status affects childcare beliefs, but residency in Québec is also a strong factor.

The presence of the provincially funded daycare system appears to have changed Québec residents' attitudes toward child care. This is something other provinces should take into consideration as they debate possible ways to support child care.

Ironically, the poll also reveals that Québécois, more than any other province, would prefer that governments fund child care by providing parents with cash payments. This is the opposite of the system they have, which favours funding daycares instead of parents. Therefore, how Québécois truly feel about their current subsidized system is a topic for further research. 🍁

E-pendix: Questions and margins of error can be found online at imfcanada.org/daycaredesires

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7. Le Bourdais, C. and Lapierre-Adamcyk, É. (2004). Changes in conjugal life in Canada: Is cohabitation progressively replacing marriage? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 66, pp. 937.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Abroms, L. C., Goldscheider, F. K. (2002). More work for mother: How spouses, cohabiting partners and relatives affect the hours mothers work. *Journal of Family and Economic Issues*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Summer 2002, p. 162.