



Understanding Child Care in America

What parents want, what tradeoffs they face

The Research



In order to gauge parent attitudes toward child care in America, we worked with public opinion research firm GBAO to poll 1,000 adults with children 5 and under. Online panels were conducted from December 8-12, 2025. The margin of error for this research is +/- 3.1 percentage points.

Our findings span the following five areas:

1. Providing Care
2. Affording Care
3. Navigating Care and Work
4. The Gender Divide in Child Care
5. Employers and Child Care

Providing Care



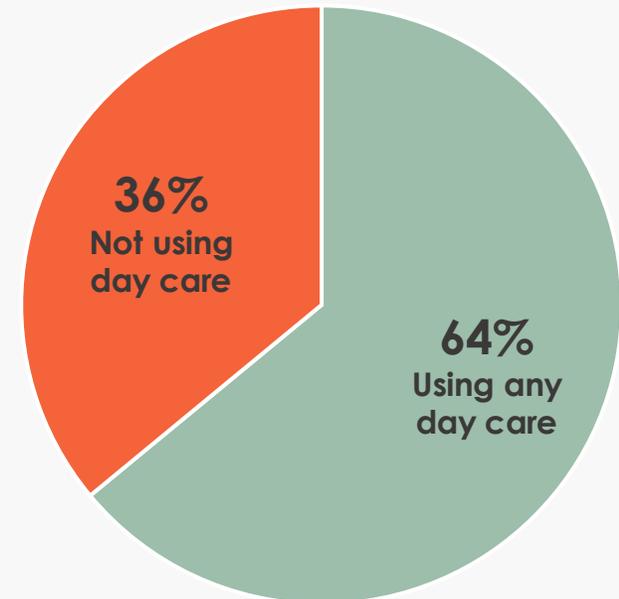
Most Parents with Young Children Are Using Some Form of Day Care

64% of parents are using **some form of day care**, including **74% of employed parents**.

Day care includes the following:

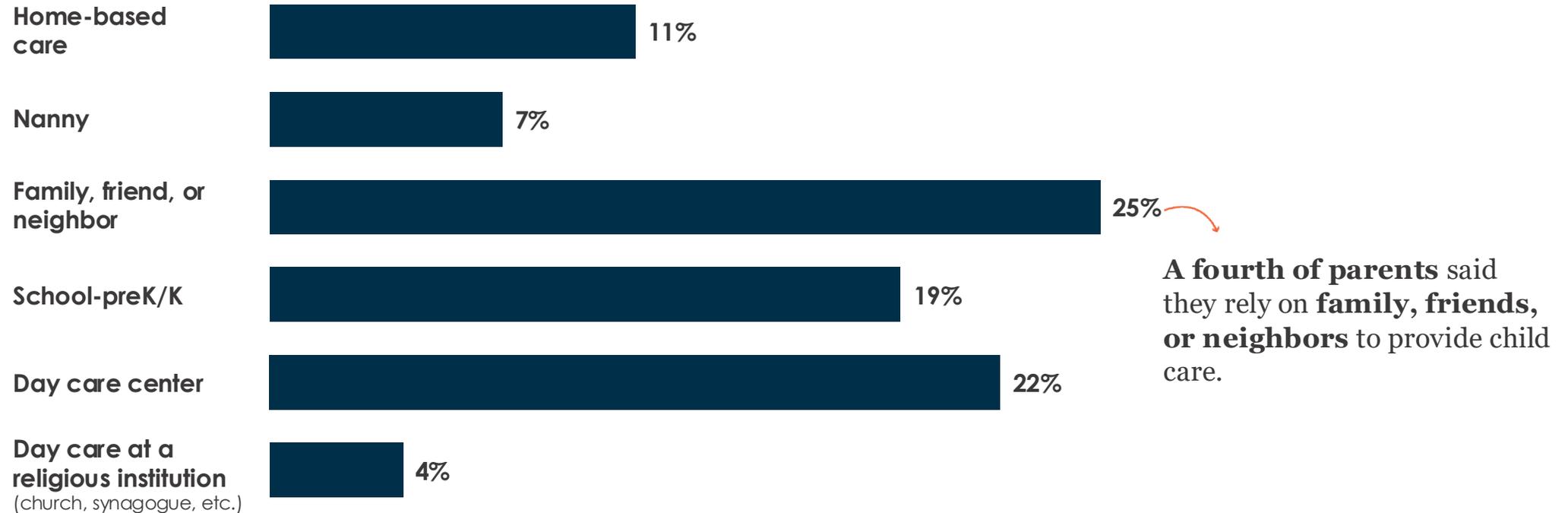
- Day care center
- Family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care
- Home-based care
- Nanny
- School

Child Care Use by Parents of Young Children



Day Care Often Doesn't Mean "Day Care Center"

