Evaluating the Implementation of Child Care Subsidy Policy and Administrative Changes

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Policy implementation research: general points

- Focuses on the **black box** between policy changes and outcomes
  - Impact evaluation focuses on policy changes and outcomes relative to no policy change

- Multiple methods

- Multiple purposes

- Theory informs research questions asked, outcomes of interest, and interpretation of findings
Meta research questions (Werner 2004)

1. What is happening?
   • Document – program goals, operations and resources

2. Is it expected or desired?
   • Assess – compared to what standard

3. Why is it happening as it is?
   • Explain – uncover plausible reasons/hypotheses
Study key components of programs

• Theoretical and practical basis/context
• Resources and capacity
• Environment (state/local) and variation
• Processes and systems
• Intended target population and services
• Relevant client/worker/agency outcomes
Data sources

• Program planning, documents and manuals; legislative material, media

• Background statistical data

• Open-ended interviews key informants, program staff, advocacy/public interest groups, ex/clients

• Structured observations

• Worker/client surveys, administrative data, program management reports
Examples: Implementing CCDBG Administrative and Policy Changes in Massachusetts
Example 1: 2012 Massachusetts’ Administrative Change

- In January 2012, MA initiated administrative changes that shifted the location and responsibilities for Income-Eligible voucher reassessment from CCR&R agencies to contracted providers for some families.

- Change in location (distance traveled)
- Change in reassessment experience (staff)
- Change in workloads
Implementation Research Considerations

- **Retrospective**
  - Policy change was implemented statewide in January 2012
  - Research team met with state in June 2013
  - Research Partnership Grant was awarded October 2013

- **Exploratory**
  - No known performance measures
  - No other state had implemented this type of administrative change
    - No defined or prescribed model for the state to follow in implementing this type of administrative change
Implementation Research Questions (Werner 2004)

1. What is happening?
   - History of the changes
   - Components of reassessment pre- and post-administrative change (model/work flow)
   - Variation in practices and experiences of all stakeholders (e.g., CCR&Rs, providers and families)
   - Unpack what is meant by family friendly, explore system administrative burden
   - Identify performance metrics
Implementation Research Questions (Werner 2004)

2. Is it expected or desired?
   • Administrative changes delivered as intended
     • Bottlenecks identified, solutions developed?
     • System more user friendly (for all stakeholders)?
     • Decrease distance traveled?
     • Reduce workloads for CCR&Rs?

3. Why is it happening as it is?
   • Developed hypotheses
     • Variation in local practices (family friendliness)
     • Clarity of policy guidance, communication issues
     • Context - waitlist
Implementation Research Design: Year 1

Methods:
• Document review
• In-depth interviews with 17 key policy and administration stakeholders
• In-depth interviews with 19 staff from all 7 CCR&Rs
• Site visits and client observations at 5 CCR&Rs

Goals:
❖ Document voucher reassessment process prior to the administrative change from the perspective of the state and the CCR&Rs
❖ Identify how the voucher reassessment administrative change was implemented
❖ Identify possible gaps/areas of intended flexibility in the design of the administrative change through which implementation may vary
Implementation Research Design: Years 2 - 4

Year 2 Methods:
• In-depth interviews with 53 child care providers in all 7 regions of the state (80 staff members)

Year 2 Goals:
❖ Identify how the change was implemented and experienced by providers (including intended/desired effects)
❖ Identify implementation variation

Year 3 & 4 Methods
• In-depth interviews with 40 families in 4 regions of the state (English and Spanish)

Year 3 & 4 Goals:
❖ Identify how the change was experienced by families (including intended/desired effects)
❖ Identify outside factors affecting their subsidy stability
Mixed Methods Evaluation

**IMPLEMENTATION STUDY**
- Document review
- Stakeholder interviews (Key Informant, CCR&R, Provider, Parent)
- Site visits and observations

**IMPACT STUDY**
- Quasi-experimental design
- Analysis of subsidy exits
- Spatial analysis

**Final Report:**
- Integrated Triangulation of Findings

**SUBGROUP ANALYSES**
- Analysis of Subsidy exits
- Spatial analysis
- Parent interviews

**Implementation Reports**

**Impact Reports**

**Subgroup Reports**
Example of Intersection of Implementation and Impact Studies

Location of Reassessment

• **Implementation:** CCR&R s have different **outpost** locations convenient for families.
  
  ➢ **Impact:** For each CCR&R region, control for the number and location of each outpost location.

• **Implementation:** Center-based providers that are part of an **umbrella agency** (e.g. YMCA) may require families to conduct reassessment at the main office rather than the provider location.
  
  ➢ **Impact:** Distances were calculated to umbrella agency main offices and provider locations.
New CCDBG Authorization Policy

12 Month Authorization Period
All caseloads (IE, DTA, DCF) will get a 12 month authorization period

Less Administrative Burden
Reduces inflexibility to temporary changes in family circumstances
Reduces burden associated with reporting changes

Improved Subsidy Stability
Family Stability
Stabilizes access to subsidies
Provider Stability
Decreases churning of subsidized children in care

Positive CCDBG Outcomes
Stabilizes parent employment
Stabilizes child care arrangements
Stabilizes revenue streams

Example 2: Change in CCDBG 12 Month Authorization Policy
Implementation Research Considerations

• **Prospective**
  - Regulatory and policy changes are currently in the process of being drafted (regulations set to be finalized by June 2018)
  - Researchers have been involved in the planning process
  - Research funding may be available in April 2018

• **Exploratory**
  - Several other states are currently in the process of making these changes
  - No defined or prescribed model for the state to follow
    - CCDBG block grants intentionally give states flexibility in policy design and implementation