

Child Care Policy Research Consortium

Title: Measurement Issues in Our Child Care Research: The Cutting-Edge Questions

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**Chris Ross, Mathematica Policy Research, Inc.**

**SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION**

**1. Marty Zaslow (Professional Development)**

- a. It has been clear at this meeting that measurement is core to our accomplishments in different areas
- b. Right now we will focus on defining and measuring professional development
- c. In 2003 there was a meeting that presented a paper (Kelley et al.) that was supposed to lay down the common definition and measurement of PD, however it actually brought up a great deal of insufficiencies in the measurement of PD (ex: blurring credit-bearing education vs. non-credit-bearing trainings)
- d. The follow-up activities to Kelley et al. (2003) article:
  - i. The QUINCE team and another working group are working very hard on creating common definitions and measurements
  - ii. A key factor in moving forward is linking data sets so that pieces of information can be linked and help to create common definitions
  - iii. Kathy Thornburg will make common core items available on Research Connections
  - iv. Rick Brandon had a strong focus on surveys on the national and state level. Some of the meetings have changed the way that we ask questions in surveys (e.g., changing wording like calling all child care providers teachers.. many of them do not identify as teachers)
  - v. At Child Trends, they are taking the guidance from the working group to do a careful review of existing measures and pulling out the best ones from each of them. There is a first draft of this survey that has been compiled. The intent is to update this survey with new information and make it a living document (available on Research Connections). The idea is to get people's input and find out what works in the field and what does not.

**2. Bobbie Weber (Market Rates)**

- a. Market Rates, if valid, reflect prices that parents find in their communities
- b. Difficulties in these measurements are the complexity of the child care

market

- i. When you go out into the market, not all facilities are in the open market, and then those that are in the open market might not be in the database
  - ii. There are often submarkets that can affect price (options)
  - iii. There are no units to measure the geographic price clusters (e.g., university towns have some high price areas and low price areas)
  - iv. Conversions between pricing modes (hourly, weekly, monthly, etc.) don't work
- c. Data sources, sampling plan
- i. Samples need to represent mixed, complex markets
  - ii. Most states are using administrative data, which gives a good representation of licensed providers but then it begs the question how reliable and valid is this data? This can be affected by how the data is collected and even who is calling up providers and asking these questions
  - iii. Then it becomes an issue of analysis and a statistician who can handle these problems is needed
- d. Conclusions:
- i. Price studies are important to understand how to plan and implement child care assistance programs
  - ii. There are a lot of things that affect the market rate but they are not just prices and there is nothing obvious about it

### **3. Tamara Halle (Parental Choice)**

- a. Main issues with parental choice and measurement focus on the endpoint (utilization of care) but little is known about the decision-making process that parents use to choose care
- b. There has been talk in this meeting of creating a more complex model of families choice of child care
  - i. The model is complex and includes things like employment characteristics, cultural factors, monetary factors, policy factors (subsidies) etc.
  - ii. We have been articulating in terms of theory but there is little research that takes these predictors into account to determine what really affects these choices
  - iii. The parental choice process is not linear, it is complex and it changes over time
- c. There is a lot of room for measurement both on the theoretical side and the research side

### **4. Chris Ross (Parental Outcomes)**

- a. Area of Parent Outcomes jumps immediately to employment and economic self sufficiency.
- b. There is not so much a question of how to develop measures of economic outcomes but measuring:
  - i. Stress in their lives (work-family stress)
  - ii. Relatedly: economic stress (getting CC they can afford)

- iii. Questions and concerns about child's arrangement
- iv. Parent-provider relationships: can a provider become somewhat of a co-parent. Between the parent and provider, they are sharing care. The quality of that relationship can be a great source of parenting support. Flexibility of provider and support of provider to parent socially.
- v. Having quality time with children, not just time spent but actually making the time spent of good quality
- c. Measurement in this area will need to constantly be improved because they are subjective and you need to be sure that parents are understanding and answering the questions that you are asking them
- d. Economic and self-sufficiency:
  - i. Very advanced in these areas of measurement. The goal for these areas would be to bring these measures up to the measures that we have of child care subsidies

#### **5. Deanna Schexnayder (Parental Outcomes)**

- a. CCDF has two major goals, one of which is to improve self-sufficiency of parents
  - i. Measuring this self-sufficiency is important; many different dimensions of self-sufficiency can be measured, including employment status, hours of work per day and per week, earnings, job stability, and non-wage compensation/job benefits.
  - ii. The challenge is that good measures of child care subsidy receipt are often not in the same data set as employment and earnings.
  - iii. Last September, the Child Care Bureau hosted a roundtable on measuring self-sufficiency outcomes that discussed this topic in detail.
    - 1. The most easily-available measures of self-sufficiency are employment and earnings. All states have Unemployment Insurance wage record data, which provide information on whether the individual was employed during the calendar quarter and the total earnings for the quarter. Getting access to these state databases can be challenging, but it is possible. The UI wage data potentially can be linked with state child care subsidy databases, but researchers need to obtain permission from the state agencies, and the data need to be from the same time period and able to be linked with a common identifier.
    - 2. An alternative source of data is population surveys. These can provide information about both employment/earnings and about child care subsidies for the same individuals. Population surveys can provide much more comprehensive information about jobs, earnings, and stability of employment. However, parents may not understand the questions about child care subsidies, and as a consequence,

there can be substantial measurement error on these variables.

