



Telephone Survey of Early Learning and Childcare Needs of Parents who Work Atypical Hours or Live in Rural Communities

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Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



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Tuaithe
Our Rural
Future



Context



First 5 (2018) is a whole-of-Government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families. The First 5 Implementation Plan (2019) outlines a commitment to ‘undertake research on the early learning and care and school-age childcare¹ needs of parents who work atypical hours or live in rural communities and develop recommendations for further actions’. This commitment is also shared in the Department of Rural and Community Development’s (DRCD) Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy, 2021-2025.

To fulfil this commitment, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) conducted a multi-phase research project. The project was overseen by a Project Oversight Group with membership from DCEDIY, DCRD, Department of Trade, Enterprise and Employment, and the Irish Government Economic and Evaluations Service.

Objective: To assess the early learning and childcare needs of parents who work atypical hours or live in rural communities.

This report focuses on the quantitative component of the research: A telephone survey of early learning and childcare needs of parents who work atypical hours or live in rural communities.

Qualitative Component

Focus groups and interviews with parents who work atypical hours or live in rural communities

Quantitative Component

Nationally representative telephone survey of over 500 households with children aged under 15 years

Summary Report

Summary of combined research findings to inform policy development

Figure 1. Research phases

¹ Referred to hereafter as early learning and childcare where appropriate

Methodology



A telephone survey was conducted by IPSOS MBRI between the 20 and 29 January 2022.

588 parents/guardians of children aged 15 years or under were recruited to take part in the survey through Random Digit Dialling (RDD). Quota controls by age of child in the household were used to ensure representativeness of the sample. Surveys were administered through the use of Computer Aided Telephone Interviewing (CATI).

The survey took approximately 15 minutes to complete and consisted of 17 questions relating to the socio-demographic characteristics of the household as well as childcare usage and experiences.

Analysis: Chi-square tests were used to examine differences in early learning and childcare experiences across groups.

In order to address the research objective this study component focused on the following questions:

- Which of these apply to your pattern of work, either your main job or any other jobs you may work?
- Which one of these best describes the area you live in?
- Who typically looks after your child during the week?
- What are the most important reasons for choosing this type(s) of childcare arrangement?
- How satisfied are you with this arrangement?
- Have you faced any difficulties in arranging childcare?
- What difficulties have you faced in arranging childcare?

Definitions



Parents living in rural communities:

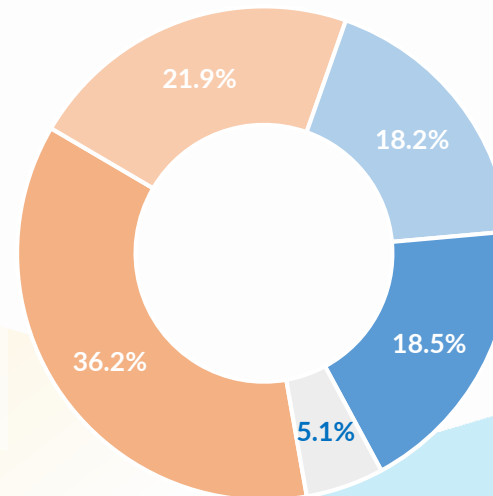
Parents/guardians with children under 15 who live in geographical areas of low population density, including outside towns and cities, and may include Gaeltacht and island communities. CSO (2016) defines a rural area as an area with a population of less than 1,500 persons. Respondents in this research were categorised as rural if they reported that the area where they live was rural, which included villages and highly rural/remote areas.

Parents who work atypical hours:

Parents/guardians with children under 15 who are employed and whose work patterns consist of shift work, evening work, night work, or work on a Saturday or Sunday. Respondents in this research were categorised as atypical if they reported that one or more caregivers in the household do not work typical hours 4 or 5 days in a week.

Survey respondents were categorised according to the above definitions as follows:

- Parents in urban areas working typical hours
- Parents in urban areas working atypical hours
- Parents in rural areas working typical hours
- Parents in rural areas working atypical hours
- Excluded



Note: 30 (5.1%) respondents were excluded from the analysis as they did not fit the working atypical/typical hours criteria as no caregiver in the household was currently in paid employment

Respondent Characteristics

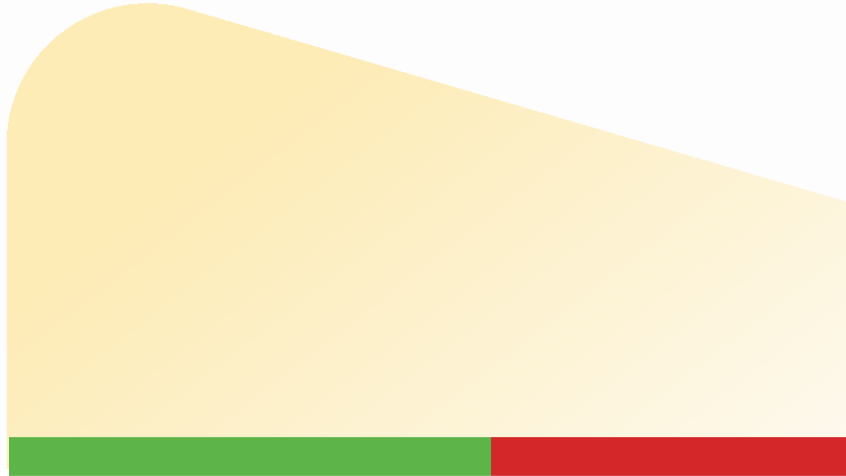


The final sample consisted of 558 parents where at least one caregiver in the household was currently in paid employment. Just over half of responding caregivers in the final sample were female (50%), 66% were working full-time, and the vast majority (92%) were living in two-parent households.

Approximately one-third (34%) had a pre-primary school child(ren) in the household and 86% had a school-age child(ren) living in the household.

Approximately 21% had both a pre-primary and school-age child(ren) in the household.

