



Use of childcare among foster and kinship care children in the first two years of life

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Background

- 46% of children admitted to OOHC in Australia in 2015-16 were 0-4 years of age
- Large discrepancies in learning outcomes between children in care and children not in care
- Strong evidence that good quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) supports healthy development, helps prepare children for school and promotes social inclusion
- Quality effects are stronger for children facing disadvantage and special education needs
- Some evidence that preschool is underutilised by OOHC children

Reasons to be cautious about foster and kinship care children using childcare within the first 1-2 years of life

- Evidence of cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of ECEC provision strongest from age two and upward
- Long hours in low quality ECEC provision can be detrimental to development
- Early adversity (relationship trauma/insecure attachment to parents) suggests that delayed entry into ECEC may be appropriate
- No evidence on what quality provision looks like for children in care

Questions for analysis

- How does the AMOUNT and QUALITY of formal childcare used by foster and kinship care children in the first two years of life compare to that of their peers?
- What FACTORS PREDICT THE AMOUNT of formal childcare used by foster and kinship care children in the first two years of life?

The Early Childhood in Foster and Kinship Care study

- Results are from the Early Childhood in Foster and Kinship Care study (ECIFKC)
- Online survey of foster and kinship carers
- Carers with a foster and kinship care child who has yet to start school (all Australian state and territories) targeted for involvement
- Offline strategies for participant recruitment
- Data collected in 2015-16 ($N=149$)



Sample for current analysis (N=39)

Child characteristics

Boy	53.8%
Has a disability or medical condition	23.1%
Indigenous	25.6%
Lives in major city	59.0%

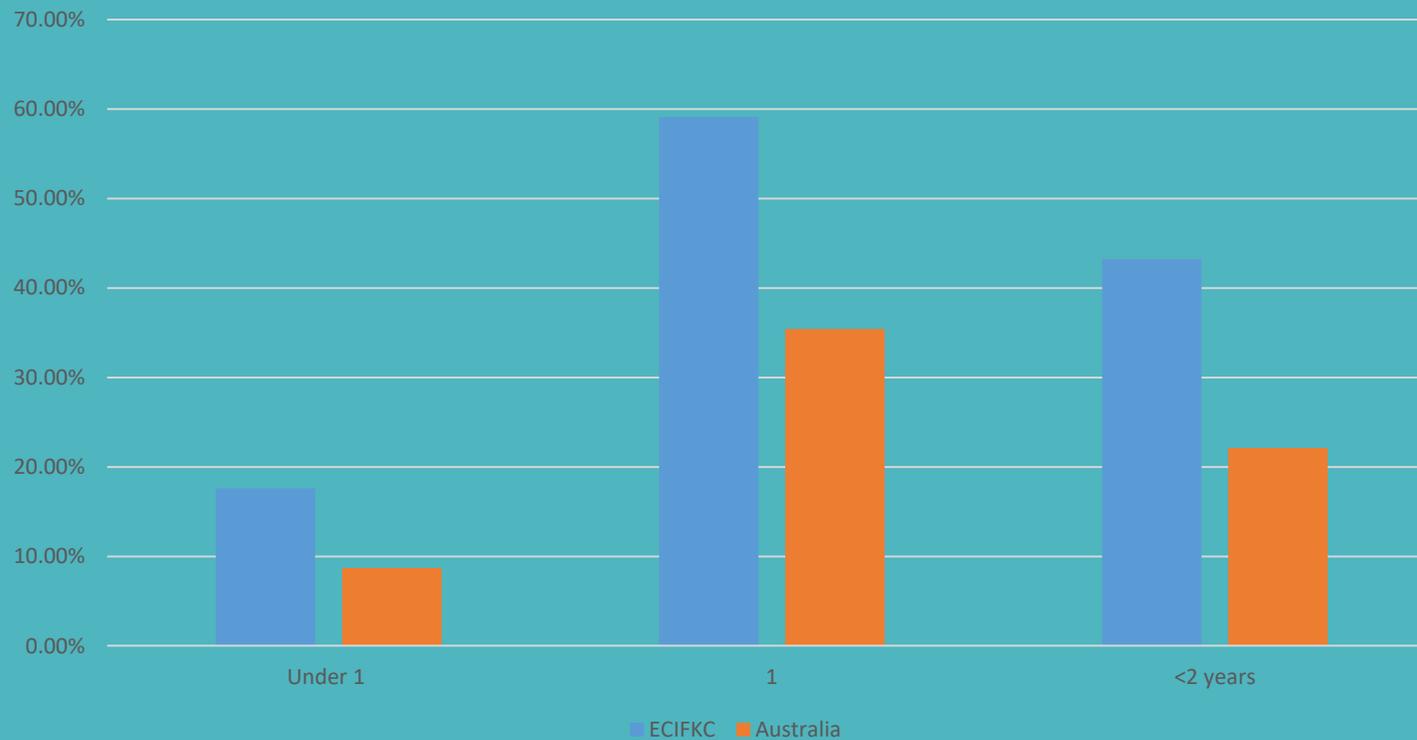
Carer characteristics

Age	$M=44.7(SD=9.80)$
Indigenous	7.9%
Partnered	82.1%
Completed Yr 12 or equivalent	70.6%
Rating of financial status “reasonably comfortable” or better	85.7%

