

Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Young Children, their Families, and Child Care Needs of South Carolina’s Essential Workers

Representing the voices of 624 parents and caregivers, who worked full or part time in the last month, from 40 of 46 counties in South Carolina, this brief offers policymakers, advocates, and stakeholders timely insights into the status of families with children birth through age five. This brief aims to advance and inform data-driven, family-centered solutions to restoring and strengthening our state’s early childhood system. There are approximately 343,000 children birth through age five estimated to live in South Carolina.



Respondent Demographics

Our most frequent essential worker respondents were from the Lowcountry and Midlands regions, white, and ages 25-44 (figure 1). Essential workers reported a total of 567 total children under age 6, of which most were 3 years old or older (55%; results not shown).

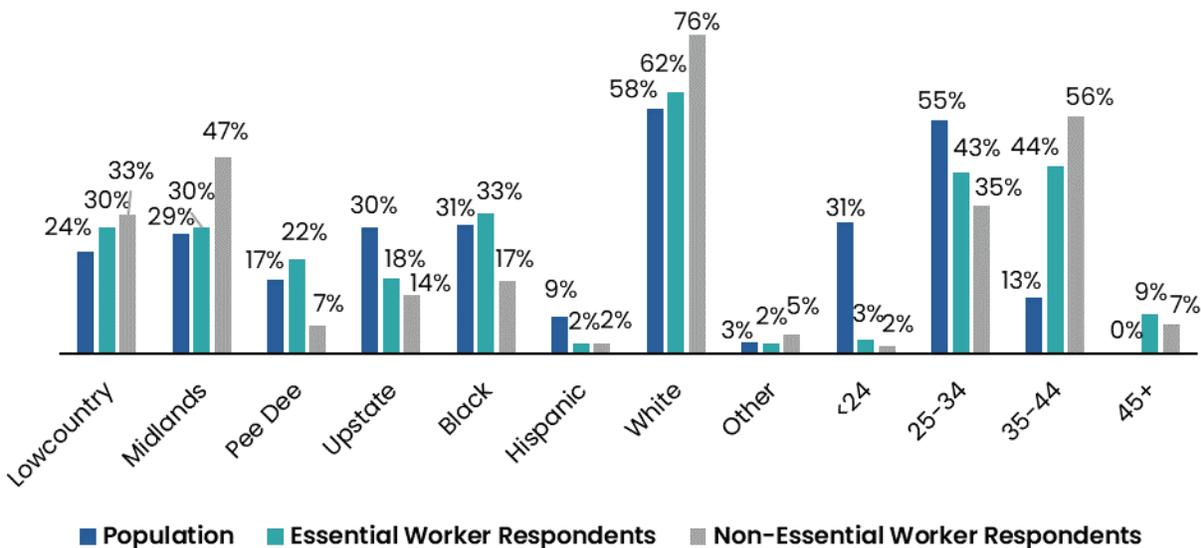


Figure 1. Demographic distribution of proxy population, compared to demographics of survey respondents - essential workers [n=369]; non-essential workers [n=255] (number of unknown responses excluded: region [E=15/NE=9]; race/ethnicity [E=23/NE=11]; age of respondent [E=15/NE=8])

1

Essential worker parents and caregivers of young children have had to take unpaid leave to provide child care and are currently using child care centers more than non-essential workers.

Essential workers (20%) reported taking unpaid leave to provide child care more than non-essential workers (8%). Alternatively, more non-essential workers (85%) reported telecommuting or working from home while caring for children than essential workers (52%; figure 2).