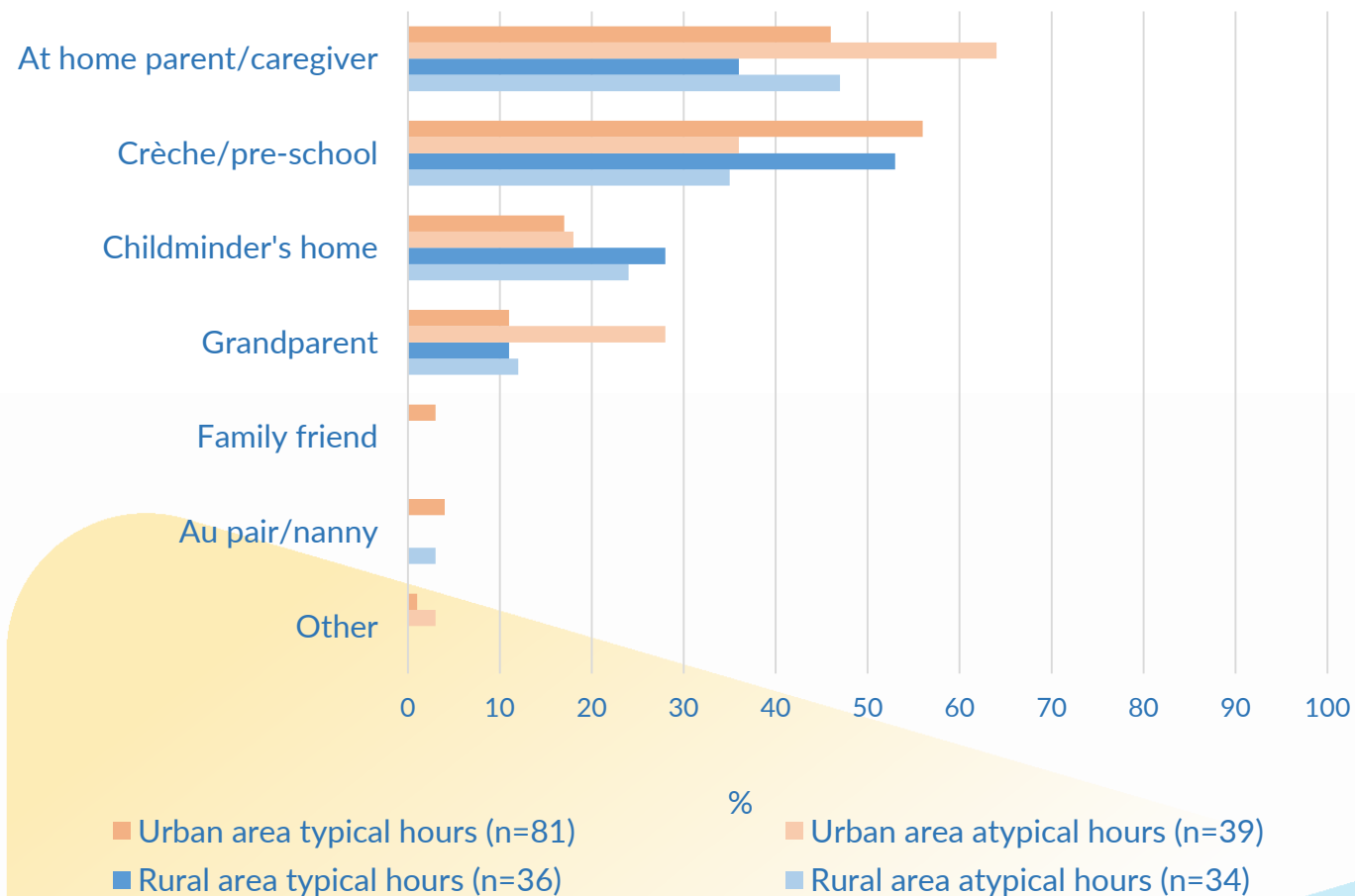
Characteristics of responding parent	URBAN AREA		RURAL AREA	
	Typical Hours (n=213) %	Atypical Hours (n=129) %	Typical Hours (n=107) %	Atypical Hours (n=109) %
Gender				
Male	46.9	52.7	47.7	51.4
Female	52.6	46.5	52.3	48.6
Prefer not to say	0.5	0.8	0.0	0.0
Working Status				
Full-time	77.0	64.3	64.5	47.7
Part-time	6.6	14.0	8.4	13.8
Self-employed	4.7	13.2	14.0	27.5
In education or training	0.9	0.8	0.0	0.0
Not in employment education or training	10.8	7.8	13.1	11.0
Two-parent household (yes)	86.9	96.1	89.7	97.2
Pre-primary child in household (yes)	38.0	30.2	33.6	31.2
School-age child in household (yes)	84.5	84.5	92.5	86.2



Pre-Primary School Children



Early learning and care arrangements



Approximately one third (32%) of parents reported typically using more than one type of early learning and care arrangement for their preschool child(ren). The most common combination reported was at home by parent/caregiver and crèche/preschool, with 11% of all parents in the sample using this combination.

