



# Education of primary caregiver: early childhood

The proportion of primary caregivers with no qualification is dropping

**Indicator Description**

Highest qualification of primary caregivers of children aged less than five years-old.

**Why This Is Important**

The educational attainment of caregivers, especially mothers, is positively related to participation in early childhood education and later to children’s educational achievement. Parents and whānau create and provide the first environments experienced by children. These environments include the people, places, values and expectations, material things and experiences that are the contexts for children’s learning. Reciprocal and responsive relationships are first experienced in the

home, and learning in and about the language and culture of the family and whānau initially takes place in the home.

Parental education is more closely related to children’s educational outcomes than is parental income, although poverty experienced by children during the early years and particularly the period age 0-5 has a considerable impact on later outcomes for children.

Interactions between parents and children are directly linked to children’s opportunities to learn. Increasingly complex experiences and learning opportunities, accompanied by varied language, linked to children’s experiences are particularly important. Higher levels of parental education are linked to greater feelings of

parental self-efficacy that support parental involvement in early childhood education both in and out of the home.

Parents with lower levels of literacy and numeracy can more effectively support their children's learning if they have opportunities to develop their own skills. An example of this is that the mother's educational level is consistently related to whether or not children are read to by a family member, and being read to supports early language and literacy learning.

### How We Are Going

This indicator reports the highest qualification gained by a child's primary caregiver. In two parent families this is deemed to be the mother.

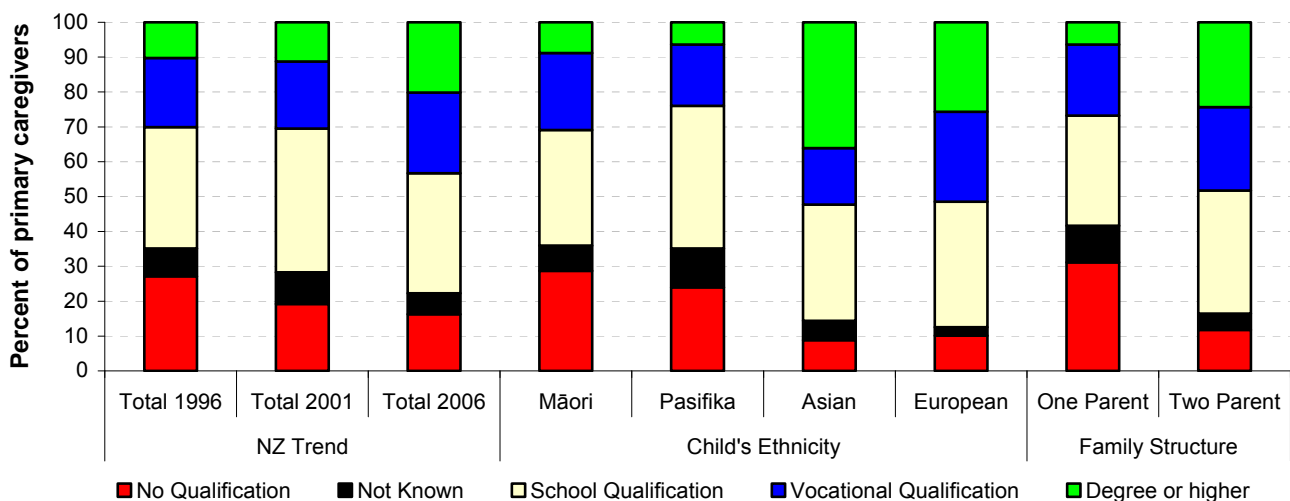
In 2006, 20% of primary caregivers of children aged less than five years-old had a qualification at degree level or higher. That is a 100% increase since 1996 when only 10% of children had parents with that level of qualification. Twenty-three percent of primary caregivers had vocational qualifications, a slight increase since 1996. The percentage of primary caregivers with a school qualification as their highest qualification has remained almost unchanged since 1996 at 34%. In 2006, 16% of primary caregivers had no qualification, a 40% reduction since 1996 (27%).

In one-parent families the proportion of primary caregivers that attained any level of qualification was lower than the primary caregiver of two parent families, particularly at degree level or higher (6% compared to 24% in two parent families). Conversely, the proportion of primary caregivers with no qualification was substantially higher in one-parent families (31%) compared to two parent families (12%).

The proportion of primary caregivers with no qualification has dropped steadily since 1996. While the situation appears to have improved for all ethnic groups, the exact extent of any change can not be gauged accurately due to inconsistencies in the data for ethnic groups between censuses.

Thirty-six percent of Asian children in 2006 had a primary caregiver with at least a degree level qualification. This compares to 26% for primary caregivers of European children. For Māori and Pasifika children, 8.8% and 6.4% of their primary caregivers respectively, had at least a degree level qualification. The opposite pattern can be observed when comparing the percentage of primary caregivers with no qualification. In 2006, primary caregivers of Māori and Pasifika children aged less than five years-old had no qualification (29% and 24% respectively). Among European (10%) and Asian (8.8%) children the proportions of primary caregivers without a qualification were considerably lower.

### Highest qualification of primary caregivers of children aged under five years-old (2006)



## Where To Find Out More

Parental education is one of a cluster of proxy indicators for family processes that contribute to a rich learning environment linked to school achievement. Other indicators to consider are:

- Education of primary caregiver: schooling.

The Ministry of Education has established an Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis Programme to systematically identify, evaluate, analyse, synthesise and make accessible, relevant evidence linked to a range of learner outcomes. Information relative to this indicator can be found in:

- The complexity of community and family influences on children's achievement in New Zealand: Best Evidence.

## References

- Biddulph, F., Biddulph, J. and Biddulph C. (2003). *The complexity of community and family influences on children's achievement in New Zealand: Best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.