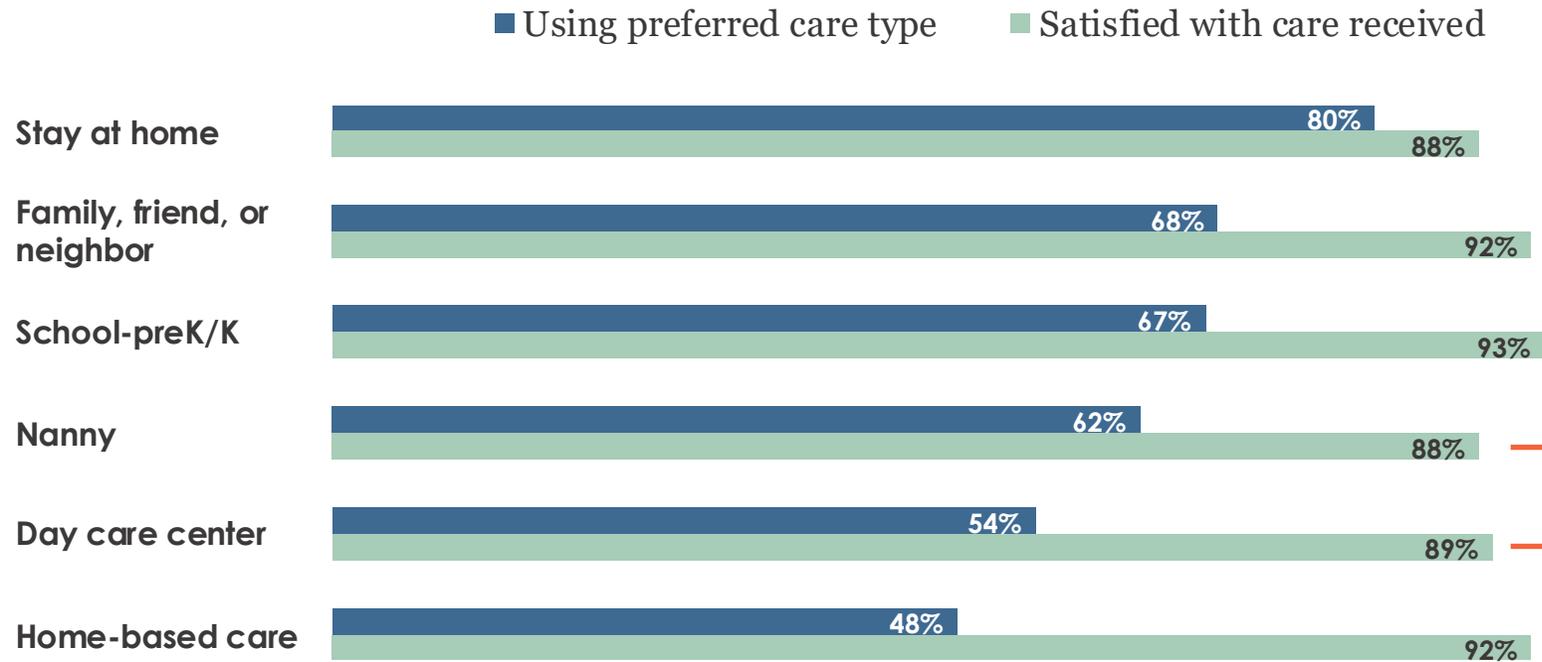
Type of Day Care Parents Currently Use



Note: Examines the 64% of parents who use any form of child care. Parents may be represented in more than one category if they use different care options for different children.

Parents Are Satisfied with Their Child Care, but Many Would Use a Different Type if They Could

Parents Level of Satisfaction with Care Type vs. If It Is Their Preferred Option



Around two-thirds of parents using a nanny or relying on family, friends, or neighbors said they were using their preferred type of child care.

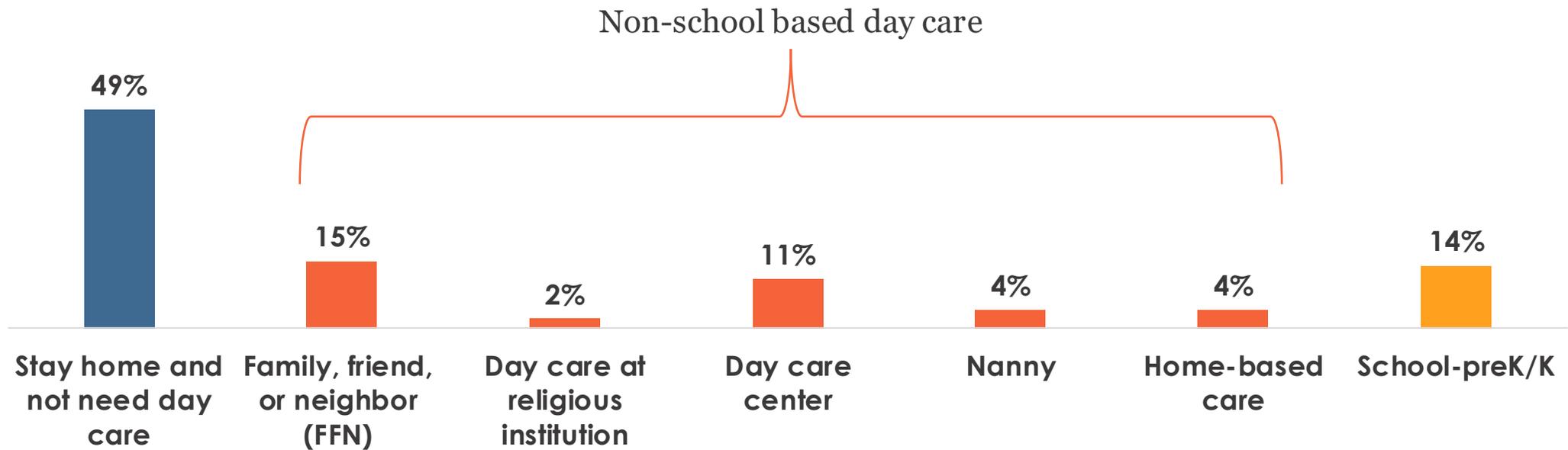
Although parents using day care centers are highly satisfied with the care they receive, just half say they are using their preferred form of care.

Half of Parents Preferred Form of Child Care Is Staying Home

Just over 1/3 of parents said their preferred form of child care is a non-school day care (like a day care center, FFN, or home care provider).

