

INTRODUCTION

During the fall of 2023, Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) researchers conducted a statewide study to establish a baseline for public perceptions related to the awareness, understanding, and attitudes about challenges that Utah women and girls face (see [Background & Methods](#) for details). The study was created to support the work of 18 areas of focus (spokes) within the movement called [A Bolder Way Forward](#), which is dedicated to helping more Utah girls and women thrive. One of the 18 areas of focus is childcare, and this research summary shares findings that illuminate present circumstances and establishes a baseline to track progress in a few key areas.

BACKGROUND

On November 1, 2023, the UWLP released a research snapshot titled [“Childcare—What Utahns Need to Know Now: A 2023 Update.”](#) This report captured the limited available data on childcare from various sources. We know that Utah is considered a “childcare desert” and that there are significant challenges with affordability, access, and quality. However, it has been difficult to track the status and progress in Utah with the available data sources. The four childcare/pre-K program questions (survey items) asked in this new study provide additional insight that can guide changes to improve support for more Utah families.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Participants responded to each survey item using a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat disagree, 4=neither disagree nor agree, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, 7=strongly agree). For Sample 1 (non-probability), 2,454 Utahns responded to these four questions, and for Sample 2 (representative) there were 650 participants (Total=3,104).

1. Access: The first survey item was “Access to childcare is an issue that families face in Utah.” The statistical mean was 6.19 (SD 1.08) for the non-probability sample and 5.19 (SD 1.45) for the representative sample. With both samples combined, 1,396 individuals selected “strongly agree,” and another 1,265 either “somewhat agree” or “agree.” This tells us that most respondents believe that childcare is an issue in Utah. See the summary of demographic findings for combined participants below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s agreement levels were significantly higher than men’s (6.12 and 5.41, resp.).

**Age:* Although all agreed, the highest levels of agreement were in the age ranges of 30–39 and 50–64.

**Education:* The more education, the stronger the agreement.

**Marital Status:* Married and divorced parents with children in the home had the highest agreement levels.

**Income:* Higher income levels had higher agreement.

**Children:* Parents had higher agreement levels than nonparents, but all agreed (6.00 and 5.72, resp.).

**Race & Ethnicity:* All agreed, but White and Hispanic had the highest levels of agreement.

**Religion:* Highest levels of agreement were agnostic, atheist, and spiritual but not religious affiliations, with Latter-day Saints and others not far behind.

**Employment:* Full-time employees had the highest levels of agreement.

**Residency:* The more years in Utah, the higher the agreement.

**Counties:* Highest statistical means (6.00+, highest first) included San Juan, Grand, Wasatch, Summit, Cache, Salt Lake, Davis, and Sevier.

**Denotes statistically significant differences within the demographic categories.*

2. Childcare Providers as Professionals:

The second survey item was “Childcare providers are professionals.” The statistical mean was 5.43 (SD 1.51) for the non-probability sample; and 4.73 (SD 1.45) for the representative sample. It appears that 70.7% agreed at some level with the statement, while 15.5% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 13.8% disagreed. Most respondents acknowledged that childcare providers are professionals, but only “somewhat” was selected for many participants. For a summary of demographic findings for all participants, see below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s agreement levels were significantly higher than men’s (5.37 and 4.91, resp.).

**Age:* Individuals in the 25–34-year-old range were the most agreeable, while those 60 and older had the lowest agreement levels.

**Education:* The more education, the stronger the agreement.

**Marital Status:* Single, married, and those living with partner/cohabiting had the highest agreement.

**Income:* Higher income levels had higher agreement.

Children: There were no significant differences among those who had children and those who did not.

**Race & Ethnicity:* The highest levels of agreement were from individuals who identified as White, Asian, or Pacific Islander.

**Religion:* The highest levels of agreement came from agnostic and atheist, with Latter-day Saints having the lowest.

**Employment:* The highest agreement levels were from full-time or part-time employees and full-time students.

Residency: There are no significant differences among how long someone had lived in Utah and their level of agreement.

**Counties:* Highest statistical means included Wasatch, Sanpete, Grand, Summit, Morgan, Cache, Davis, and Salt Lake (highest listed first). Except for a few, rural counties had the lowest.