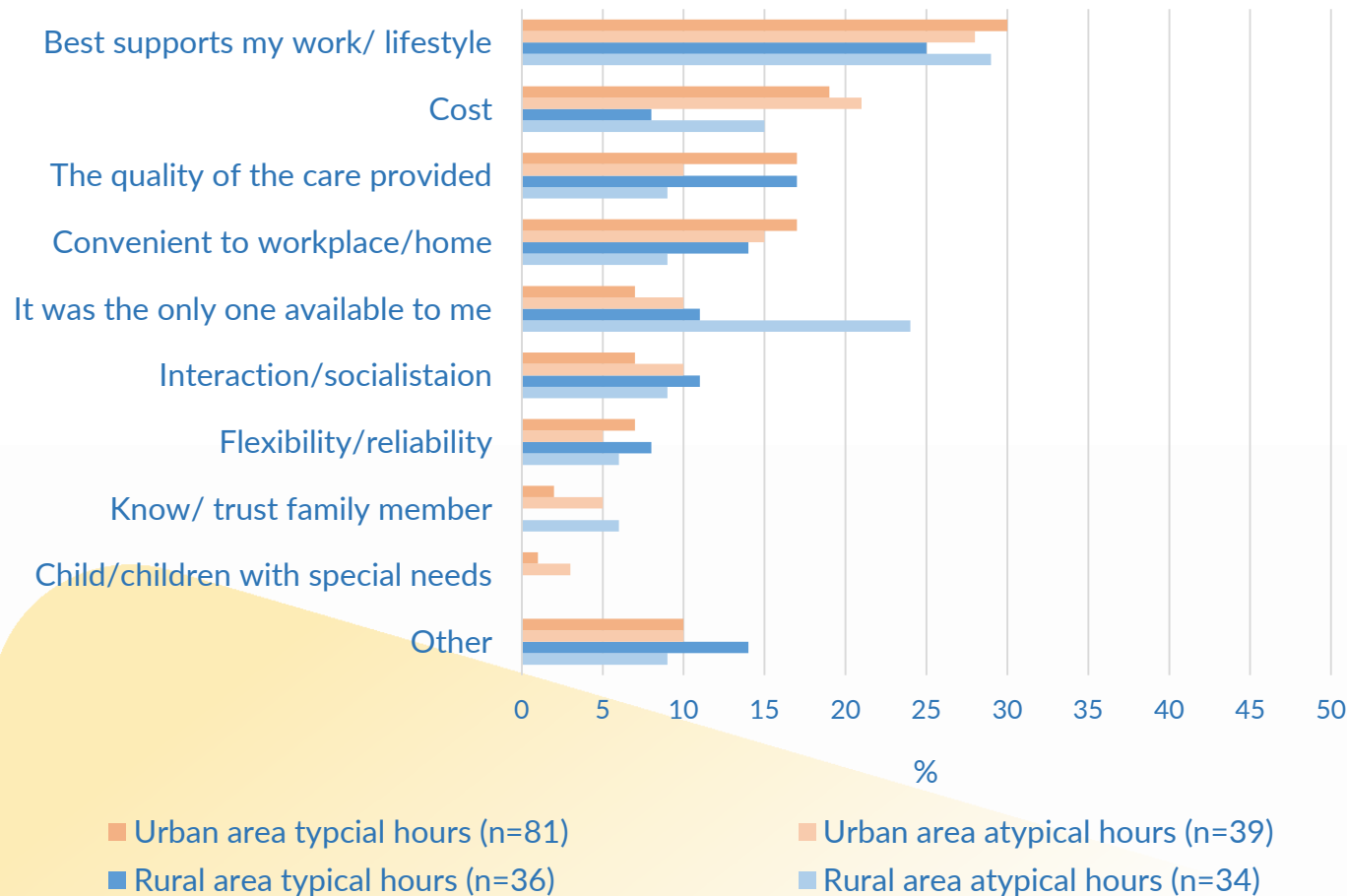
Among parents where at least one caregiver was working atypical hours, the most common arrangement for pre-primary school children was at home with a parent/caregiver. Whereas, for those working typical hours, the most common arrangement was crèche/preschool. Use of childminders was more common among parents in rural areas than among parents in urban areas. Finally, compared to all the other groups, parents in urban areas working atypical hours reported the highest usage of at home parent/caregiver and grandparent care.

Despite differing patterns of usage across groups, there was no statistically significant association between group and early learning and care arrangements.

Pre-Primary School Children



Main reason for chosen arrangement



Among all parents with pre-primary school children, best supporting work/lifestyle was the most common reason for their chosen pre-primary school early learning and care arrangement.

Nearly a quarter of parents in rural areas working atypical hours reported that their chosen arrangement was the only one available to them compared to 8% on average among other groups. A lower proportion of parents in rural areas working typical hours (8%) reported cost as the main reason for their chosen arrangement compared to 15% of rural atypical parents, 19% of urban typical parents and 21% of urban atypical parents. However, despite these apparent differences there was no statistically significant association between group and main reason for choosing a given early learning and care arrangement.

Other includes: Covid related, best for child, other child goes there, linked to my job and child too young

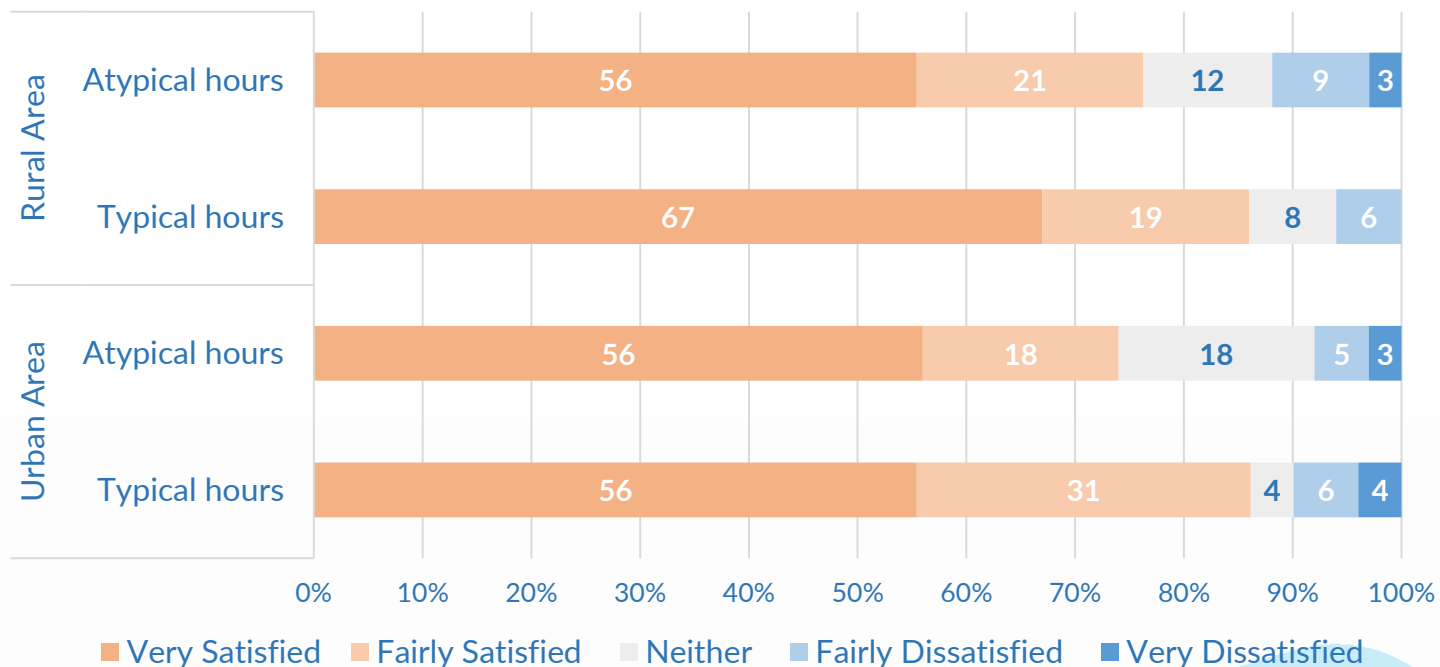
Pre-Primary School Children



Overall, satisfaction ratings were high, 82% of respondents reported being fairly or very satisfied with the early learning and care arrangements for their pre-primary school children.