Placement characteristics

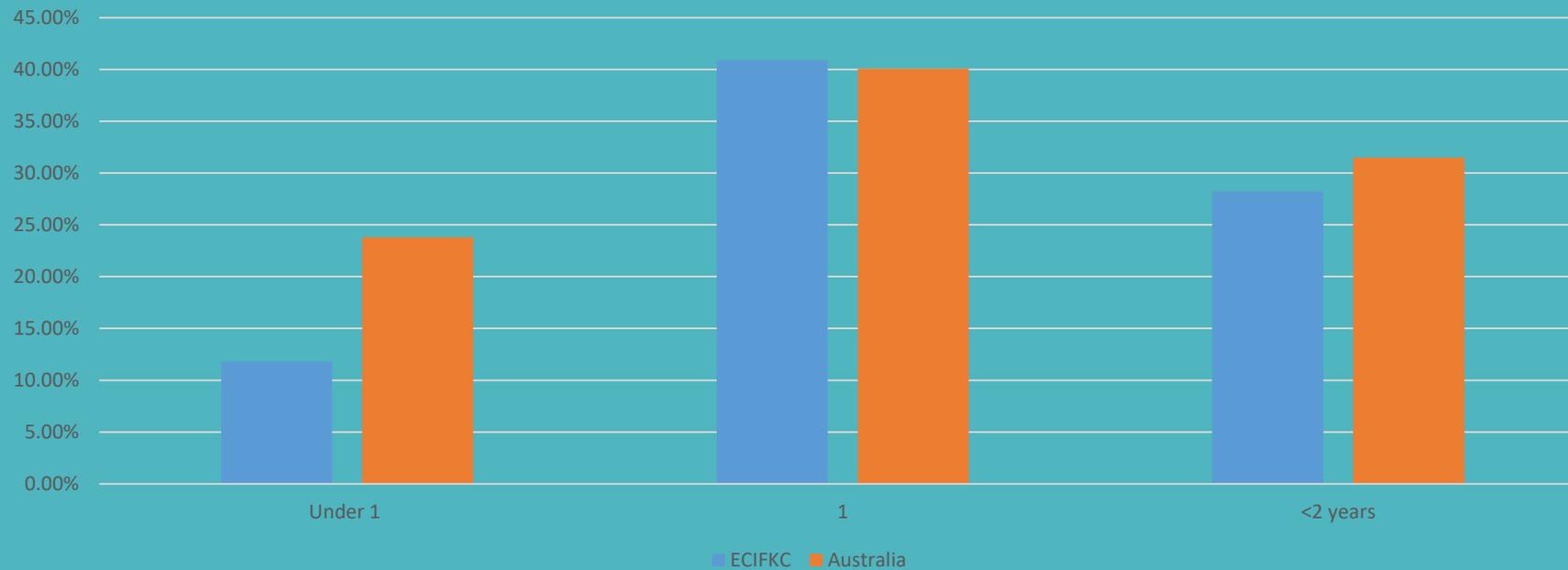
Child living in placement since birth	35.9%
Months living with carer	$M=9.4(SD=6.3)$
Expected length of time with carer	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <6 months = 10.5%• 6mos – 2 years = 10.5%• Permanently = 34.2%• Not sure = 44.7%

Proportion of ECIFKC and Australian* children using FORMAL childcare in the first two years of life