3. Early Childhood Education: The third survey item was “Childcare and Pre-K programs play an important role in early childhood education.” The statistical mean was 6.33 (SD 1.04) for Sample 1 and 5.19 (SD 1.23) for Sample 2. For this question, 57.9% selected “strongly agree” in Sample 1 and 34.5% in Sample 2, and another 36.0% (Sample 1) and 50.6% (Sample 2) responded with either “somewhat agree” or “agree.” This tells us that most respondents believe that childcare and pre-K programs are important in a child’s early education. For a summary of demographic findings for all participants, see below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s agreement levels were significantly higher than men’s (6.32 and 5.80, resp.).

Age: Although there were no significant differences among age groups, participants 70 and older had the lowest agreement levels.

**Education:* Those with at least some college were more agreeable than those without, and those with graduate degrees were significantly higher.

**Marital Status:* Married, divorced, and living with partner/cohabitating had the highest agreement levels.

**Income:* Higher income levels had higher agreement.

Children: There were no significant differences among categories.

Race & Ethnicity: There were no significant differences of agreement levels among race/ethnicity categories.

**Religion:* There were no significant differences among the religion categories; respondents who were less active in their religions had more agreement with the statement (although all statistical means ranged from 5.95 to 6.31).

**Employment:* Those in the labor force (and retirees) had the highest levels of agreement, but the lowest category (full-time homemakers, 5.49) was still agreeable.

**Residency:* Participants who had lived in Utah fewer than 2 years had the lowest levels of agreement.

Counties: There were no significant differences. Most survey participants around the state in both samples agreed that programs for a child’s early education are important.

4. The Role of Government: The final survey item was “Government has a role in addressing childcare in Utah.” The statistical mean was 5.75 (SD 1.49) for Sample 1 and 5.18 (SD 1.43) for Sample 2. There was a significant difference in all four questions between the samples. Of those who responded, 82.7% agreed at some level in Sample 1, 8.4% neither agreed or disagreed, and only 8.8% responded with any level of disagreement. For Sample 2, 70.1% agreed at some level, while 20.0% were neutral, and 9.8% disagreed. Although there is a wide standard deviation, this tells us that most survey participants in both samples (non-probability and representative) believe that government has a role in addressing childcare challenges in Utah. See the summary of demographics for all participants below.

DEMOGRAPHIC FINDINGS

**Gender:* Women’s agreement levels were significantly higher than men’s (5.72 and 5.25, resp.).

**Age:* The highest levels of agreement came from individuals in the 30–44-year-old range, while those 70 and older had the lowest. All were at least “somewhat” agreeable.

**Education:* The more education, the stronger the agreement.

Marital Status: There were no significant differences among marital status categories.

Income: Although not a significant difference, higher income levels had slightly higher agreement.

Children: There were no significant differences among categories.

Race & Ethnicity: There were no significant differences of agreement among race/ethnicity categories.

**Religion:* Latter-day Saints had significantly lower agreement than all others, but still had a mean of 5.34.

**Employment:* Full-time homemakers (4.88) had significantly lower levels of agreement than did all others.

Residency: There were no significant differences among categories.

Counties: There were no significant differences by county. Most survey participants around the state believe—at least somewhat—that government has a role in addressing childcare for its residents.

CONCLUSION

This summary highlights key findings related to four childcare questions. Respondents from across the state participated in the study. Sample 1 was a non-probability sample, and Sample 2 was a representative sample. Although the second aligns more closely with the awareness, understanding, and attitudes of the general Utah population, Sample 1 provides insight into the views of a slightly different set of Utahns (see [Background & Methods](#) for the demographic details on both samples). Each is useful in understanding Utahns’ perceptions of childcare.

Through the years, childcare for Utah families has been viewed as a “private” instead of a “public” issue, but Utahns’ perspectives have changed. According to this research, most understand and believe at some level that childcare is an issue that needs to be addressed. Hence, if we want to help more Utah women and their families thrive, the challenges around childcare affordability, access, and quality demand greater attention.

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