Parents Preferred Choice for Care

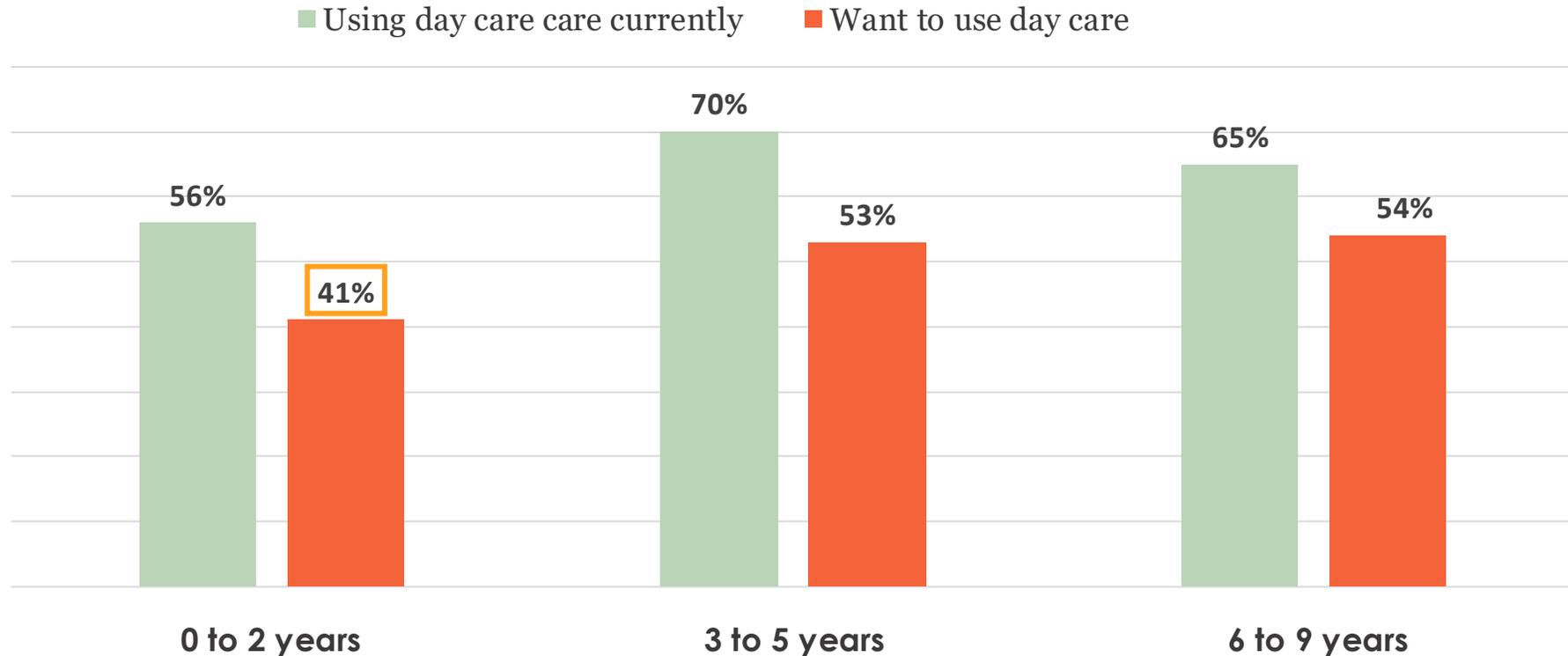
Share of Parents Saying Care Type is Their Preferred Choice



Parents Are More Likely to Want to Care for Younger Children Themselves

Only 41% of parents of children under 2 years old want to put their child in any type of day care.

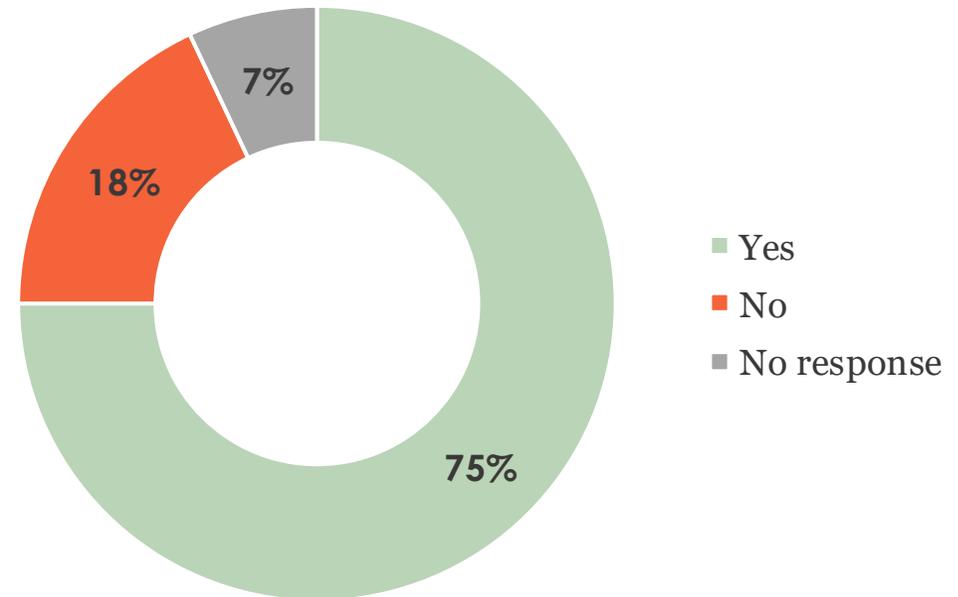
Day Care Use and Parent Preference by Age of Child



Many Parents Want to Provide More Care Themselves

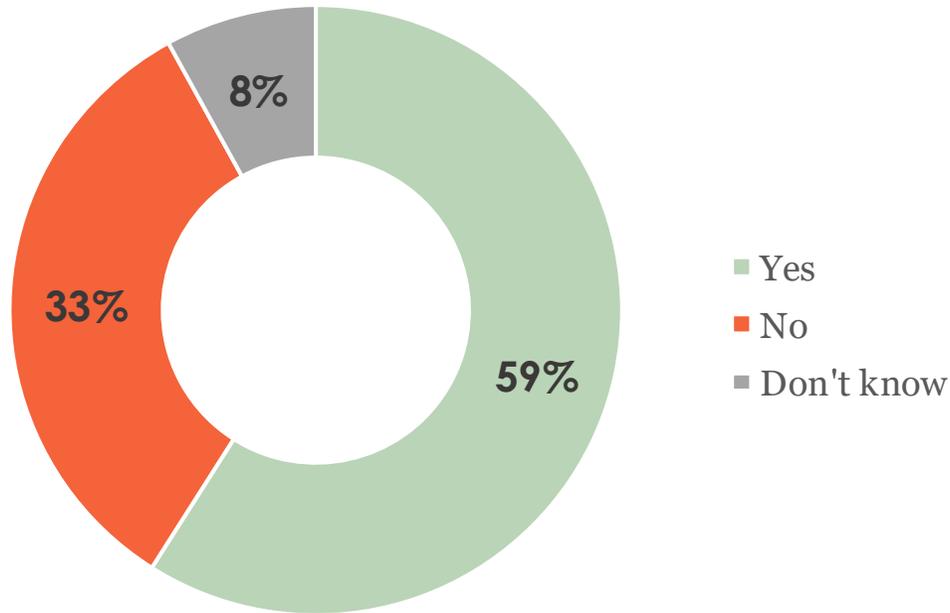
Setting aside financial considerations, would you prefer you (or your partner) be able to work less to take on more child care duties personally?

The share of parents agreeing with this statement is consistent across varying income levels, educational attainment, and care type used.



While Less Utilized, a Majority of Parents Support Religious Institutions Receiving Public Funds for Child Care

Do you support public funds going to religious institutions that manage day care or child care centers (but do not engage in religious educational instruction)?



