

Child Care Subsidies and the Long Term Achievement of Low-Income Children

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Project Description

This research will examine the enrollment of children in CCDF subsidized providers during early childhood and the effects of these enrolments on the school achievement outcomes of children in grades third to eight. The project will first, explore how, when, where and what factors systematically influence whether low-income households enroll their children in early care and education providers receiving CCDF-funding. Second, it will study how those enrollment choices are causally related to the achievement test scores in math and reading during grades third to eighth. The project will employ a longitudinal dataset of administrative records from the city of Chicago and quasi experimental methods to mimic random assignment.

Research questions

How do children enrolled in child care purchased with CCDF subsidies during early childhood perform on standardized math and reading tests while in third to eighth grades (compared to children who did not use child care subsidies)?

Answers to the following three related subquestions will also be pursued:

- Do effects vary according to whether exposure takes place primarily in center-based child care as opposed to home-based child care? (The type of care effect.)
- Do effects vary according to whether children start their child care spells before or after the age of three years old? (The age of exposure effect.)
- Do effects vary according to whether exposure to care lasts more or less than six months? (The duration effect.)

Sample

Researchers will build a longitudinal database of linked administrative records of low-income third graders in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in the 2008–09 school year. The database will track students' math and reading scores in standardized achievement tests in third to eighth grade. Once identified, those students will be matched as belonging to Medicaid-eligible families at birth. Parents of those students will be identified, and their full history of participation in CCDF, TANF and SNAP, along with their UI wages, will be recovered. The database will retrospectively track the experiences of those children during early childhood in the CCDF program, distinguishing the types of care, ages of exposure, and the associated duration of their exposures.

Progress Update

Construction of the analytical database has already started. Specific issues or findings that we will be able to address in December 2015 at the CCPRC Annual Meeting include the research strategy and expected results.

Implications for policy/practice

Policymakers and administrators of the CCDF program (at all levels of government) face new challenges. While on the one hand there is an increasing demand for CCDF-subsidized slots, on the other hand there is a call for the program to respond to well-being outcomes across two generations. A priority for effective administration of CCDF is to find ways to improve targeting of its investments towards those families, children, and child care providers from which those investments would render the highest returns. Broadening the knowledge base documenting how exposure to child care subsidized with CCDF funds affects

the longer term development of children is a key input for completing the increasingly complex task of developing a targeted approach for the CCDF program.

Implications for research

Documenting the school achievement effects on children associated with their exposure to CCDF-subsidized child care is not only of policy importance, but it is also a scientific priority. Decades of research has shed light on how exposure to nonparental care during early childhood associates with child development. However, the field lacks of strong research evidence on how the development of children receiving nonparental care with providers that receive CCDF funds is affected by this exposure. Recent studies linking CCDF subsidy use to child developmental outcomes have produced a mix of negative and neutral. These mixed results alone are reason for additional subsidy research. No research has studies CCDF effects beyond the third grade.

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