1. Descriptive Information

B3 Instability in Early Care and Education: Causes, Consequences, and Policy Implications	Facilitator
	• Gina Adams, Urban Institute
	Presenters
Description	• Gina Adams, Urban Institute
This session examines how instability in children's early care and education (ECE) experiences intersect with other sources of instability in their lives and other family adversities. The session will begin with key findings from interviews with leading experts and a scan of prior research regarding instability in different realms of children's lives and what research and action is needed to stabilize children's lives. The second presentation examines links between Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) prior to age 3 years, instability in children's ECE, and instability in parental employment. The third presentation examines associations between interruptions in ECE and foster care placements among children involved in the Child Welfare System. The session will conclude with a rich discussion of the implications of work for research design and for policy and programs.	• Shannon Lipscomb, Oregon State University Cascades
	• Sacha Klein, Michigan State University
	Discussant
	Scribe
	• Claire Lowe, Child Trends

2. Brief Summary of Presentations

Stabilizing Children's Lives: Insights for Research and Action
Gina Adams, Urban Institute
- Background
    - Instability has been recently emerging in the research field
    - Instability is a highly complicated and interconnected problem and is usually part of a domino set of issues.
    - This research is building on previous work with the Urban Institute
    - This has lead to work looking at work at what information and research is needed to stabilize families
        - How does instability function?
        - What do we need to know about the different domains of instability
        - This work was put into several projects (paper, blogs, webpage) to summarize this work
- What is instability?
    - Instability is not necessarily bad, it can be good and even a little bit of negative instability can be good. Because of this variability, more work needs to be done thinking about the terminology and the definition of instability.
    - We need to think more about how instability relates to poverty and mobility
- There is very little information on how much instability children actually experience across different domains (such as income, employment, food insecurity). However, there is more research within these specific domains and, within these domains, instability is relatively common.
- Why should we care?
    - Instability is related to poor short and long-term child outcomes.
    - Instability makes it much less likely that programs trying to help children will succeed
    - This is a widely shared concern
- How does instability affect children's outcomes?
    - Children who are highly stressed can't learn as well so they will not have as good of child outcomes ad non-stressed children.
    - Instability can limit a child's ability to get a buffer from a parent. However, it is important to keep in mind that the parent can also be the source of instability.
    - Instability impacts access to basic resources

- o Instability limits a child's networks and, in the context of mobility, can limit the ability of helping individuals to find a child
- Instability and other factors
  - o Chronic ongoing changes are important
  - o Family and community characteristics are very important. People are starting to think about resilient communities.
  - o Collective instability is the idea that children will experience stress indirectly. For example, children living in communities of chronic violence may not directly experience the stress or fear of this violence but they experience it through the community or through a parent who experiences it.
- What should be done and where should we focus?
  - o There is no single trigger for instability. It could be a loss of a job, a snow day, a health crisis, etc. Instead of thinking about the trigger, we should think about whether there is something to stop the "domino" effect of instability. Think about: What kinds of buffers to people have access to?
  - o Every domain can be a trigger or a buffer.
  - o Some families and children are more vulnerable that others. For example, families with mental health challenges
- Future research
  - o This is a complex problem that intersects with other issues. Instability in one sphere is connected to instability in another sphere. You don't have to be involved in all spheres but you do have to be aware of all of them and their intersection. This is important for policy and is what makes cross sector work essential.
  - o There is a need to look at the web of stabilizing supports. Who has which buffers and how they work both play a role in stabilizing supports.
  - o We need to understand more about the risks and protective factors of populations. Who experiences particular trajectories? Who has access to buffer gaps or stabilizing supports? Different communities will have different buffers and supports.
  - o We need to improve the ability to measure and interpret instability. How do you think about instability in the job force? In food security? We need to do this in childcare and the income world. We need to link instability to triggers.
  - o There is so much within each domain that could be done and is being done.
  - o There is a need to bring people together from different spheres to discuss and disseminate the knowledge base. For example, people from the refugee resettlement world, the natural disaster world, the head start world, etc.
  - o The message of stabilizing families is an incredibly important one. How do you harness this as a message for building support? This is an issue that goes up the income ladder and plays out different ways.

Links Between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Instability in Early Child Care and Parental Employment
Shannon Lipscomb, Oregon State University Cascades
- Contextualize broader instability within adverse childhood experience. These pose a huge threat to child and family wellbeing. We need to think about how to leverage the ECE (Early Childhood Education) system to build resilience for children who experience adversity.
- Preview of Findings
  - o There are two main ideas. We have an important OPPORTUNITY. Families facing ACEs use ECE so there are opportunities to connect with these families in a non-stigmatizing way. However, there is a BARRIER to realizing the potential of that opportunity because families that experience more ACEs when kids are young, are experiencing more instability as it relates to ECE (missing school or quitting work)
- ACEs can include many different experiences.
- A large body of research links ACEs in the first 18 years of life to the child's mental and physical health as adults. Even when thinking about the stability of those adults' lives. A growing body of research is also showing parallel outcomes with childhood problems with behavior.
- How do we use ECE to build resilience?

- o Some research shows positive outcomes for families experiencing ACEs. It's a complicated body of literature. The success of these efforts hinge on the ability to connect with families in a sustained way.
- Instability is a barrier because ACEs are linked with instability at home
- Do families with more ACEs experience more instability related to ECE? Looked at three different indicators of instability. Looking at the total number of ACEs as well as specific indicators.
    - o Data is pulled from fragile families and child well-being study.
    - o Paralleled our measurement of ACEs with work that studies kindergarteners. All indicators were self-reported by the mother (used different measurements and scales)
- Findings
    - o Over half attended some kind of out of home care. On average, there isn't a huge amount of instability but there is a lot of variability.
    - o Barriers: Families with higher total Ace scores are experiencing more instability (more arrangement, more changes, more special arrangements) as well as more life interruptions
- Future research
    - o What supports do teachers need to work with these families?