59% of parents said they'd support federal funds going to religious institutions hosting child care centers that don't engage in religious instruction.

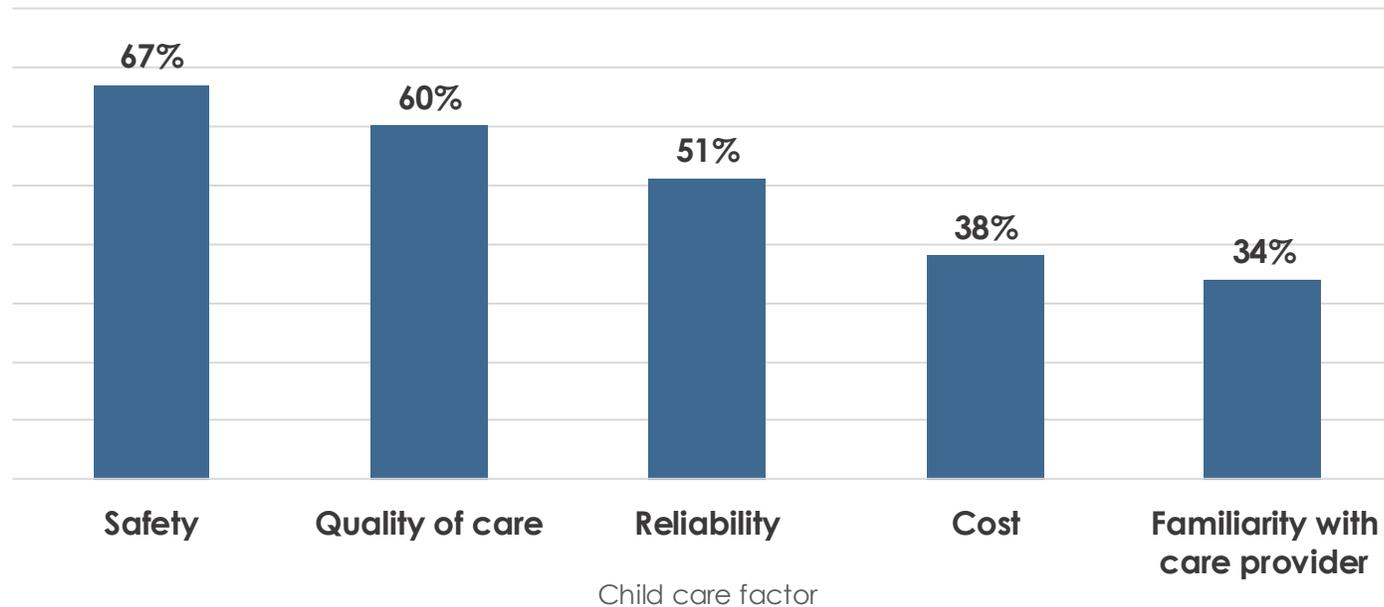
The majority of Democrats, Republicans, & Independents were in support.

Affording Care



Safety and Quality Matter Far More than Cost When Choosing Child Care

Share of Parents Saying Various Child Care Factors are Extremely Important (10 of 10)



- **Safety and quality of care are far and away the most important factors** for parents in choosing child care—much more than cost.
- Parents also overwhelmingly say they are highly satisfied with safety and quality in their current care situations.

The Cost of Child Care Is a Burden for Many Families

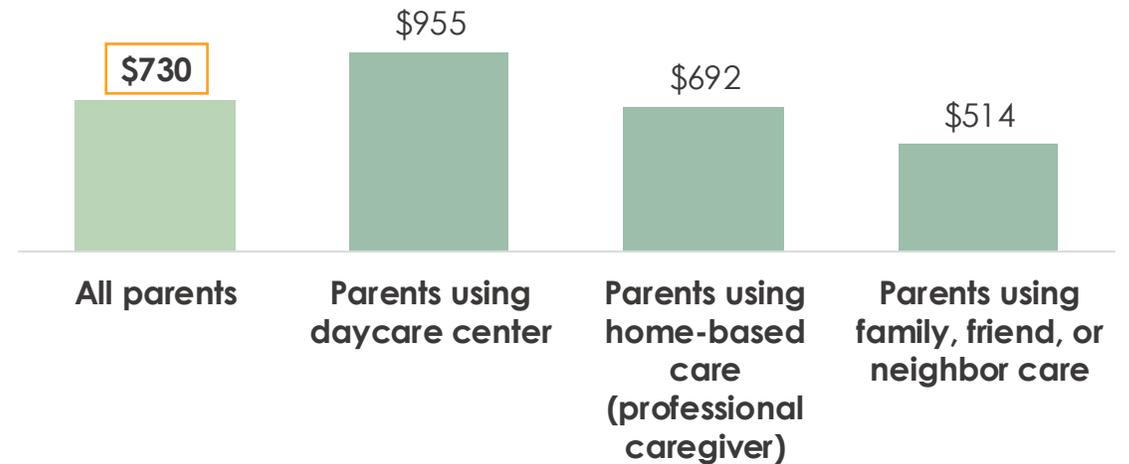
The average parent is spending **\$730 a month on child care.**

Share of Parents Saying Child Care is...



