



CHILD CARE DEFICIT FOR VERY YOUNG CHILDREN AND LOW LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN KAZAKHSTAN

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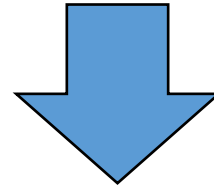
Care is an economic issue

Improving the care system

Reduction of unpaid work

Increase in female employment

New workplaces



Increase in budget revenues

Pension savings

Women's economic empowerment

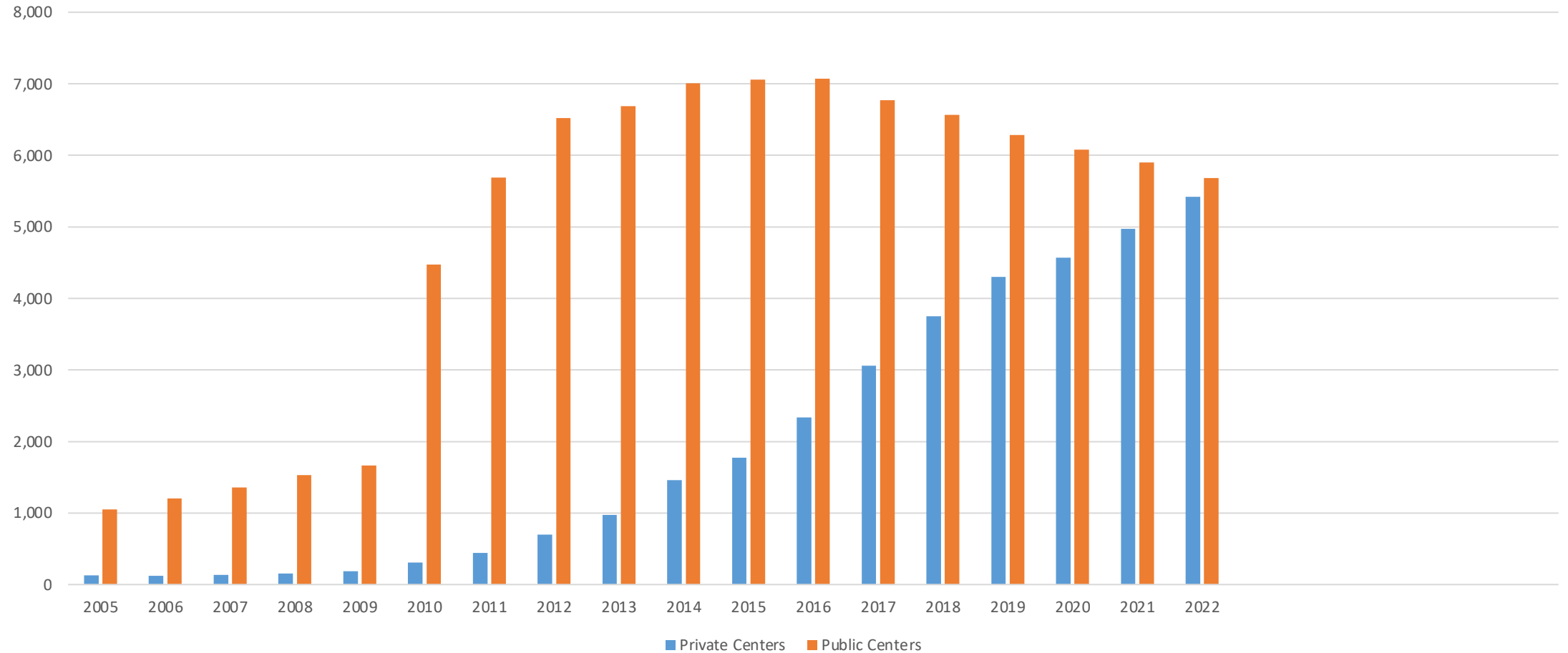
The economic growth



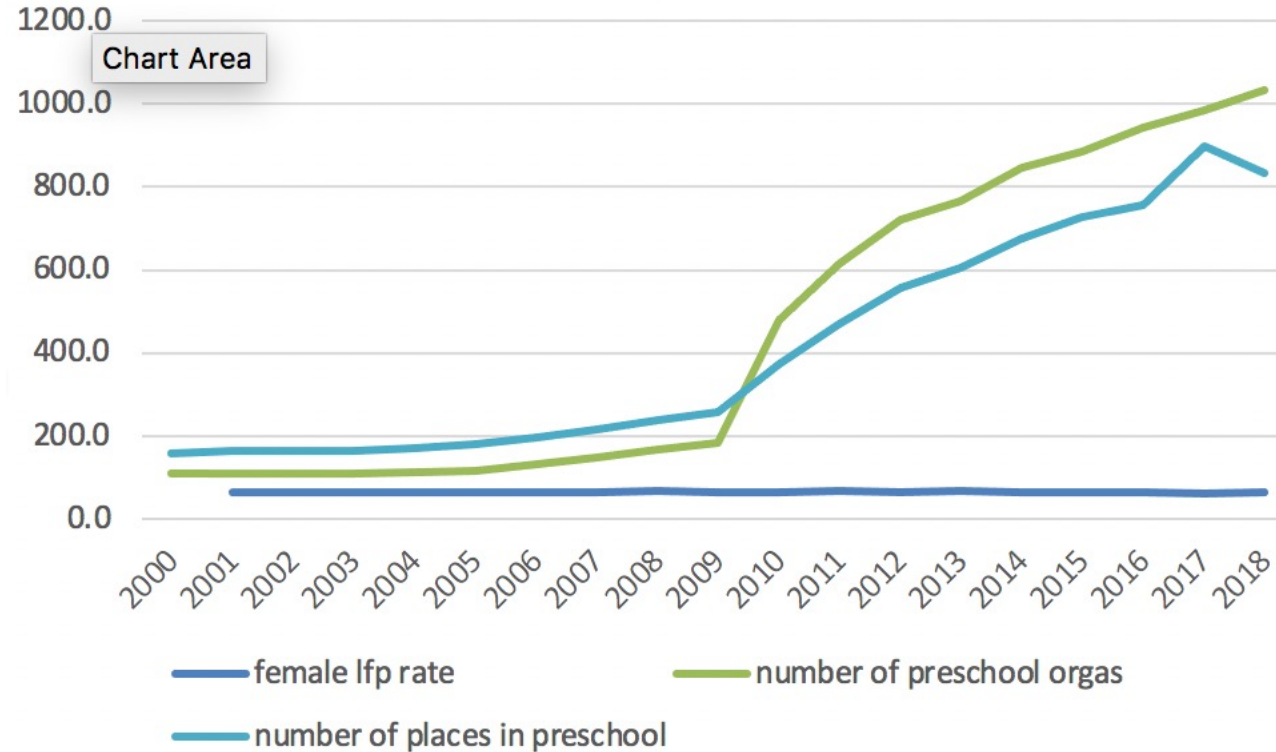
Recent Policy Focus on Care and Outcomes in Kazakhstan

- The Strategy for Gender Equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2016: prioritizes gender equality in the economic sphere and strengthening of the family
- "Balapan program" for childcare expansion 2014/2020: cover 77.7% of children 1-6 years by 2015 and 100% coverage by 2020

Rapid Expansion of Childcare Centers



Women's Labor Force Participation and Child Care Availability in Kazakhstan



Previous research using 2016 LITS (Meurs, et. al., 2021) shows that Kazakhstani women with children 3-6 are not less likely to be employed, but women with children 0-3 are 14% less likely.

Kazakhstan model:

- Socialist legacy of high female labor force participation with high female caring
- Supported through high participation in childcare after age 3
- Economic downturn in transition
 - Collapse of childcare during transition
 - LFP falls slightly
 - Familial care model

Emerging Regime: dual-earner, female-carer (path dependent)

- Relatively long maternity leave (126 days, 56 after birth.)
- Paid, but low replacement (40% average monthly income, most below minimum wage) until age of 12 months.
- Little incentive for fathers to participate
 - No sharing of maternity leave
 - Fathers don't take poorly paid leave
- Quite extensive care for children 3-6, 78% in 2019
- Allow/support private care for children under 3
- Relatively Low coverage of childcare for children under 3 (41% in 2022)



Care sector in Kazakhstan and Implications

The main issues:

- Gap between end of paid care leave (12 months) and more available care (3 yrs)
- Poor quality
- Variable access by region
- Increasing pressure on the care sector
 - High birth rate
- Unequal distribution of unpaid care (90% are women) is an important cause of the gender inequality, with fiscal implications
 - Long term impacts on women's earnings
 - Low level of income, child poverty
 - Lost tax and and pension payments

What do we know about child care and employment of mothers of young children?