Rates of satisfaction were highest among parents in rural and urban areas working typical hours (86-87%). Whereas they were lowest among parents in urban areas working atypical hours (74%). However, there was no statistically significant association between group and satisfaction with early learning and care arrangements.

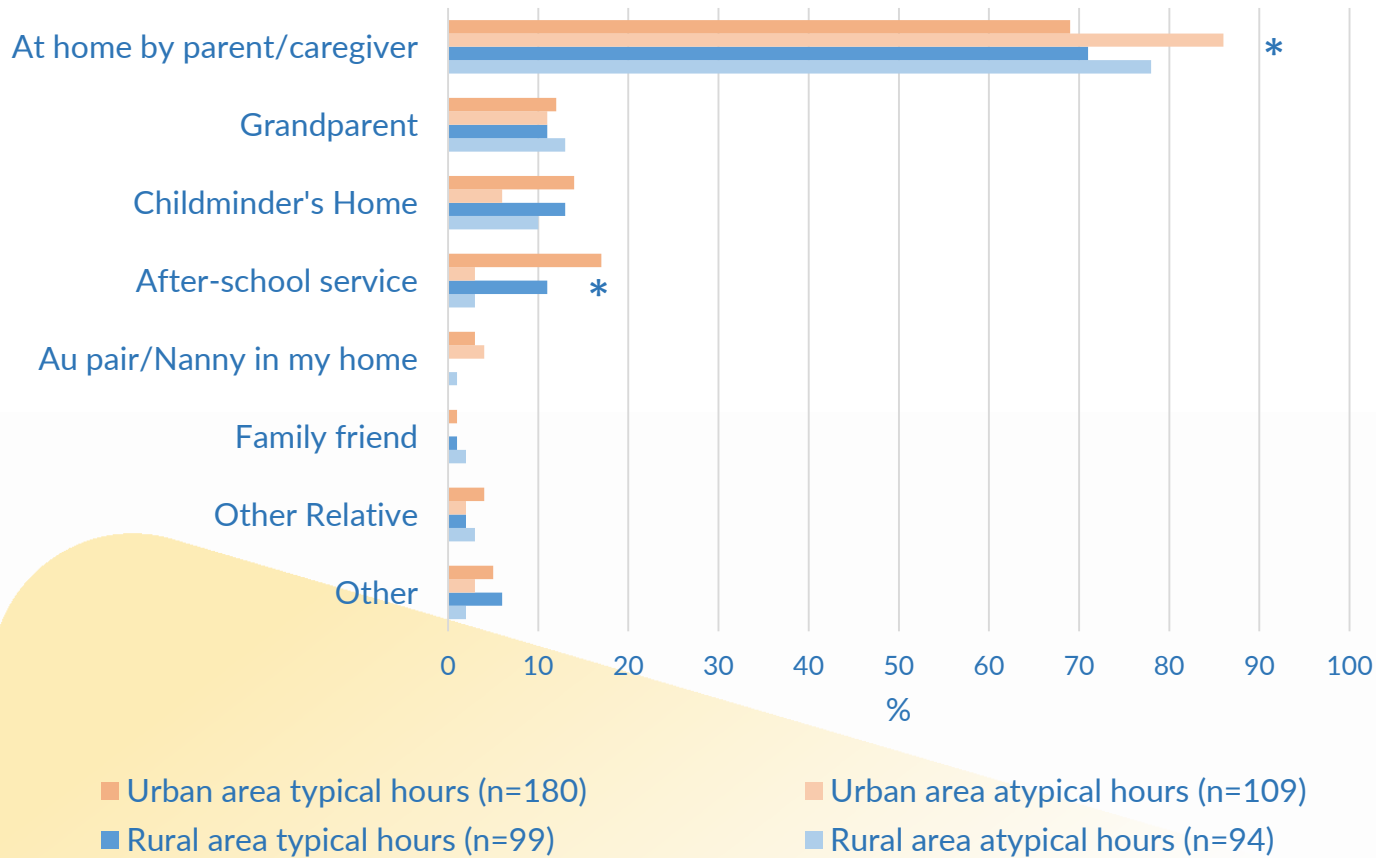
Satisfaction with early learning and care arrangements



School-Age Children



School-age childcare arrangements



*Denotes statistically significant difference $p < .05$

Across all of the groups, the most common school-age childcare arrangement was care at home by a parent/caregiver (75%).

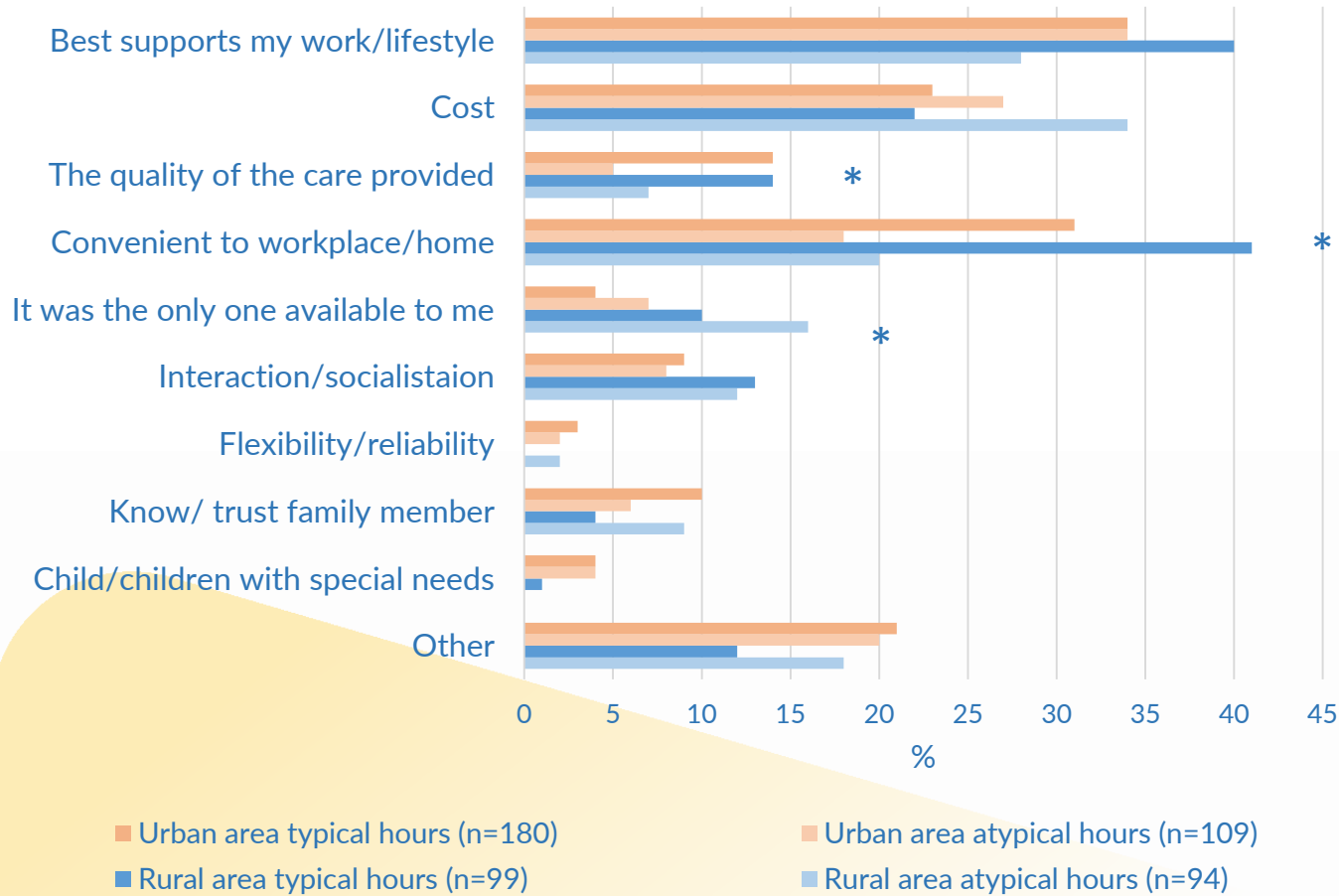
Less than one fifth (17%) of parents reported using multiple school-age childcare arrangements. The most common combination of school-age childcare arrangements was at home by parent/caregiver and grandparent, with 5% of all parents in the sample reporting this combination.