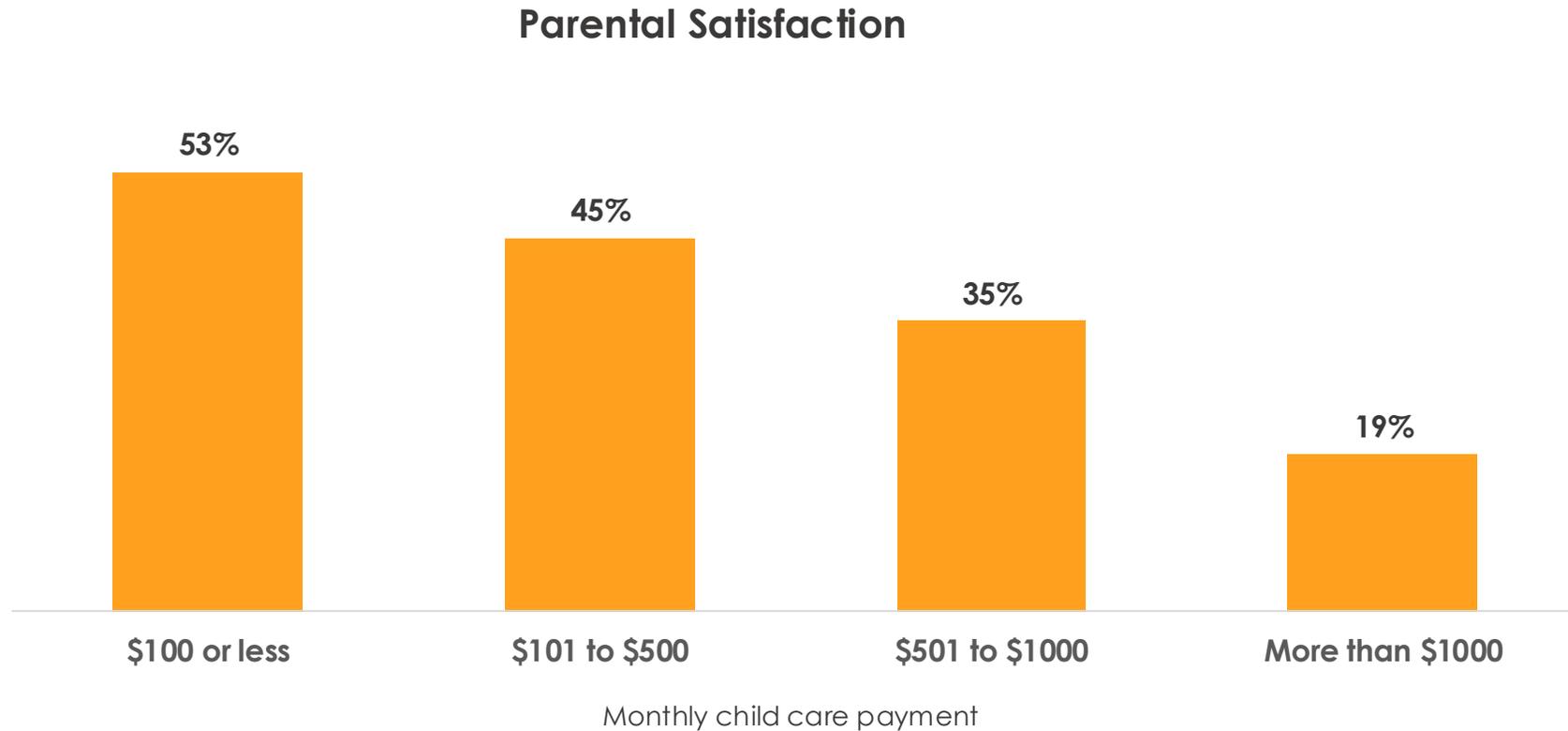
60% of parents of young kids say child care is one of their top expenses, and a fifth say it is their single biggest expense.

Average Monthly Cost of Child Care



Parents with Higher Child Care Bills Aren't Satisfied with the Cost

Satisfaction with child care costs plummets when parents pay more than \$500/month.

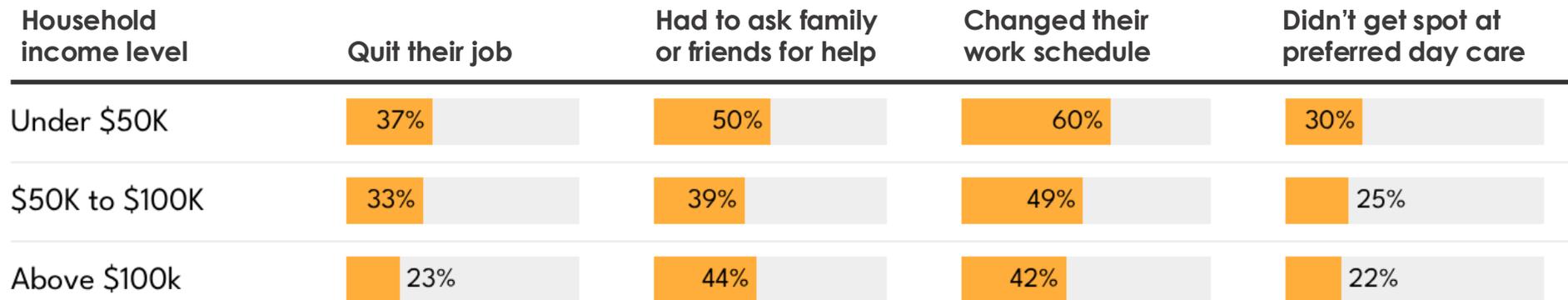


Note: This share reflects parents noting any amount of satisfaction with the cost of child care.

Parents Earning Less Make Bigger Sacrifices to Afford Care

Parents on lower incomes are more likely to **quit their jobs, change their work schedules, or use more informal care options.**

Share of Parents by Household Income Level Who...

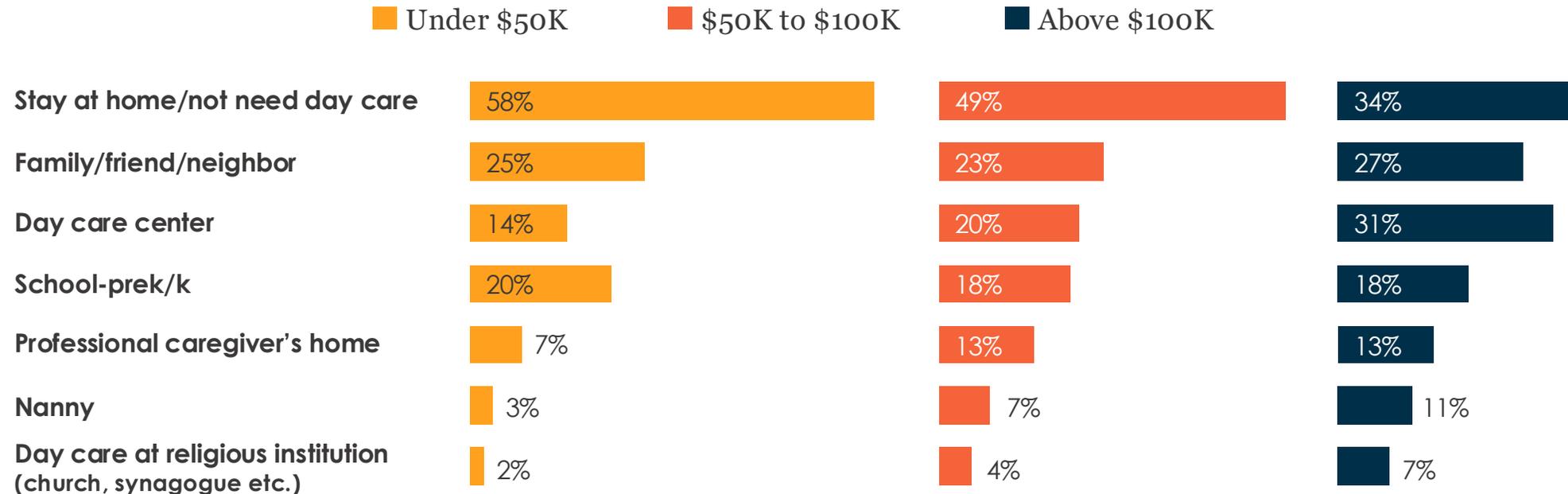


Parents on lower-incomes are more likely to be raising children alone—a third of households making less than \$50k annually are single parents.

