

A Study on the Demand for Childcare Services by Parents of Infants and Young Children Aged 0-3: A Case Study of Fuzhou City

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Abstract: In recent years, with the acceleration of population aging and the decline in birth rate in China, the “two child” and “three child” policies have been implemented successively, and the childcare service industry for infants and young children aged 0-3 has developed rapidly and the demand has increased. However, as an “emerging industry”, from the current perspective, the development of 0-3 year old children’s daycare work in Fuzhou is unbalanced, and public daycare facilities are not perfect, resulting in uneven service quality, and the problems of expensive and difficult daycare need to be further solved. This study surveyed 90 parents of 0-3 year old children in Fuzhou and found that the demand for childcare services among parents of 0-3 year old children is related to factors such as the situation of the children, family structure, and parents’ willingness to take care of them. Based on the results, the following strategies and suggestions are proposed: 1. Provide diversified and HP based childcare services; 2. Parents should have a correct understanding of childcare services and establish a scientific parenting perspective; 3. Childcare institutions should strengthen the construction of environmental facilities and standardize service standards.

Keywords: 0-3 year old infants and young children; Parental needs; Childcare services

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background

In recent years, the number of newborns born in China has shown a significant downward trend. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the number of newborns in China has been decreasing year by year since 2016. By 2022, the number of newborns will only be 9.56 million, the lowest since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, and the first time since 1950 that the annual birth rate has fallen below the 10 million mark. This phenomenon has attracted widespread attention and concern, and China is facing challenges such as reduced labor supply and increased pressure on elderly care. In order to mitigate the crisis caused by China’s aging population, the government actively responded to the aging phenomenon and implemented the “universal two child” policy in 2016. During the 14th Five Year Plan period, the family planning policy was adjusted from “universal two child” to “three child”. The new birth policy aims to promote population development strategies and reflect new changes in family rearing concepts. Although young parents are concerned about having a “second child” or “third child” due to factors such as life pressure, time companionship, and limited freedom, this situation has promoted the emergence and development of the childcare service industry, making it an important consideration factor in family fertility decisions and promoting more families to achieve a balance between work and parenting. And currently, the country is also extremely concerned about this. In the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, it was proposed that in the key tasks of people’s livelihood, the childcare service system will become the primary industry for “early childhood education”. Therefore, in recent years, China has attached great importance to the issue of childcare for infants and young children aged 0-3, listing it as one of the seven key tasks and promoting and improving it.

1.2 Research significance

1.2.1 Theoretical significance

With the development of scientific research and the deepening of cognition, young people are paying more and more attention to early education for infants and young children aged 0-3. This period is a critical and plastic period for the growth and development of infants and young children’s brains. Providing appropriate intervention can promote normal brain development in infants and young children, and have a positive impact on their mental health, thinking, and language in the later stages. The needs of parents are the value reference for childcare services. Currently, research on childcare services for infants and young children aged 0-3 in China is still insufficient. Starting from the historical experience and current situation of childcare services, combined with the actual situation in Fuzhou, this study aims to provide theoretical basis for the development of childcare services and meet the needs of parents and infants.

1.2.2 Practical significance

From a temporal perspective, the urgent need of parents for childcare services is aimed at optimizing infant care and promoting healthy growth. By analyzing the needs of parents in depth, we can improve the quality of childcare services in a targeted manner, while helping parents establish a scientific parenting concept to ensure that infants and young children receive good early education.

1.3 Difficulties in childcare services

China’s childcare service system started relatively late. As of the end of 2021, inclusive childcare in China accounted for about 0.2%. Currently, childcare services for infants and young children aged 0-3 in China are mainly based on family upbringing, facing the challenge of supply-demand imbalance. There are many private institutions with uneven quality and insufficient public facilities, making it difficult to meet the needs of parents. Therefore, while strengthening the childcare function of childcare services, attention should be paid to the

development needs of infants and young children, and parents should be guided to form a scientific parenting concept to promote the healthy development of childcare services.

