

Childcare Costs Across the U.S  
Empowering Families to Make Informed Relocation Decisions

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## **Summary of Analysis**

This project analyzes childcare costs across U.S. counties using the National Database of Childcare Prices. By examining data from 2008 to 2021, the goal was to identify regional disparities, cost trends, and affordability indicators for families planning relocations. These insights are shared through a combination of mediums, including an interactive dashboard, infographic, relocation guide, and an engaging social media reel. The project's ultimate goal is to be a resource and help parents make informed decisions when considering childcare costs in a new state (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).

## **Findings**

Childcare costs vary significantly by state, demonstrating the importance of geographic considerations for families. For instance, in states like Massachusetts and New York, infant care costs often exceed \$200 per week, whereas states such as Mississippi and South Dakota average under \$100 weekly. These disparities highlight the need for thorough financial planning before relocating. (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).

Over time costs have risen steadily, influenced by inflation and the demand for quality childcare. This trend highlights the need for parents to plan childcare expenses as part of their relocation budget. The most affordable states include Mississippi, South Dakota, and Kansas, while the District of Columbia and Massachusetts consistently rank among the most expensive.

## **Assumptions**

To accurately represent typical childcare expenses, the data's 75th percentile cost measures were assumed to represent typical childcare expenses accurately. Missing data at the county level was considered insignificant in its effect on state-wide trends. Cost is the primary concern for families, taking precedence over other childcare metrics like quality ratings (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).

## **Items That Still Need Clarification**

Several aspects would require additional analysis to enhance the project's effectiveness. First, understanding how state childcare subsidies affect affordability would provide a more comprehensive picture. Additionally, analyzing rural versus urban cost differences could highlight within state disparities. Lastly, incorporating quality metrics, such as childcare provider availability and ratings, would strengthen the findings of this project (Knafllic, 2015).

## **Direction of Story and Message**

The project's narrative centers on empowering families to make informed decisions about childcare costs during relocation. By using accessible mediums, the story emphasizes affordability while encouraging proactive planning. The interactive tools and visualizations aim to bridge the gap between data complexity and user understanding (Yau, 2011).

## **Target Audience**

The primary audience for this project is parents with young children who are considering relocation to a different state. Secondary audiences include community organizations, relocation specialists, and childcare providers, all of whom could benefit from the project's insights and resources.

## **Mediums and Design Decisions**

To ensure accessibility, the project employs multiple mediums. The interactive dashboard allows users to filter data by state, year, and age group (infants, toddlers, preschoolers), providing customized insights. Initially developed in Excel using slicers for dynamic filtering, the dashboard is being improved using Tableau for greater user-friendliness.

The infographic visually highlights affordability trends and costliest states through heatmaps and bar charts. Adobe Express was used to create a design that enables parents to quickly grasp key insights. The relocation guide, a downloadable resource, includes state-level cost comparisons, tips for locating affordable childcare, and a section on state subsidies. QR code embedded within the guide directs users to the interactive dashboard. This guide remains a work in progress, it is expected to serve as a valuable tool for relocating families.

A social media reel, a 30-second MP4 video created using Adobe Express, presents key statistics in a sharable format for platforms like Instagram, Facebook Reels, and TikTok. Featuring animations and key statistics, the reel ensures a wider reach for diverse

audiences. This video was fun to create and stands out as a ideal way to reach younger parents.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical data handling was a priority throughout the project. Missing values were excluded to maintain accuracy, and all transformations were documented. To prevent misrepresentation, filtered data was clearly labeled, and all visuals included legends and annotations. The dataset was obtained from the U.S. Department of Labor which ensures credibility and ethical compliance (U.S. Department of Labor, 2020).

### **Risks and Mitigations**

Several risks were addressed to ensure the reliability of the project. The primary concern was the potential for misleading representations; without careful labeling, users might misinterpret heatmaps or filtered results. To mitigate this risk, clear legends and annotations were incorporated into the visualizations. In addition data bias was considered, as the dataset primarily focuses on urban areas, which may not fully represent rural childcare costs. This limitation was acknowledged in the project's accompanying text and visuals (Yau, 2011).

### **Lessons Learned**

This project provided valuable insights into data visualization and storytelling. One area for improvement is integrating real-time data to enhance relevance and usability. Collaborating with web developers could optimize the dashboard for online platforms, making it even more accessible. I enjoyed developing the social media reel, it allowed me creativity while making the data accessible to a broader audience

## **Conclusion**

By combining visual storytelling, interactive tools, and actionable resources, this project successfully equips families with the insights needed to navigate childcare costs. The mediums work together to present data in an approachable, engaging, and ethical manner, fostering informed decision-making for parents across the U.S.

**References:**

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