Lower-Income Parents Are Less Likely to Use Formal Child Care

Just half of parents making under \$50k annually use day care compared to 80% making more than \$100k. The trade-offs between staying at home and paying a high-price tag for care may be a factor for families on lower incomes.

Share of Parents Using Child Care Options by Household Income



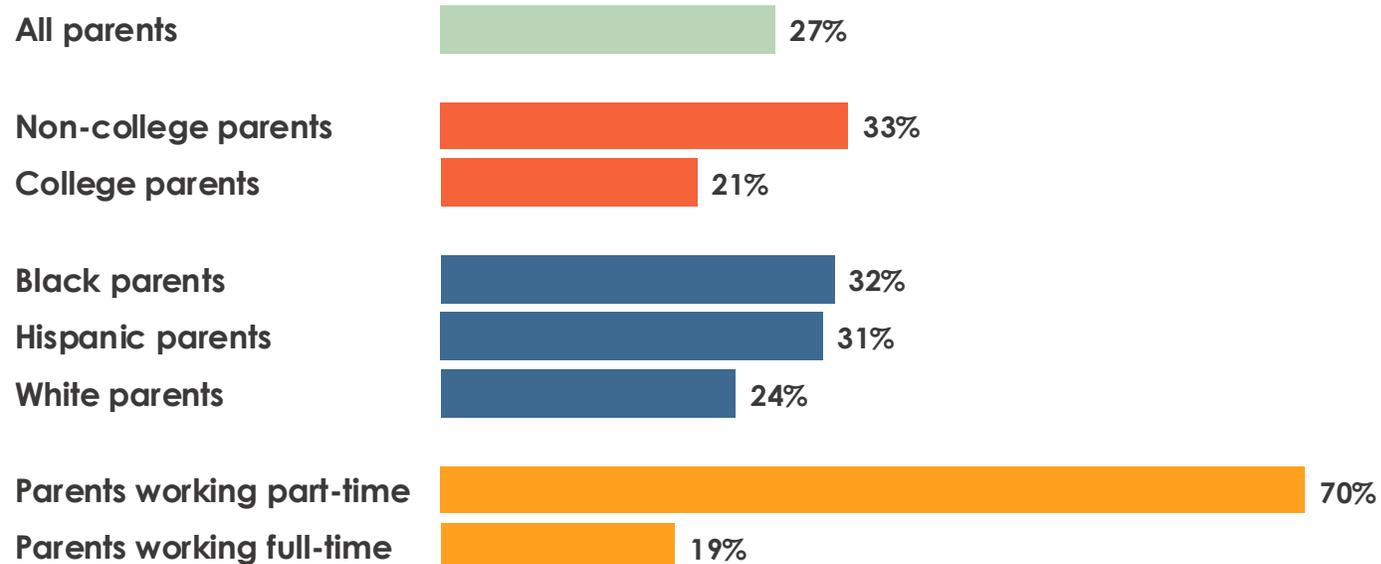
Note: Percentages will not sum to 100% because some parents with multiple children may utilize more than one option.

Navigating Care & Work



Many Parents Work Non-Traditional Hours

Share of Parents Working Non-Traditional Hours



- **Half of parents** see their work schedule change on a monthly basis.
- **27% of parents** work “non-traditional” hours outside a normal 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.
- This is especially true for parents without a college degree, those working part-time, and Black or Hispanic parents.

Parents Working Non-Traditional Hours Are More Likely to Change Their Schedule and Cut Back Hours

How Child Care Impacts Work

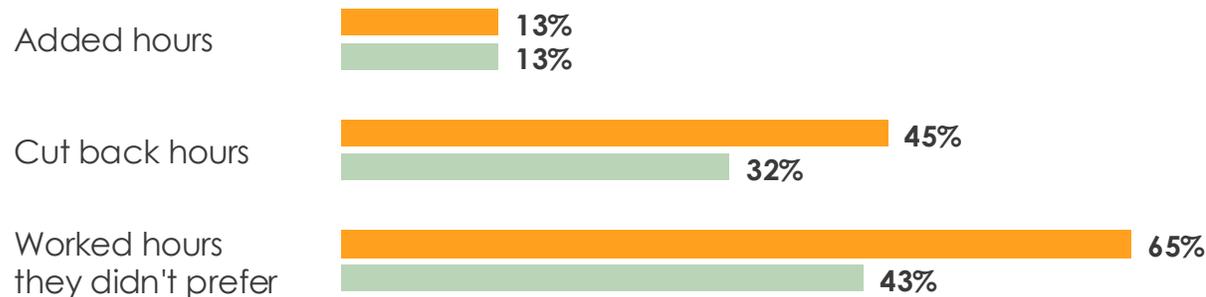
The share of parents who changed work schedules due to child care needs by type of work schedule

■ Non-traditional hours ■ Traditional hours

Share of all parents saying child care needs caused them to...



Of parents that changed schedules the share that...