When compared to parents in urban areas working typical hours, all other parents were less likely to use an afterschool service. Parents in urban areas working atypical hours were also more likely to use care at home by a parent/caregiver than parents in urban areas working typical hours. These differences were statistically significant.

School-Age Children



Main reason for chosen arrangement



Parents living in urban areas were most likely to report choosing their main school-age childcare arrangement based on it best supporting their work/lifestyle. Among parents in rural areas working typical hours their decision was most commonly based on convenience to their workplace/home followed closely by best supporting their work/lifestyle. Whereas parents in urban areas working atypical hours were most likely to choose based on cost.

Compared to parents in urban and rural areas working typical hours, parents in urban areas working atypical hours were less likely to choose based on quality of care. Parents in rural areas working typical hours were more likely to choose based on convenience to their workplace or home compared to parents in urban and rural areas working atypical hours. Finally, compared to parents in urban areas working typical hours all other groups were more likely to report that it was the only one available. Parents in rural areas working atypical hours were also more likely than parents in rural areas working typical hours to choose their school-age childcare arrangement because it was the only one available. These differences were statistically significant.

Other includes: child is too young, interaction/socialisation, linked to my job and Covid related

*Denotes statistically significant difference $p < .05$



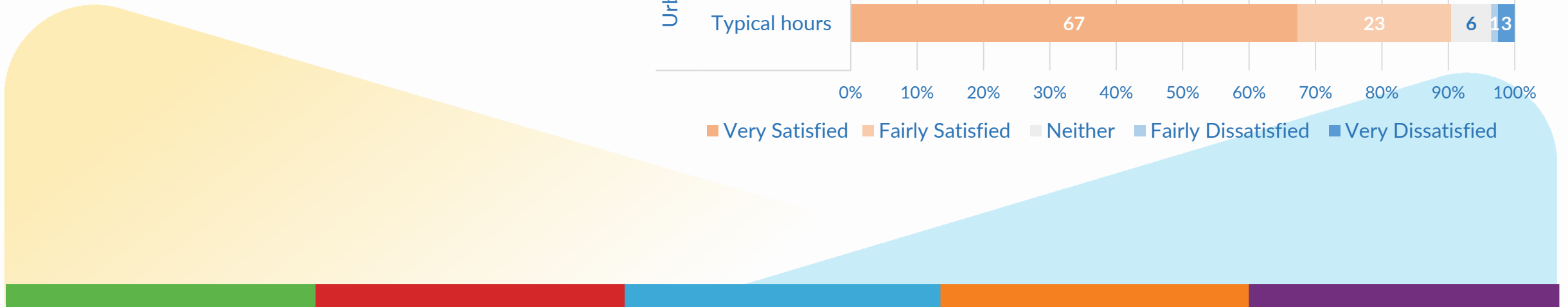
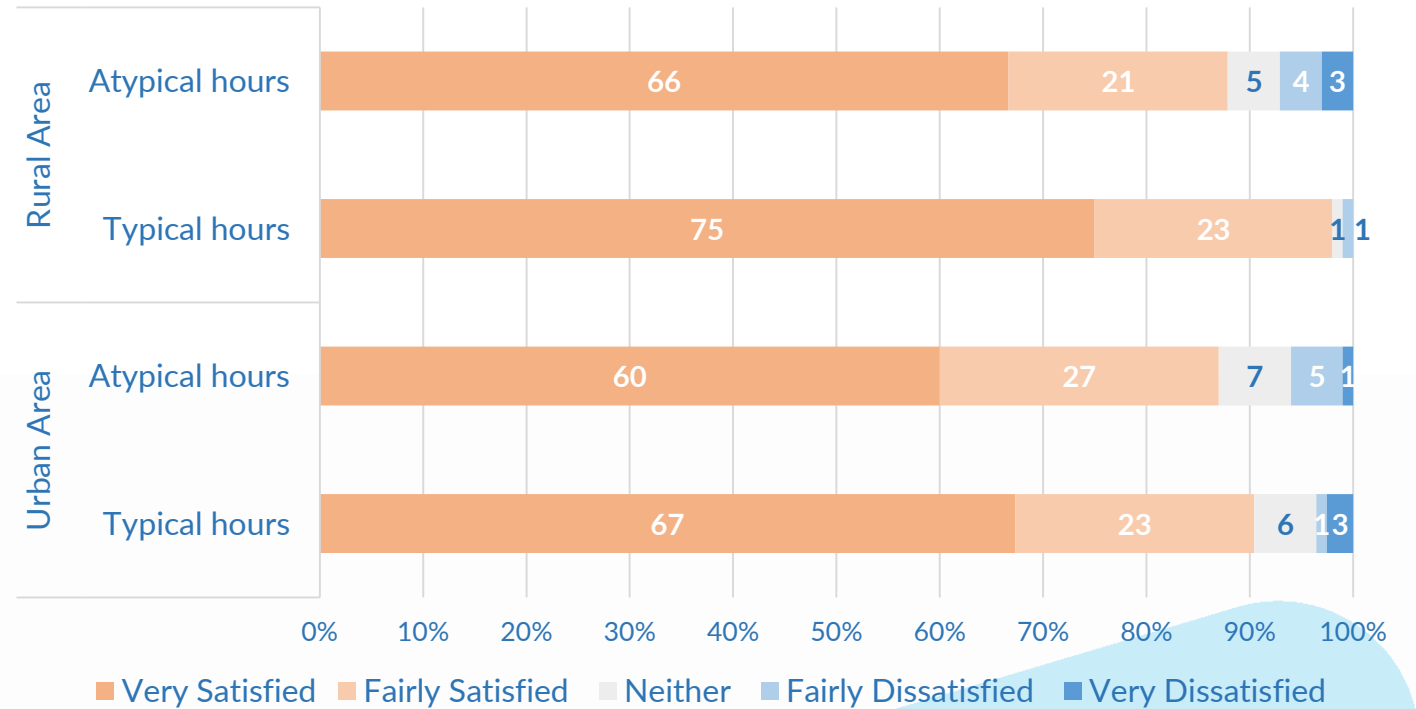
School-Age Children