- Mothers of young children are less likely to be employed than non-mothers .
- A significant literature now exists linking costs and availability of childcare and pre-school to women's employment.
- In a review of the literature, Ferragina (2017) finds that “comparative studies almost universally suggest that cheap and public childcare service provision favours mothers' employment.”

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Much less is known about the relationship for mothers of very young children—under 3

- These mothers are particularly likely to be not engaged in paid work (Pfau-Effinger, 2012).
- Wallonia, Belgium. They found a positive effect of expansion on female labor force participation, but a small: 100 new places → 18 additional women took up employment. Mostly switching from other care. (Dujardin, et. al., 2022)
- Similar modest response in Germany and Netherlands. Germany only PT work of middle-skilled women. Hungary, no employment response to childcare expansion (Bettendorf, et. al. 2015; Muller and Wrolich, 2020, Lovasz and Szabo-Morvai, 2015)

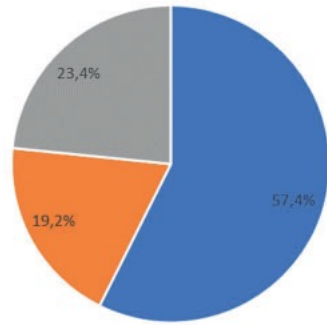
Why?

- Economic rationality: higher cost of care for very young children
- Preferences? (social norms and history)
 - Hungary: small surveys 2011
 - 56% of families believe 3 is the earliest age that it is acceptable for the mother to leave the child and return to work (maternity leave lasts 3 years)
 - 20% believed that 2 years was the appropriate age (Lovasz and Szabo-Morvai, 2015).
 - China: small surveys in 2021,
 - 84% in one survey of 1845 households) felt that ages 2-3 are best to start institutional care
 - before that children are too young (Zhe, 2022).
 - Remaining Chinese families gave reasons having to do with access, affordability or quality (Chen, et. al., 2023).
 - Care for children under 3 is mainly provided by private individuals or organizations and is of poor quality, and no transparent process of accreditation and quality monitoring.

Why?

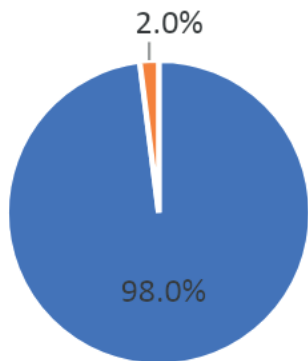
- Statistical analysis (mainly European cases) finds social attitudes only partially explain the low levels of employment of mothers.
- Context matters:
 - Gender attitudes sensitive to context, attitudes change once women are employed (Himmelweit, 2002).
 - Gender attitudes do not determine choice: women make choices constrained by financial need, which drives even conservative women to work,
 - Lack of affordable, quality child care, which limits the employment of career-focused women (Steiber and Haas, 2012).
 - US experiment with young couples shows that preferences for traditional division of household labor change when primed with information about available, affordable, quality childcare (Pedulla and Thebaud, 2015) .

2022 Survey of 500 Caregivers of Very Young Children in KZ



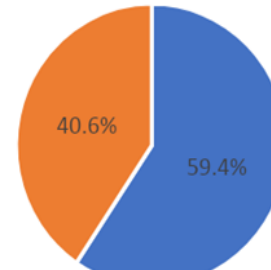
■ City ■ Nearby a city ■ Far away from a city