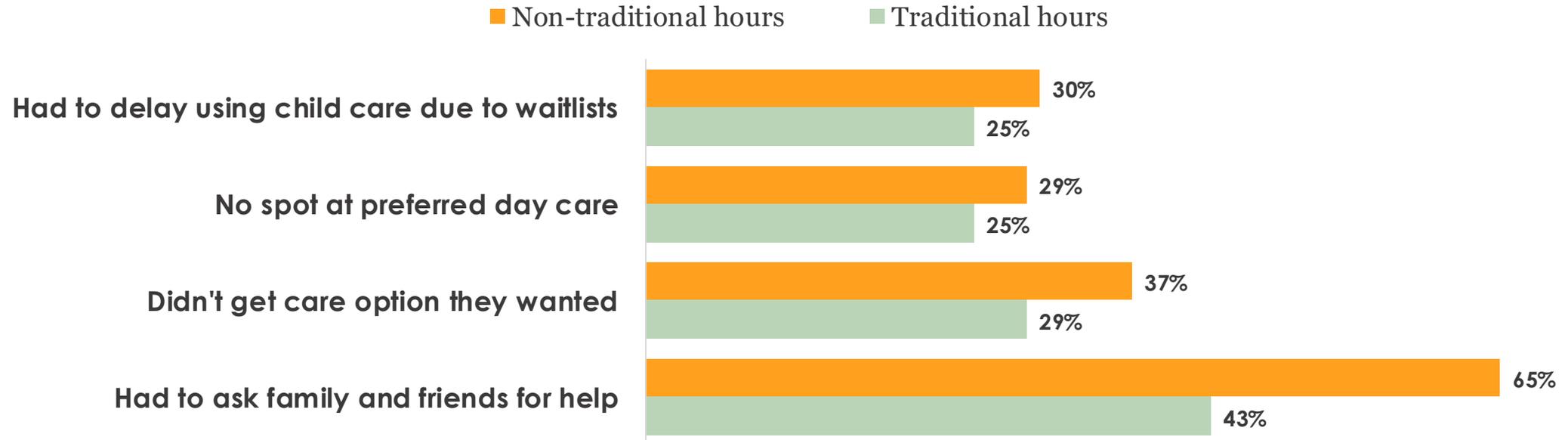


- 65% of parents working non-traditional hours changed their work schedule due to child care needs, compared to 43% of parents working traditional hours.
- Of those changing schedules, 45% of workers with non-traditional hours cut back their hours, compared to 32% of workers with traditional hours.
- On average higher earning parents took on more hours and lower earning parents reduced hours.

Parents Working Non-Traditional Hours Experience More Frustrations Finding and Keeping Care

Parents working non-traditional hours were **less likely to get the child care option they wanted** and **more likely to rely on informal options**.

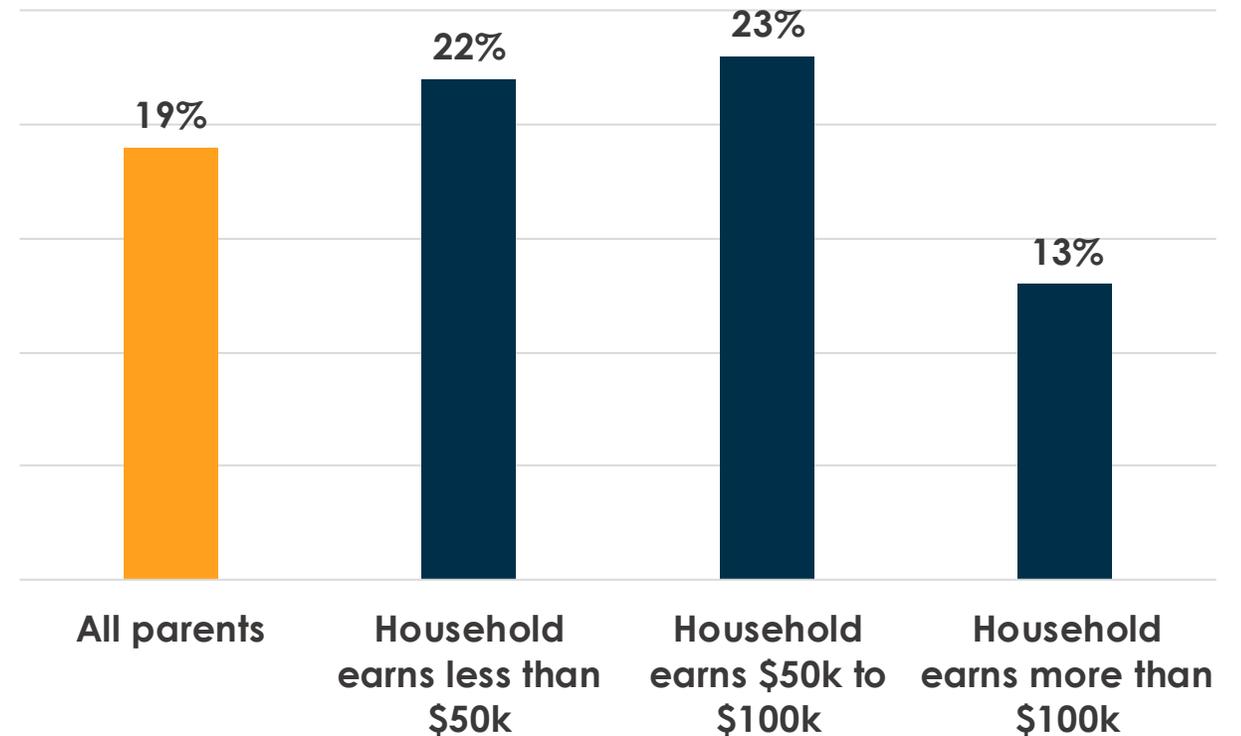
Share of Parents Citing Child Care Problems



1-In-5 Parents Quit Their Jobs Due to Child Care Needs

- **19%** of parents **said someone in their house quit their job** to afford child care.
- **33%** of parents **not using day care** had someone in their home quit their job to perform child care.
- But many parents who do quit feel satisfied with their choice.
- **72%** of parents where someone in the household quit said they were only using their **preferred type of child care**.

Someone in The Household Quit Their Job to Afford Child Care



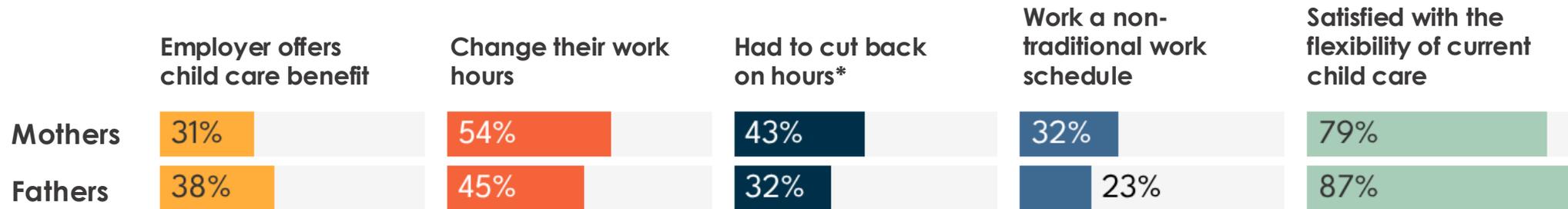
The Gender Divide



Mothers Encounter More Challenges and Less Support When It Comes to Child Care

Compared to fathers, mothers are less likely to have child care benefits from employer, more likely to have to change their work schedule, and work a non-traditional schedule.