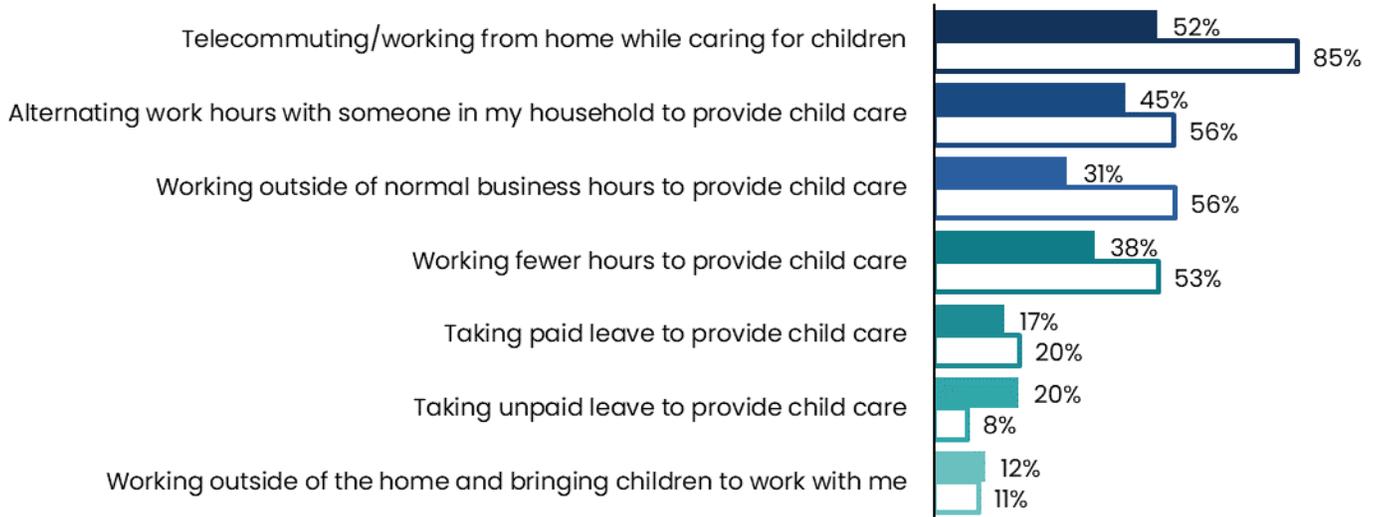


Figure 2. Responses to the question, “Have you or another parent/caregiver in your household experienced any of the following since March 13, 2020? Select all that apply.” Filled in bar = essential workers [n=369]; outlined bar = non-essential workers [n=255]

Before a state of emergency was declared for the state of South Carolina on March 13, 2020, 57% of essential workers and 67% of non-essential workers were using a child care center, daycare, or preschool as the primary care arrangement for the young children in their households. At the time of the survey, more essential workers (33%) reported using child care centers than non-essential workers (20%; figure 3).

Since March, the most common type of child care arrangement has been unpaid care by parents, family or friends for both essential (44%) and non-essential (64%) workers. Both essential (64%) and non-essential workers (69%) say unpaid care is not ideal (figure 3). More essential workers reported receiving a child care voucher before March 13 (7%) and at the time of survey (5%), than their non-essential counterparts (4% and 2%, respectively).