Location



■ Woman ■ Man

Gender



■ Yes ■ No

Employed

Overall employment rate quite high, 59%

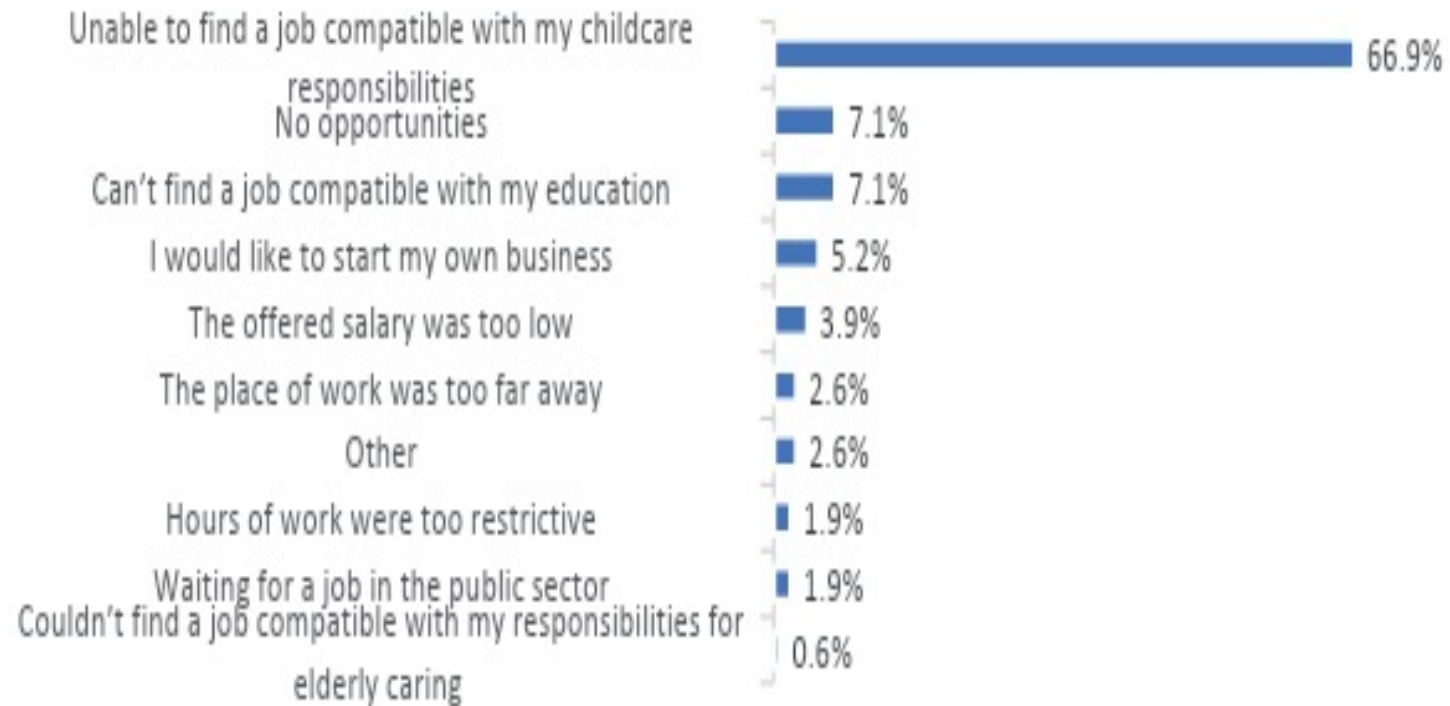
Varies with age of child:

85% of caregivers of (youngest) children 2-3

60% of caregivers of children 1-2

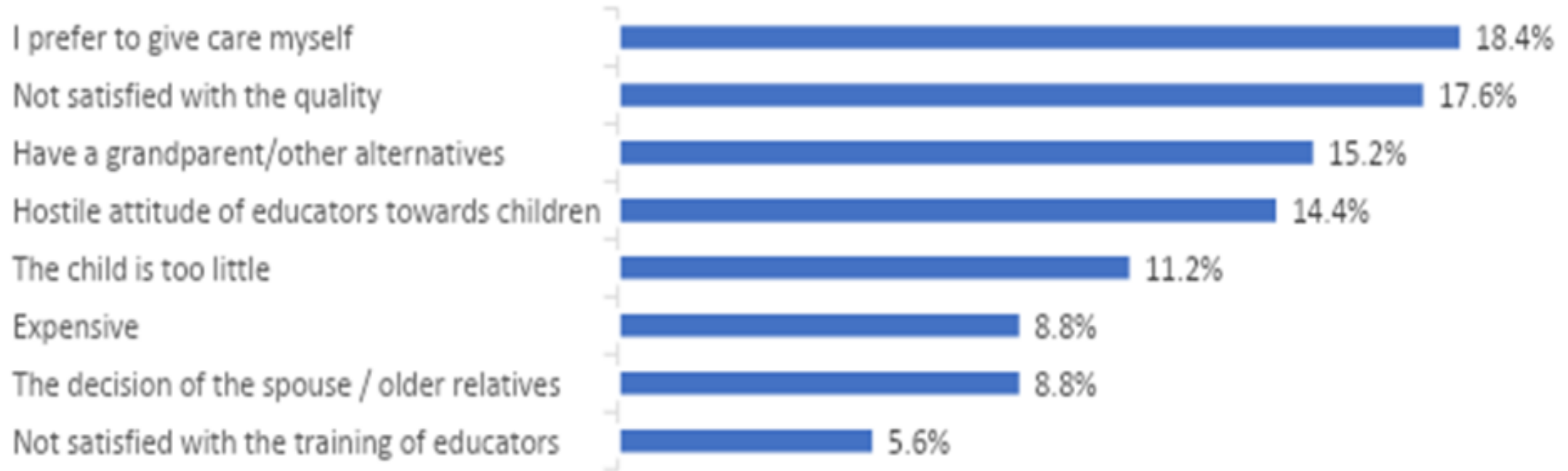
38% of caregivers of children <1

Why Not Employed?



Child care is main reason, but labor demand issues too

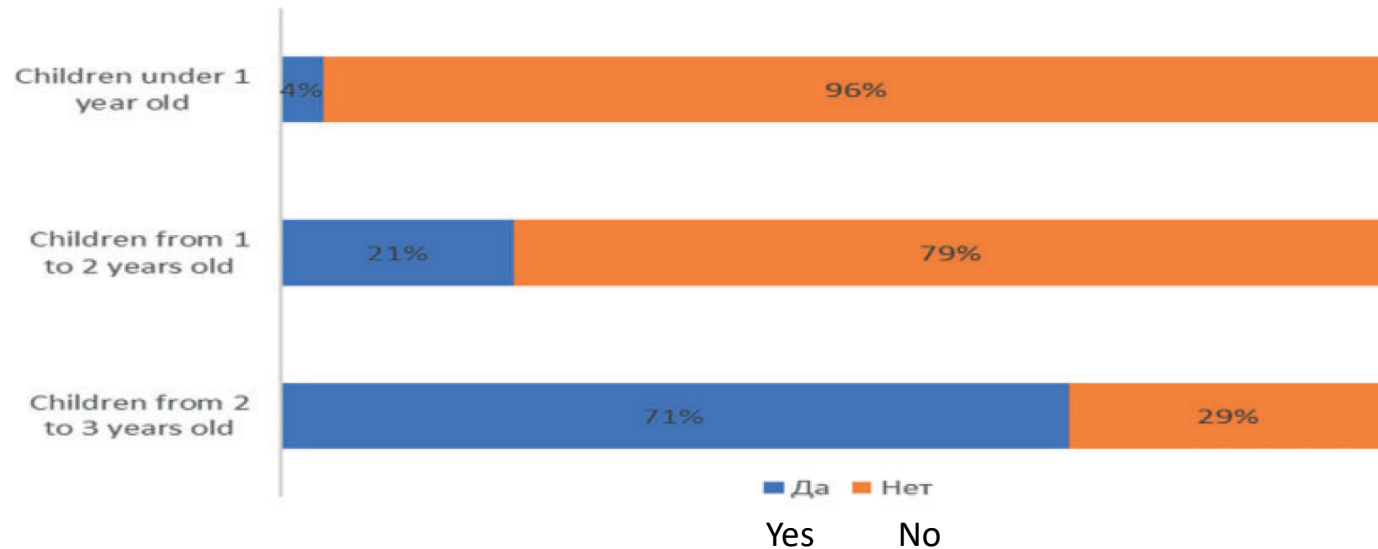
Survey



The main reason for the reluctance to enroll a child under 3 years old into a kindergarten

Is childcare needed for children under 3?