Mothers vs. Fathers

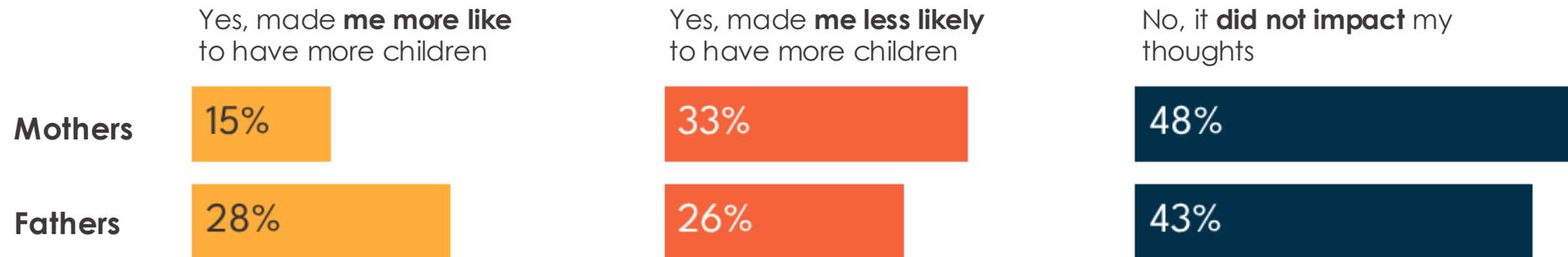


*Share of those who said they had to change their work hours due to child care.

Child Care Experiences Impact the Planning for More Children

A third of mothers (33%) say child care needs makes them less likely to have more children compared to a quarter of fathers (26%).

Has Your Experience with Child Care Impacted Your Thoughts About Having More Children?



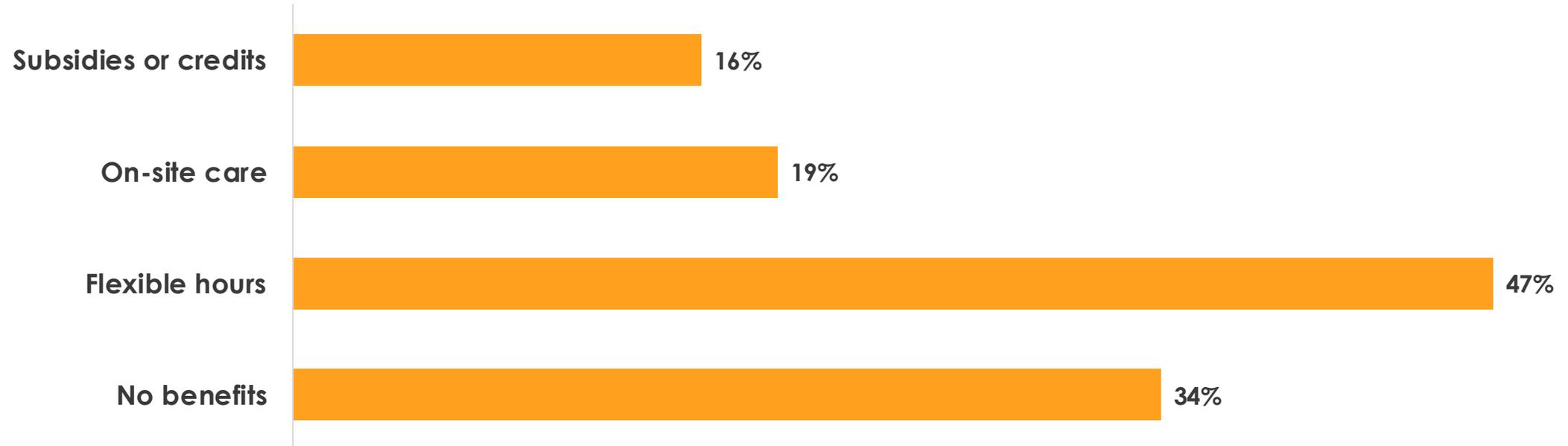
Employers



Employers Play an Important Role in Child Care Supports

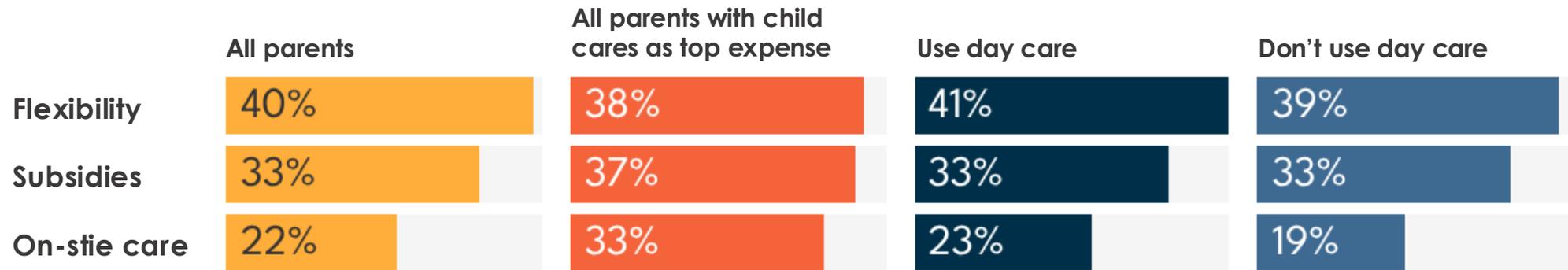
64% of parents get at least one child care benefit provided from their employer.

Does Your Employer Provide the Following Benefit?



Parents View Flexibility as the Top Benefit Employers Can Provide

What Employer Benefit Would You Prefer the Most?



Even among parents who said child care is their single biggest monthly expense, **there is a slight preference toward flexibility** over subsidies or credits.



THIRD WAY

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