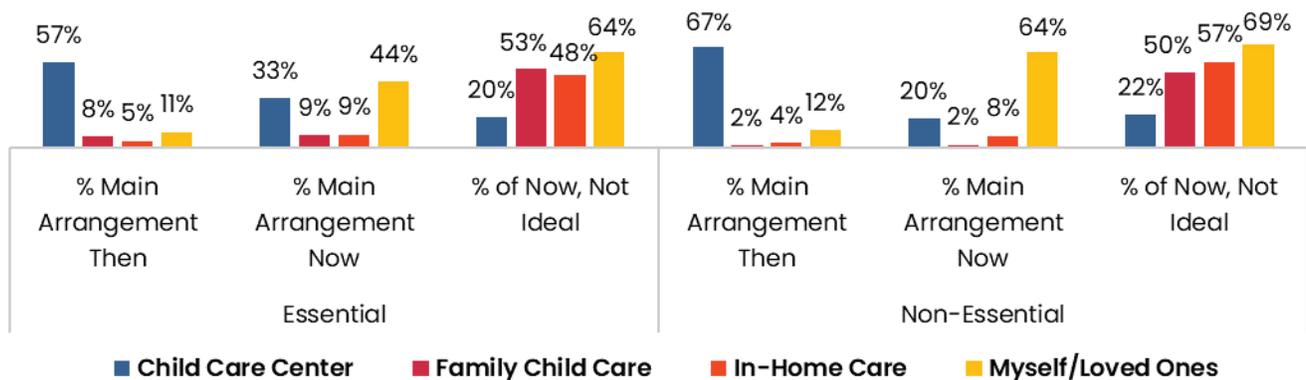


Figure 3. Diagram comparing percent of survey respondents’ reported main child care arrangements before March 13 (“Then”) and at the time of the survey response (“Now”). Also, the percent of each arrangement who report it is not ideal is displayed. Total survey respondents: essential workers [n=369]; non-essential workers [n=255]. “Head Start,” “Public School,” “Summer Camp/Program,” “Other/Unknown” responses not displayed.

2

More essential workers are concerned about affordability of child care than non-essential workers. This crisis poses a threat to the wellbeing of young children and their families across the board.

When thinking about their child care arrangements for the next three months, survey respondents say they are most concerned about the increased likelihood that their child and family may be exposed to COVID-19. More essential workers (44%) are concerned about the affordability of child care than non-essential workers (31%; figure 4).

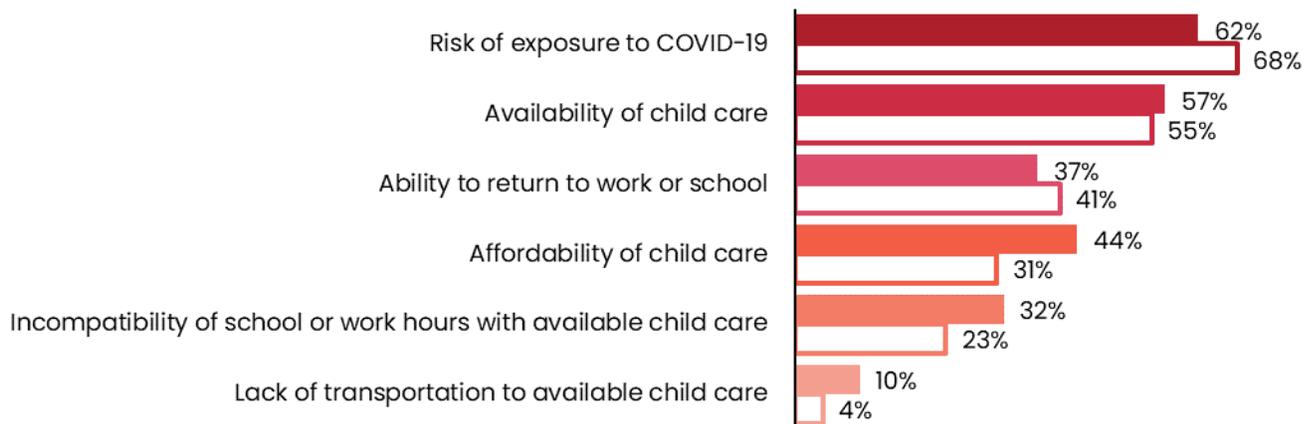


Figure 4. Percent of survey respondents reporting that they are very/moderately concerned about these issues; filled in bar = essential workers [n=369]; outlined bar = non-essential workers [n=255]; unknown responses excluded: risk of exposure [E=1]; availability [NE=1]; return to work/school [NE=1]; affordability [E=2/NE=1]; incompatible hours [E=1/NE=2]; transportation [E=1/NE=1]).

Parents and Caregivers’ Pandemic-Related Worries and Anxiety

Overall, a high proportion of essential and non-essential workers are worried about the pandemic’s impact on the wellbeing of their family and themselves (figure 5).