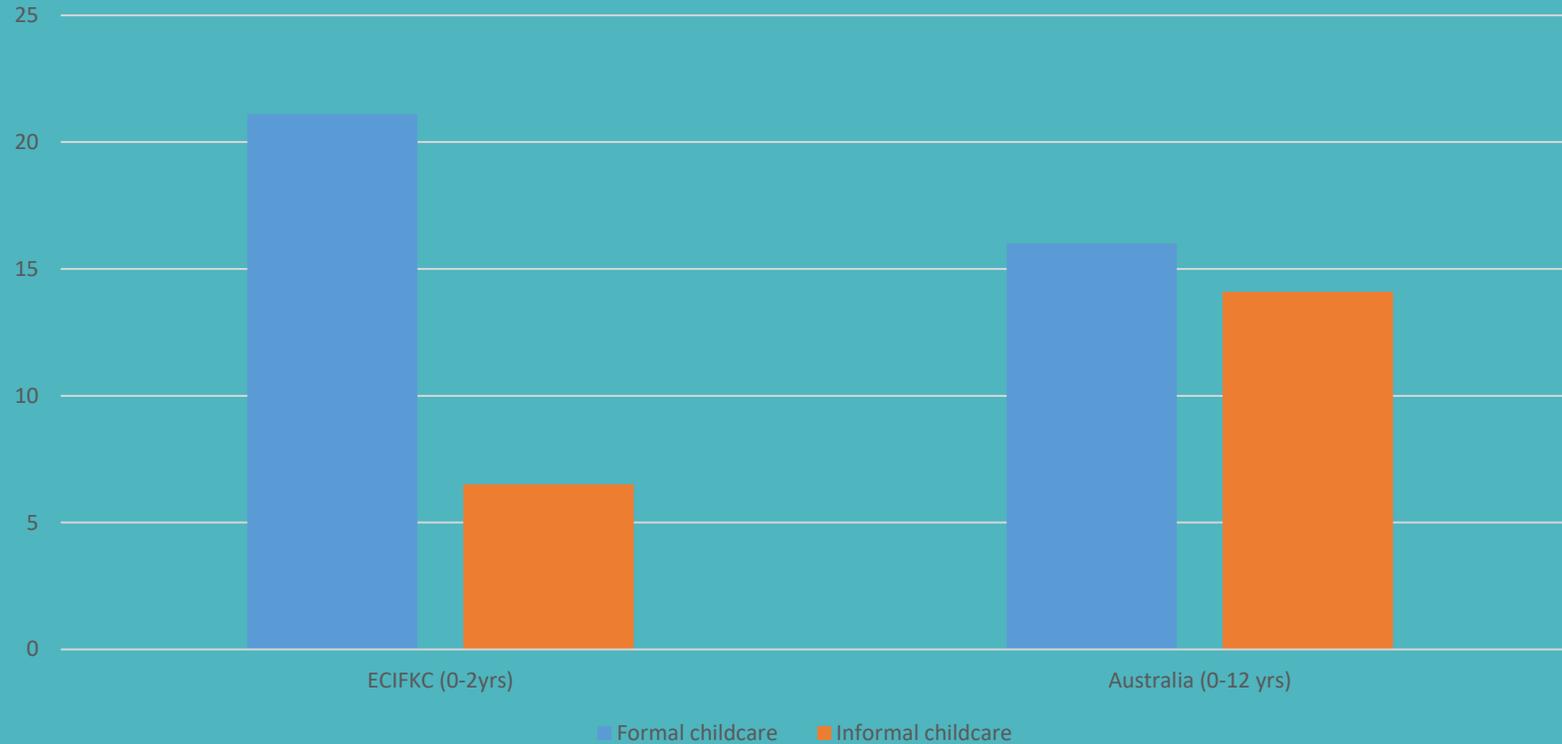
*Childcare data for Australia from the Childhood Education and Care Survey (CEaCS).

Proportion of ECIFKC and Australian* children using INFORMAL childcare in the first two years of life