Figure 26. The need for places for enrollment in kindergarten, depending on the age of the child



Officials: “no demand” for preschool education for children under 1 year old, “About 60% of parents want to enroll their children in kindergartens from the age of two and 90-100% of parents from the age of 3”.

Why?

1) Preference for own care for very small children:

The child is too little	11%
I prefer to care myself	25%
<i>Carer of child under 1</i>	<i>29%</i>

In line with China, Hungary findings, but minority of respondents

2) Economic Rationality: (see insert)

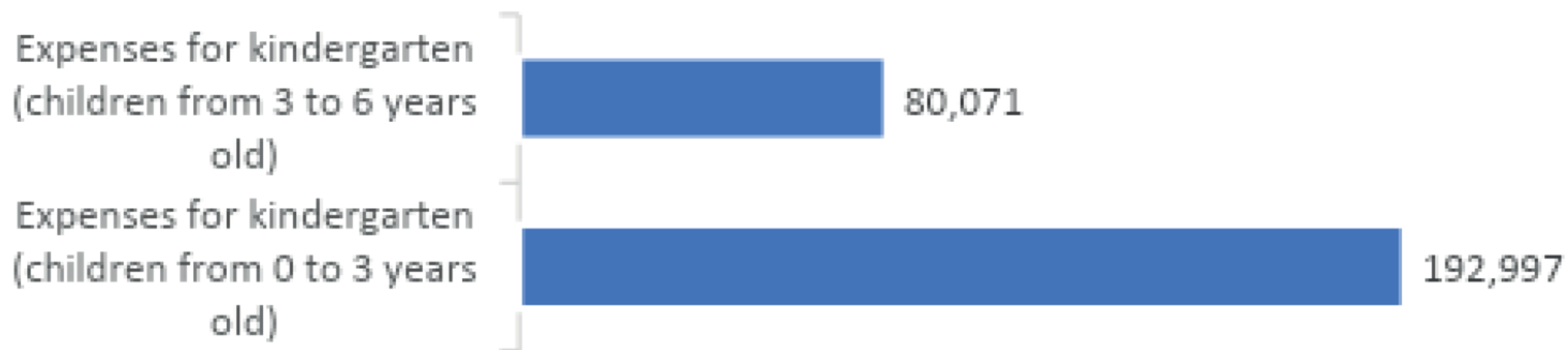
Too Expensive	9%
<i>Carer of child 2-3</i>	<i>25%</i>

3) Quality 31%

Parents who enroll children ranked 11 characteristics of quality on a scale of 1 (not satisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) (3=ok).

Average score on every characteristic was <3 (2.0-2.6)

Figure 10. **Average cost of institutional care per month, tenge**



[Go back](#)



Would you take up work if quality, affordable, accessible care were available?

Yes

Child is <1:	27%
Child is 1-2 years:	64%
Child is 2-3 years:	92%

Previous Q: Is care needed?

4%
21%

Table 1: Probit Regressions, Mother's Willingness to Seek Employment if Childcare Available, Kazakhstan, 2023

Variable	Beta	s.e.
Caregiver higher ed	-0.18**	0.089
Spouse Higher Edu	-0.02	0.082
Close to City	-0.27**	0.087
Far from City	-0.61***	0.063
Children <1 years	-0.70***	0.059
Children 1-2 years	-0.35***	0.080
Number of women over 18	0.07*	0.040
Quality: Physical Infrastructure	-0.11**	0.036
Quality: Educational Inputs	0.042	0.041
Quality: Staff Accountability	0.040	0.033

All Women
 N=500
 R2=.49



Conclusions:

Despite government policies, FLFP stagnant in Kazakhstan.

Question: Is expansion of care for children under 3 likely to help?

International evidence on link between care and employment of mothers under 3 is limited and mixed. How much is this driven by preferences?

Use small survey to examine roles of solid preferences versus contextual issues in Kazakhstan.

Show that despite statements that care is not needed for children under 3, preferences for in-home parental care are not the dominant explanation.

Many would take up employment with adequate care, even if child <1

Other factors, including opportunity costs of foregone wages and financial need seem unimportant in this decision, but poor labor market options may play a role.

Likely impact of expanded care less for children <1 while paid maternity leave.

Lack of trust in quality.