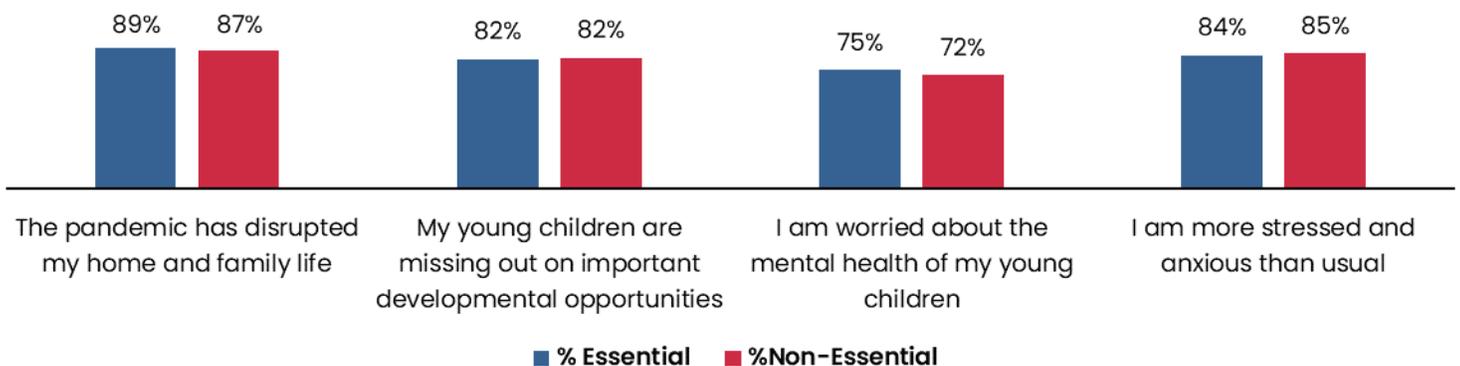


Figure 5. Percent of survey respondents reporting that they slightly/strongly agree that they worry about these issues and that they have much/somewhat higher stress/anxiety than usual; total survey respondents: essential workers [n=369]; non-essential workers [n=255]; (number of unknown/not applicable responses excluded: disruption [E=2/NE=2]; opportunities [E=5/NE=4]; mental health [E=3/NE=2]).

Survey Administration and Brief Sample

The “Build It Back Better” survey administration is detailed in the full report [<https://earlychildhoodsc.org/what-we-do/build-it-back-better-survey/>]. In total, 3,261 responses were received. Those who responded “no” to the question, “Do you live in South Carolina and are the parent or primary caregiver of at least one child under age 6?” were excluded [n=680]. Then, those who reported zero for the number of children under age 6 when asked to report the number of individuals in their household by age group were excluded [n=146]. Finally, for any respondents who entered the drawing for 1 of 10 \$200 Visa gift cards at the end of the survey more than once, only their first response was counted in the final sample [n=4]. Further refinement of our sample was done to exclude those with an IP address outside of South Carolina [n=1,186]. Those who did not report their essential worker status or reported it as “don’t know/not sure” were excluded for this brief [n=621].

References

Regional population estimate of children under age 6 obtained from 2014-2018 American Community Survey (5 Year Estimates; Table B17024). US Census Bureau.

Proxy population for survey respondents’ age and race/ethnicity obtained from South Carolina resident births 2014-2018. Regions based on DHEC definition. Data obtained from South Carolina Community Assessment Network. Office of Vital Statistics, South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. Obtained 12 Aug 2020. [Available from: <http://scangis.dhec.sc.gov/scan/bdp/tables/birthtable.aspx>].

Acknowledgments

First, we would like to extend our gratitude to the survey respondents, as their candid feedback is invaluable to us. Second, we would like to acknowledge the Alliance for Early Success, without whose support and funding this project would not have been possible. Lastly, we would like to acknowledge our national, state, and local partners who gave us feedback on our survey instrument and whose reports were utilized as models for this one, particularly the Children’s Movement of Florida.

Disclaimer

This report does not represent the views of the South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council, the United Way Association of South Carolina, South Carolina First Steps, or the Alliance for Early Success. The differences presented in this brief have not been tested for statistical significance.

Suggested Citation

Build It Back Better Regional Report: Essential Workers (December 2020). South Carolina Early Childhood Advisory Council, United Way Association of South Carolina, and South Carolina First Steps. [Available from: <https://earlychildhoodsc.org/what-we-do/build-it-back-better-survey/>].