2 Research Design

2.1 Research Object

Parents of infants and young children aged 0-3 in Fuzhou city.

2.2 Research Methods

2.2.1 Literature analysis method

This survey is mainly based on the research purpose, collecting a large amount of literature and related materials, and finding suitable research methods in the process of studying related issues. On the basis of conducting data comparison and analysis, and fully understanding the research methods and achievements of other scholars, this paper analyzes the current situation and problems of childcare for infants and young children aged 0-3 in China, and provides strong material support for further research on papers and topics.

2.2.2 Questionnaire survey method

There are great advantages in collecting data. In the process of this research project, a parent survey questionnaire titled "Survey on Parents' Needs for 0-3 Year Old Infant and Child Care Services" was developed to collect and organize data to obtain basic family information and the needs of parents for childcare services, and to understand the practical requirements of parents for childcare services.

2.3 Research Tools

questionnaire.

3 Results and Analysis

3.1 Infant and Child Conditions

The survey found that infants and young children aged 0-1 accounted for 14.4%, infants and young children aged 1-2 accounted for 21.1%, infants and young children aged 2-3 accounted for 64.4%, only children accounted for 57.8%, boys accounted for 56.7%, and girls accounted for 43.3%.

3.2 Family situation

Currently, the main caregivers for infants and young children aged 0-3 are young parents aged 26-35, who generally have a higher level of education and a wide range of occupations. The family structure is mainly composed of nuclear families, with a large proportion of middle-income families. Parents invest more time in companionship, and the caregivers are mostly healthy grandparents.

3.3 Parents' willingness to provide childcare services

3.3.1 Necessity of enrolling in daycare

It is necessary to enroll in daycare: 34.4% of parents believe that enrolling in daycare is necessary. These parents may believe that sending their children to daycare institutions is a suitable choice due to their busy work schedules and their desire for their children to receive collective education earlier.

3.3.2 Reasons for unnecessary enrollment in daycare

3.3.2.1 There are no relevant daycare institutions nearby: 12.2% of parents reported that there are no suitable daycare institutions nearby, which makes it difficult for them to send their children to daycare services. This indicates that in some regions, the distribution and number of childcare institutions may need to be further increased.

3.3.2.2 Entrusting others with care: 13.3% of parents express unease about entrusting their children to others for care. This may involve concerns about the quality of childcare services, child safety, health, and other aspects.

3.3.2.3 The cost of childcare institutions is too high: 15.6% of parents believe that the cost of childcare institutions is too high. This indicates that the price of childcare services may be an important factor influencing parents' choices.

3.3.2.4 Inadequate teaching staff and supervision: 11.1% of parents express concerns about the teaching staff level and supervision management of childcare institutions. (5) The education effect of infants and young children aged 0-3 is not good: 7.8% of parents believe that the education effect of infants and young children aged 0-3 in daycare institutions is not ideal. They may be more inclined to educate their children themselves or choose other forms of education.

3.3.2.5 Having sufficient time and good educational philosophy: 5.6% of parents stated that they have enough time and good educational philosophy to personally educate their children and do not need to send them to daycare institutions.

Data analysis shows that parents have diverse attitudes towards enrolling infants and young children in daycare. In order to comprehensively meet the needs of parents, the government and society should work together to increase the number of childcare institutions, improve service quality, reduce costs, strengthen supervision, and promote scientific parenting concepts to promote the optimization and development of childcare services.