Overall, satisfaction ratings for school-age childcare were very high. Most respondents (91%) reported being fairly or very satisfied with their school-age childcare arrangements.

Parents in rural areas working typical hours reported the highest rates of satisfaction (98%), whereas parents in urban and rural areas working atypical hours reported the lowest rates (87%). However, there was no statistically significant association between group and satisfaction with school-age childcare arrangements.

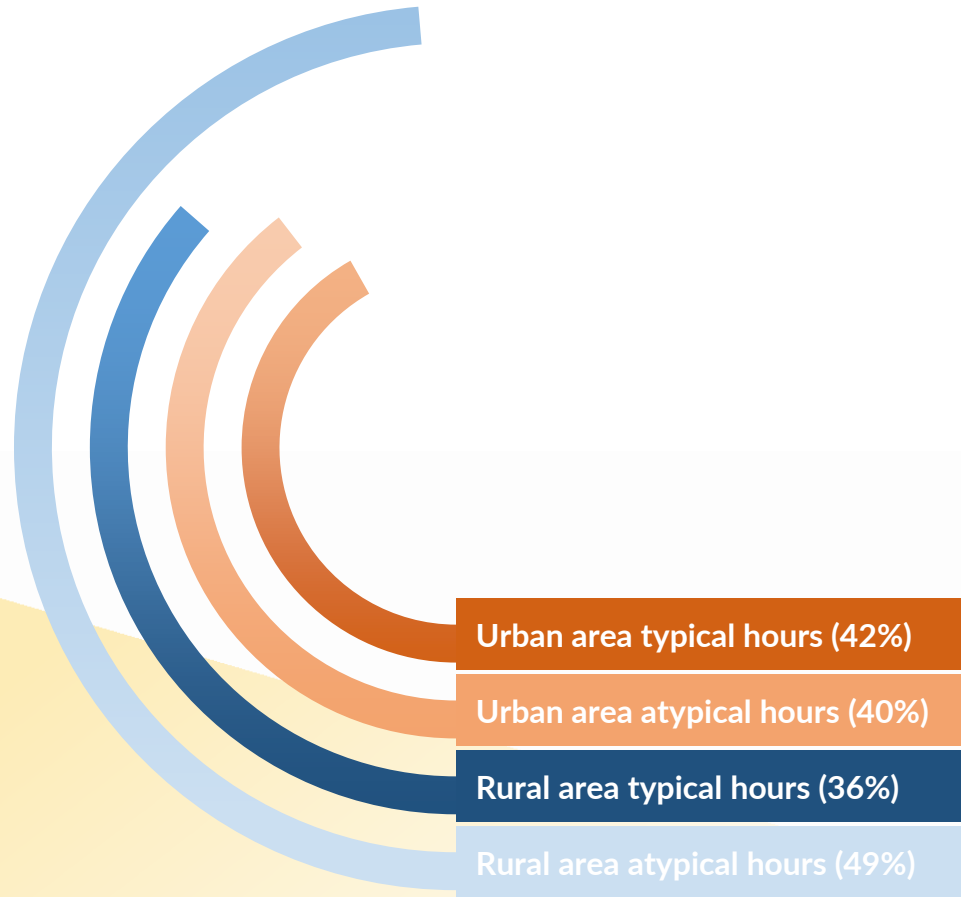
Satisfaction with school-age childcare arrangements