Unstable Early Care and Education for Child Welfare-Supervised Children: Risk Factor for Foster Placement?
Sacha Klein, Michigan State University
- Out of home care means foster care (being placed and living with someone other than your family)
- Sharing findings from an observational study about instability in ECE and the risk of being placed in foster care
    - o The child welfare system sees itself as having three goals (safety, permanence, well-being) but the study in this presentation focuses on an aspect of safety.
- ECE can provide stability in stabilizing families so parents can work. ECE allows parents to go to the workforce and have a reliable income. This reduced economic stress in the family can reduce maltreatment.
- There have been a fair number of studies showing that ECE can prevent child maltreatment. However, the research on whether the stability of ECE can prevent child maltreatment in foster care is limited
- Interrupted ECE is a risk factor for maltreatment.
- This study:
    - o Was the continuity of education predictive of foster placement at wave two?
    - o ECE was defined in 3 ways
    - o Controlled for a robust number of covariates
    - o Results
        - ▪ 2 models
        - ▪ Continuous care didn't predict risk of foster placement but interrupted care did and kids that experienced interrupted care were 4x as likely to be placed in foster care
    - o Implications
        - ▪ This was an observational study so we have to be carful about the causality
        - ▪ We could be seeing that interrupted ECE may be symptomatic of unmeasured family factors that BOTH disrupt ECE and increase foster placement.
        - ▪ Pay attention to stability of ECE

Summary
Beth Meloy
- As researchers intending to inform policy and practice, we have to think about how the nature of instability impacts our ability to study it and support families through it. Think critically about the best touch-points to support families.
- In light of these questions, the real question is "what do we do about instability?" We think we know instability is a bad thing, so what can we do about it? In our silo of childcare, we should think about how to equip providers with the knowledge, supports, and linkages to support children.
- How do we equip policy makers to deal with instability given the "chicken and the egg" nature of instability. Bring people from different sectors to the same table to think about stabilizing children and families as a framework for the work they do. There is some intentionality that has to be involved in realizing where there is overlap in our mission and goals.

- What can we equip parents with in terms of their own stability. We might not know which even it's the trigger but we know there is a domino effect. Can we equip families to identify their own trigger?

3. Brief Summary of Discussion

Question: There is a pilot program starting in CA that will have a navigator to help parents navigate the field and have a trauma informed supporter. They are connecting child welfare system and ACE world. They are interested in studying instability and stability and linking ECE data and welfare data. Are there thoughts on policy leavers or if that's something that happens across states?

Response:
- That's not at all uncommon. When Policy makers are in their own silos, there are often unintended consequences for families and children.
- The question is dealing with the funders of early care and education. They need to stop thinking about this as how do we help children in foster care- we need to think about how do we help children that have been maltreated.
- We have seen some movement that should help support general stability of education. With the new eligibility determination rules should help with subsidies.
- Broaden to think about children at risk of maltreatment.
- Understand where the disconnects in policy are.
- When kids come into the system, is there a core set of questions we can as to figure out if the child/family is at risk of instability.

Question: You're talking about ECE, how are you defining it?
Response:
- Sacha: "Have you received regular child care?" it clarifies that they're not talking about Ad-Hoc babysitting
- Shannon: All the different ways that children are taken care of. Does someone take care of your children on a regular basis?
- Factors may vary across ECE settings.
- FCC providers have problems asking families about problems in general- let alone these kinds of loaded questions. So how do you address that? They may sense there's a problem so how do you capture that.

Question: So we make an assumption that providers know where the resources are or that there are any…
Response:
- We're trying to address some of those key concerns. You don't have to know what's happening in order to be promoting resilience for that child or family. You may have clues the family needs more support but you don't have to be an investigator. We're empowering them with a few more tools.
- Some instability is natural but when it gets to a certain point, it's not okay. It's a culture change for some folks.

Question: What about provider stability? Have you thought about what characterizes stability with providers? This is both the stability of providers as well as continuity of care for children.
Response:
- It's both stability for the provider in terms of having enough funds in order to operate and stability for the child so they don't have to change because of their eligibility.
- It's a layered issue. There's stability of provider turnover and there's stability of funding. How do we stabilize a very resource poor market?
- Depends on community you're in

Questions: is disability considered…?
Response
- Not in and of itself, it isn't but it depends on what you do. It can threaten your job, you income, your school, etc. All systems can be jeopardized by instability but they don't have to be. It depends on the support systems. Chronic illness is the same.

- Having a disability wouldn't be something that makes your environment more unstable, however there's a significant amount of overlap between children with disability and children in the welfare system.
- More expulsion and placements could be seen with children with emotional or behavioral disabilities.
- It adds complexity to the child and parent's lives. The work that parents have to do to get the services their children are entitled to adds a significant layer of stress.
- The family is a piece, the community is a piece→ these are all webs of stability. Disabilities can make any of these buffering systems harder.

4. **Summary of Key issues raised** (facilitators are encouraged to spend the last 3-5 minutes of workshops summarizing the key issues raised during the session; bullets below are prompts for capturing the kinds of issues we're looking for)

- *Emerging findings that may be of particular interest to policy-makers and ACF?*
- *Methodological issues including innovative methodologies that may help maximize resources available for research and evaluation?*
- *Follow-up activities suggested to address questions and gaps (e.g., secondary analyses of data, consensus meetings of experts, research synthesis or brief, webinar, etc.)?*
- *Recommendations about future ACF child care research directions and priorities?*