During the process of distributing and collecting questionnaires, data analysis methods were used to analyze and investigate the current demand status of parents of 0-3 year old infant and toddler care services in Fuzhou City. The following conclusions were drawn:

The "second child" and "third child" birth policies have promoted the demand for childcare services for parents of infants and young children aged 0-3 in Fuzhou city; Factors such as parental income, number of children, maternal education level, guardian occupation, and

monthly income all have a significant impact on childcare demand. (Providing diversified childcare services)

Currently, parents of infants and young children aged 0-3 have a weak willingness to choose childcare services, and their understanding and importance of childcare services are limited. When choosing services, they mainly focus on factors such as childcare business capabilities, prices, and institutional distance, and make requirements for the professionalism, teacher quality, and home care interaction of childcare institutions. To enhance parents' awareness and trust in childcare services, it is necessary to strengthen publicity and education, improve service quality, enhance communication and cooperation between parents and institutions, and consider family culture and social background to jointly promote the healthy growth of infants and young children.

There is also a shortage of public childcare facilities, and childcare services face difficulties and high costs. Parents have reservations about enrolling infants and young children aged 0-3 in daycare. To this end, childcare service institutions need to strengthen their service functions, including establishing scientific parenting concepts and cooperation mechanisms with parents, optimizing environmental construction in ordinary and special childcare services, and providing rich activity materials to ensure the healthy development of childcare services.

4 Countermeasures and Suggestions

4.1 Provide diversified and inclusive childcare services

Developing a comprehensive childcare service mechanism is a prerequisite for implementing fertility support policies and an effective measure for building grassroots livelihood projects and improving people's quality of life. Childcare institutions should try their best to meet the essential demands of parents of infants and young children, and truly play the role of childcare. During the research process, a differentiated analysis was conducted based on the different needs of parents for childcare services, and it was found that factors such as parental income, number of children, and guardian occupation all have a significant impact on childcare needs. From the overall requirements and various dimensional needs of parents for childcare services, it can be seen that parents have a characteristic of universality and particularity in childcare services. On this basis, parents demand that universality be popularized and particularity be popularized, and individual childcare should be carried out according to the different conditions of children and families. The government should also establish community-based and inclusive childcare institutions, promote the development of childcare services towards community-based direction, do a good job in the construction of childcare service infrastructure, meet the childcare needs of different families, and allow parents with childcare needs to choose childcare sites that meet their own affordability based on factors such as family income and distance of delivery.

4.2 Parents have a correct understanding of childcare services and establish a scientific parenting concept

Through investigation, it was found that many parents do not have sufficient understanding of the growth of infants and young children aged 0-3. Some experts and scholars have pointed out in the process of studying early childhood education that the potential abilities possessed by children exhibit a decreasing law. If ideal education is provided to infants and young children from birth, more than 90% of their potential abilities can be excavated. Education and potential can only reach about 80% from the age of 5, and potential can only be excavated to 60% at the age of 10. In other words, the younger the potential abilities of infants and young children are excavated, the more ideal they will be. Rational and scientific childcare services should be evaluated and analyzed from an objective perspective based on good quality rather than expensive quality in service selection. Parents should adhere to the principle of prioritizing family childcare and supplementing with childcare institutions to avoid excessive reliance on them. In the process of childcare, parents should regard childcare institutions as partners, participate in infant and young child education together, and supervise and analyze childcare institutions from a practical perspective, in order to fully utilize the functions of childcare institutions and ensure that infants and young children grow up in high-quality education.

4.3 Nursery institutions strengthen the construction of environmental facilities and standardize service standards

The comfort and safety of the environment for the growth of infants and young children are basic needs, and the promoting effect of environmental facilities on the growth of infants and young children should be emphasized both indoors and outdoors. Children aged 0-3 are sensitive to external cognition, and a good environment is conducive to their emotional development and healthy growth. Childcare institutions in Fuzhou should combine local characteristics and comply with relevant national standards when creating an environment. In response to the current non-standard phenomenon of childcare institutions, the government should accelerate the formulation of qualification requirements and evaluation standards for childcare service institutions, establish supervision mechanisms, increase punishment for violations, in order to improve the standardization and professional level of the childcare service market, and make parents more confident in entrusting their children to childcare institutions.

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