Pre-Primary and/or School-Age Children



Experienced at least one difficulty arranging early learning and childcare

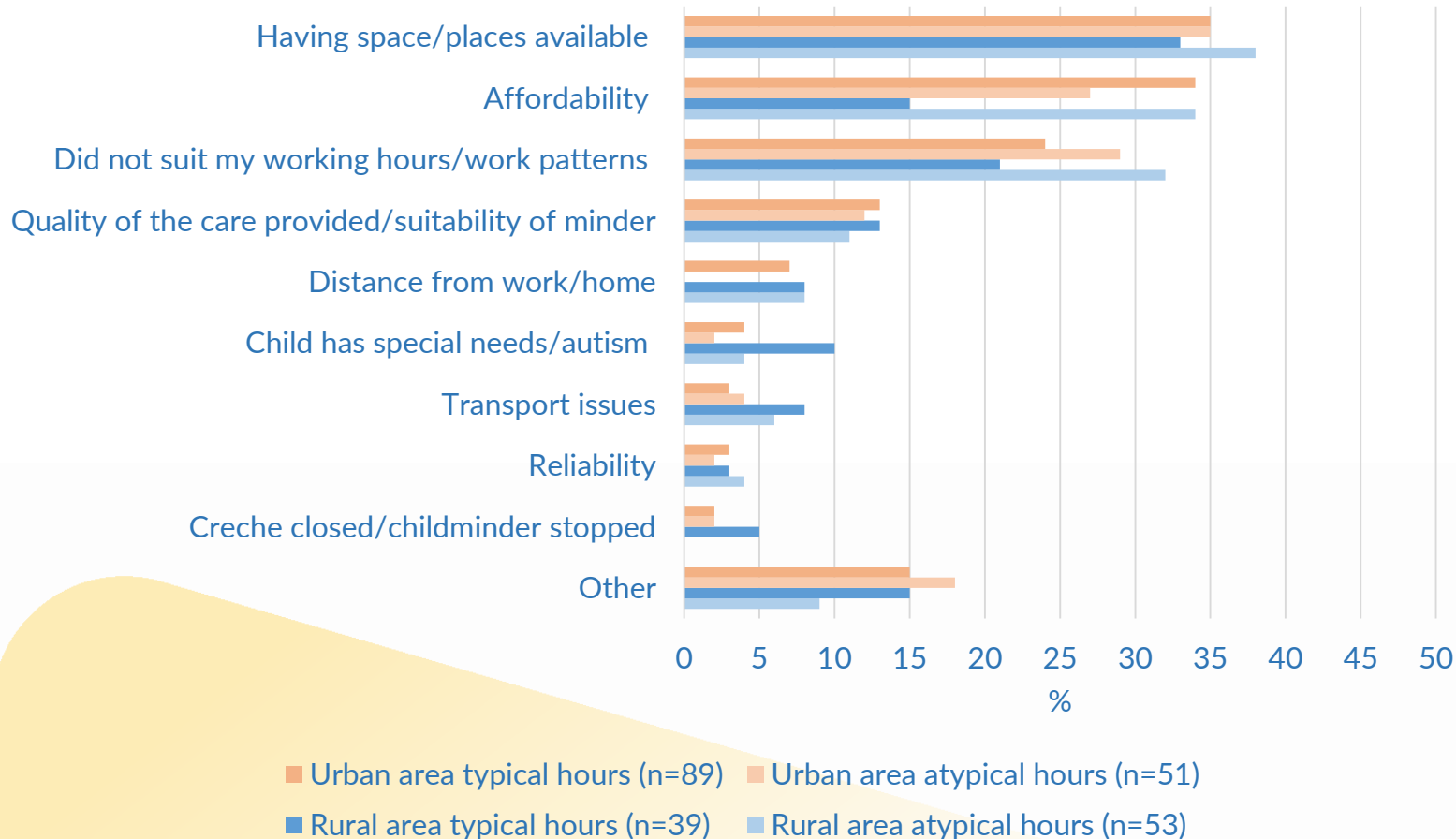


Overall, 42% of parents reported that they had faced difficulties in arranging early learning and childcare. Parents in rural areas working atypical hours were most likely to report experiencing a difficulty (49%), whereas parents in urban areas working atypical hours were least likely to report experiencing a difficulty (40%). However, there was no statistically significant association between group and experiencing difficulty in arranging early learning and childcare.

Pre-Primary and/or School-Age Children



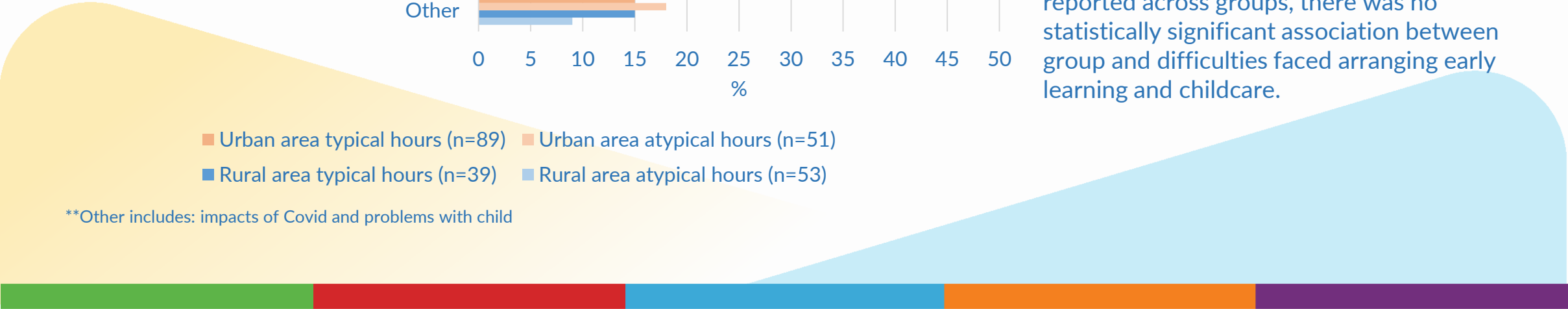
Difficulties faced arranging early learning and childcare



For those who reported having difficulty arranging early learning and childcare, the most common difficulty experienced across all parent groups was finding spaces/places.

Parents in rural areas working atypical hours reported the highest rates of difficulties across the three most common difficulties reported, having spaces/places available (38%), affordability (34%), and did not suit my working hours/work patterns (32%). However, despite different patterns in the difficulties reported across groups, there was no statistically significant association between group and difficulties faced arranging early learning and childcare.