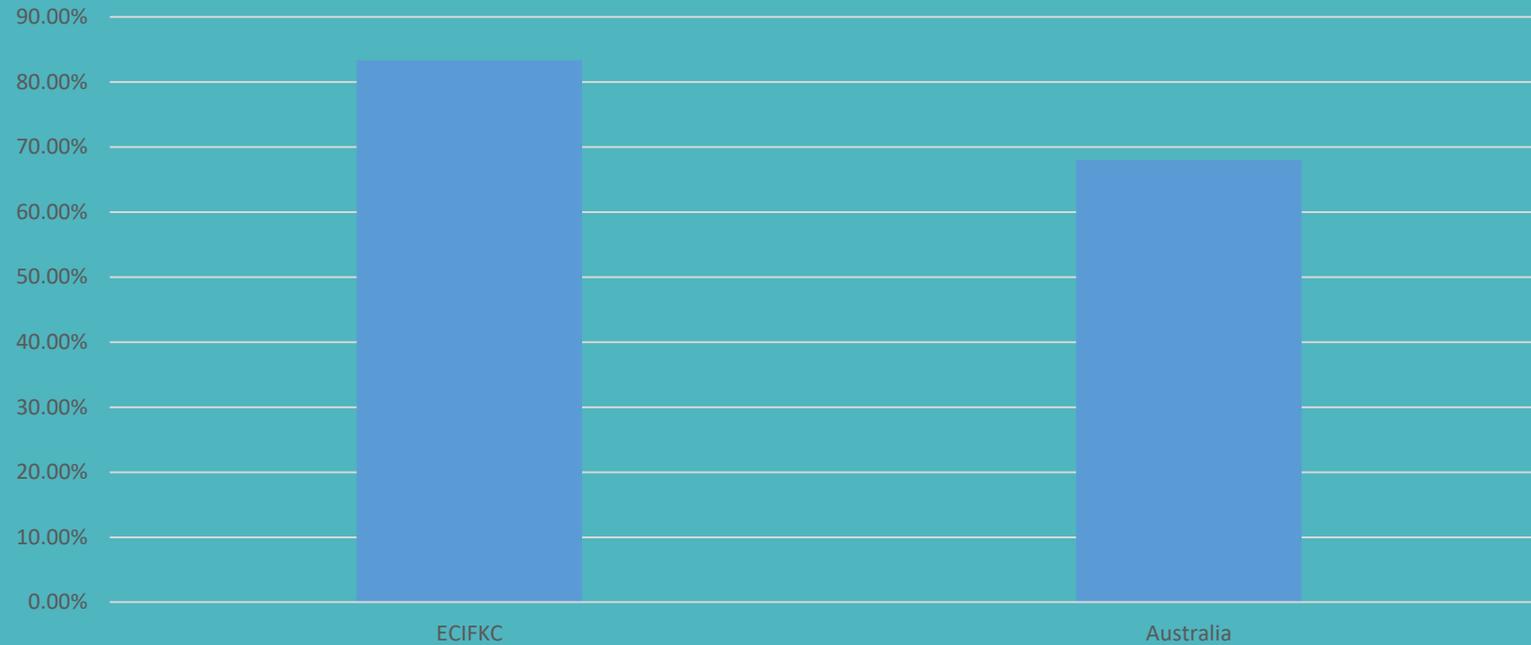
*Childcare data for Australia from the Childhood Education and Care Survey (CEaCS).

Average weekly hours in formal and informal childcare



*Childcare data for Australia from the Childhood Education and Care Survey (CEaCS).

MAIN childcare meets or exceeds national quality standards*



*Childcare quality ratings obtained from Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)

Average weekly hours of childcare used according to condition in carers, children and placement

	<i>N</i>	Mean hours of childcare	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>sig</i>
Partnered	32	6.02	2.81	37	.008
Single	7	20.86			
MAIN carer currently working	14	12.93	1.63	32	.114
MAIN carer not currently working	20	5.25			
Lives in major city	23	9.50	.44	37	.662
Does not live in major city	16	7.50			
Not a sibling placement	31	4.95	-3.90	37	.000
Sibling placement	8	23.13			
Foster carer	32	7.25	-1.52	36	.139
Kin carer	6	16.50			
Time with carer <3 months	5	1.50	-1.30	24	.205
Time with carer 3+ months	21	9.20			
Child ATSI	10	10.45	.47	37	.64
Child not ATSI	29	8.07			
Child <1	17	1.38	-3.25	37	.002
Child >1	22	14.82			
PEDS score in bottom 75% of concerns	20	5.15	-1.53	29	.137
PEDS score in the top 25% of concerns	11	12.82			
Child does not have a health problem	30	8.00	-.56	37	.581
Child does have a health problem	9	10.94			
Attends playgroup	20	11.93	-1.43	36	.161
Does not attend playgroup	18	5.56			
Boy	21	7.88	-.387	37	.701
Girl	18	9.61			

Results of a multi linear regression

- A MLR was calculated to predict average hours of childcare per week based on the relationship status of the carer, child age and whether child was placed with other siblings
- These variables explained a significant amount of variation in weekly hours of childcare $F(3,35) = 9.044$, $p < .000$, with an $R^2 = .437$, $R^2_{\text{adjusted}} = .388$
- Children of SINGLE CARERS spend 10.3 hours more in childcare per week, children who are IN THEIR SECOND YEAR OF LIFE spend 7.6 hours more in childcare per week and children who are PLACED WITH OTHER SIBLINGS spend 11.4 more hours in childcare per week
- Carer relationship status and sibling co-placement did significantly predict average hours of child care per week ($p < .05$) and child age was approaching significance ($p = .057$)

Summary of findings

- The proportion of OOHC children <2 years using formal childcare is HIGHER than for Australian children generally
- The number of hours OOHC children <2 years spend in formal childcare per week is HIGHER than for Australian children generally
- The proportion of OOHC children <2 years attending formal childcare that meets or exceeds national quality standards is BROADLY THE SAME as for Australian children generally
- The number of hours OOHC children <2 years spend in formal childcare increases when children have a single carer, are placed with siblings and are in their second year of life

Conclusions

- Further research is required on the use of childcare among OOHC children and what constitutes as quality provision for this group
- Childcare decision-making is complex and requires careful consideration on a case-by-case basis
- Additional support for care and learning in the home environment may be required, especially for single carers, carers of sibling groups and carers of children in their first year of life