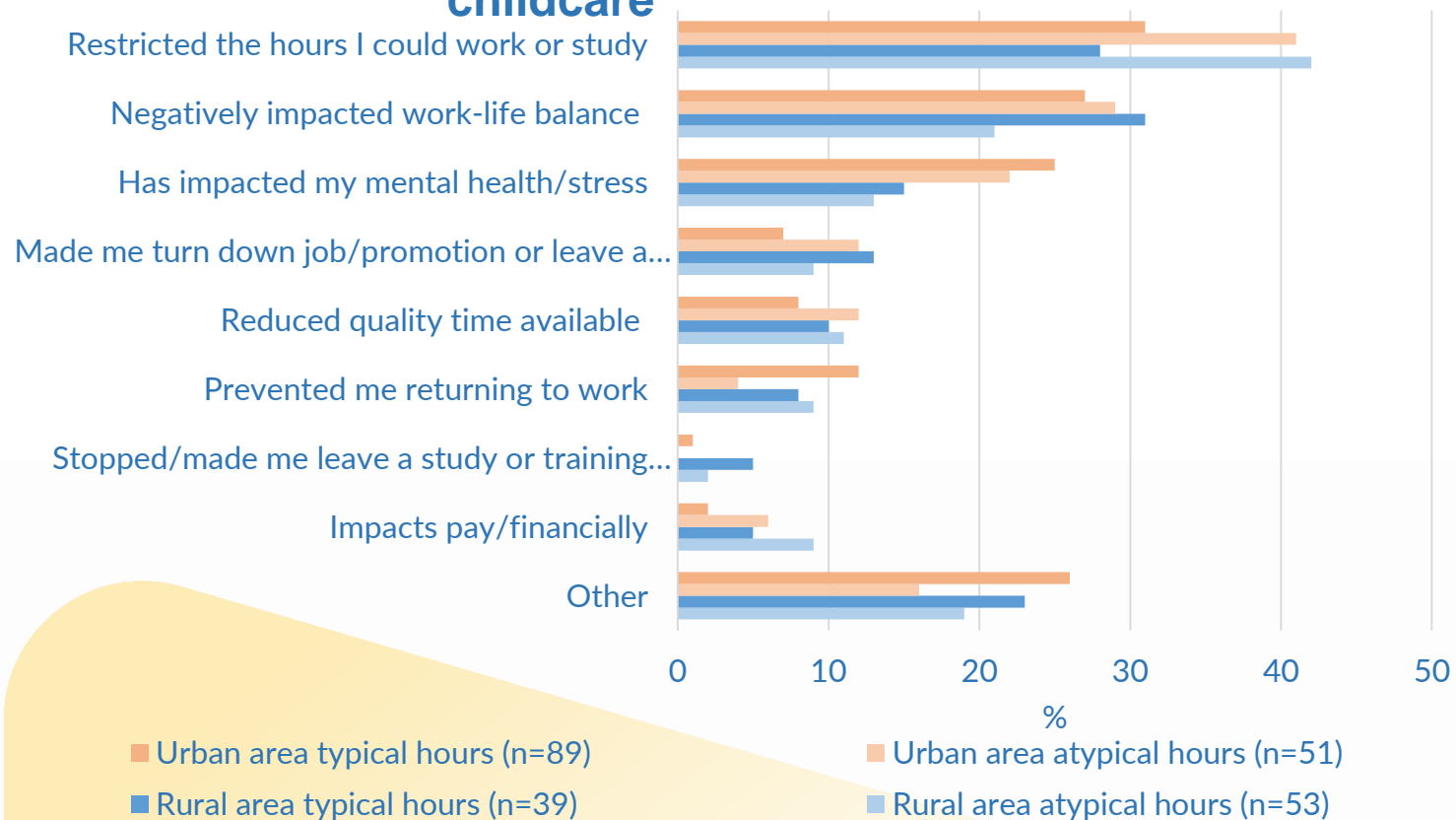
**Other includes: impacts of Covid and problems with child



Pre-Primary and/or School-Age Children



Impact of difficulties arranging early learning and childcare

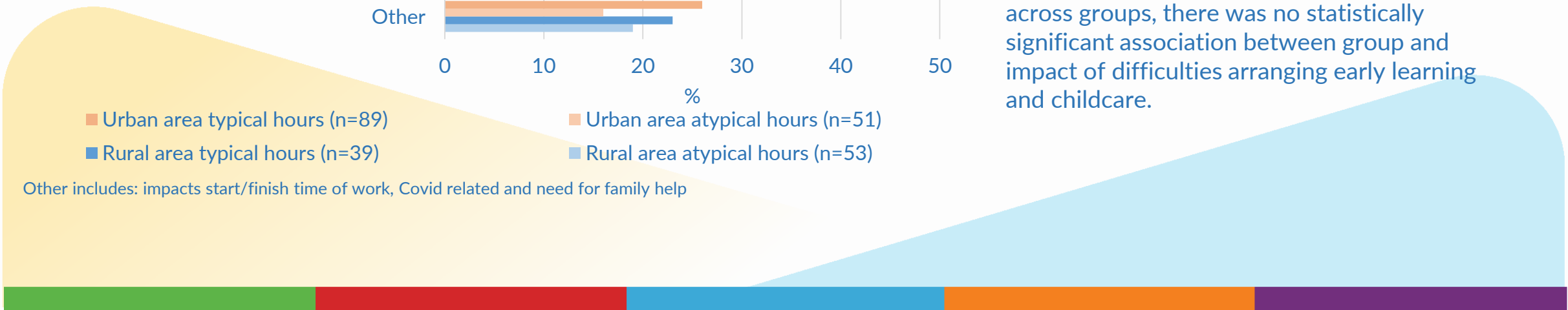


For those who reported having difficulty arranging early learning and childcare, 9% reported that the difficulties they experienced impacted on some area of their lives.

For parents in rural areas working typical hours, the most common impact was a negative impact on work-life balance. For all other parents, and particularly so for parents in urban and rural areas working atypical hours, the most common impact was being restricted in the hours they could work or study.

Despite different patterns of impact reported across groups, there was no statistically significant association between group and impact of difficulties arranging early learning and childcare.

Other includes: impacts start/finish time of work, Covid related and need for family help



Findings & Discussion



Overall, the results suggest broadly similar early learning and childcare experiences across groups. Across all parent groups, rates of satisfaction were high and less than half of all groups reported having experienced a difficulty in arranging early learning and childcare. For those that did encounter difficulties, access was the most common difficulty reported across all groups. This suggests a wider issue with regards to access to early learning and childcare places than anything specific to location or working hours.

There were several statistically significant differences between the groups in their school-age childcare arrangements. These findings suggest higher usage of at home parent/caregiver care among those working atypical hours and limited availability of school-age childcare particularly for those who live rurally and work atypical hours. While they were not statistically significant, there were also some differences between the groups in their arrangements and the difficulties they faced arranging early learning and care for their preschool children. Notably, these differences reflected similar patterns of higher levels of parent/caregiver care among those working atypical hours and limited availability of early learning and care particularly for rural atypical families. Collectively, these results reflect possible limitations in access to formal centre-based services during atypical hours and a lower supply of early learning and childcare options in rural areas.

These findings provide some insight into the early learning and childcare experiences of parents living in rural areas and those working atypical hours. While they highlight the relative similarity in experience across parent groups, they also indicate potential compounding of issues for those who live rurally and also work atypical hours. It is important to note that the data was collected while some Covid-19 restrictions in education settings were still in place, which may have influenced responses, particularly relating to difficulties faced in arranging early learning and childcare. There may also be other aspects of parents' early learning and childcare experiences that differ by location and working hours which were not captured in this piece of research. These factors should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results.

References



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