3. Other issues with national surveys include small sample sizes for low-income populations and families in special programs such as child care subsidies and small sample sizes for small geographic areas such as states, which makes it difficult to analyze relationships between state child care policy parameters and family decisions regarding child care subsidy program participation, employment, and child care choices.
  4. Even with data from any of these sources, the interrelationship between employment and child care subsidy receipt makes it difficult to attribute variations in employment to variations in child care policies..
- iv. Child Care and employment are determined together; parents need employment to obtain a child care subsidy, and they may need a child care subsidy to obtain employment. Therefore, it may be difficult to link specific child care subsidy policies to variations in employment in a cross-sectional database.

## **6. Bobbie Weber (Continuity of Care)**

- a. Going to talk about some of the challenges in studying continuity and stability of child care
- b. What we are measuring is difficult to understand for a variety of reasons
- c. Stability is the time dimension of the child's relationship with the child care provider – this can depend on how long the child is at a facility but also how many caregivers are at this facility and is caring for a child
- d. Not all changes represent instability
  - i. Instability is when child care availability is not guaranteed or available (this is different from a chosen change)
- e. Not sure if there is a threshold level on how much change is ok for children
- f. Quantitative measures;
  - i. Number of providers
  - ii. Transition – percentage who remain with the same provider over time period
  - iii. Prime primary provider ratio – looks at amount of time that they were with one primary caregiver rather than looking at all changes (like changes of a secondary caregiver)
  - iv. Duration of arrangements
- g. Design and Analysis issues:
  - i. Should we look at all arrangements or just primary?
  - ii. Duration measures sample issues
  - iii. Units of analysis
  - iv. Units of time
- h. Needs for further research:

- i. Use multiple measures with multiple datasets: are they measuring different things?
- ii. Develop consensus on methodology for the four measures
- iii. Develop ethnographic study; compare qualitative and quantitative information
- iv. Explore adaptation of existing measures or create new measures to capture complexity

## SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

1.
  - a. Deborah Neil: Tennessee: They have asked providers what formats of PD they prefer (online, on-site, etc.). Found that they like workshops on Saturdays or after work but the problem is that they forgot what they have learned or they could not translate what they learned to the classroom or the director does not want them to use that in the classroom. They decided that they will use on-site technical assistance to help with implementation. Decided to do this from using an informal survey
    - i. Response from Marty is that it's important to include Core + in surveys as well.
2.
  - a. Many child care centers do not include extra charges into their fees (e.g., activities fees, summer fees, etc.)
    - i. Response: We have asked states if they collect that data but we don't have a valid way to study this
  - b. One thing to deal with is sliding fee scales that some centers use or scholarship funds not included in their fees.
    - i. Response: If there are prices that are coming out of fees of child care centers. Some states ask providers if they have other funding. At what point do you say, should that price be in a market rate study? Inclusion is an issue as to what information should be collected and how it should be looked at.
  - c. There should be a separate section on data interpretation in the working group, but this should be a different issue. We need to segregate these issues.
    - i. Bobbie's response: We should collect data from everybody but then make decisions based on good reasoning at the time of data analysis
  - d. We have been collecting information from providers but we have told them to have a rate they should report.
    - i. When you do that there is a big issue as to whether or not this is a price that is actually offered to the parents, and so is this representative?

3.
  - a. On the Midwest project was an important factor such as why a parent decided to leave their last provider. This gives very interesting information and we have a lot of qualitative information but there are categories that emerge
    - i. The employment world and employment practices are an important factor in parental choice
  - b. Parent decision-making is a desired outcome for quality rating systems and this is critical to value the extent to which this happens. Minnesota has a great resource and a researcher who worked for insurance but will be helping them evaluate their QRS on parents. However, one thing she found is that there is a point that people will ignore it but they will finally make a change when something goes wrong so at that point they will use the QRS. Understanding at what point parents will use it is important in understanding
  - c. We did focus groups of parents to ask them what matters to them. We found that one simple thing was safety. They wanted us to count whether or not people could walk in when they wanted. As you develop these systems, talking to parents about their priorities is important in understanding what is important to measure.
4. Ivelisse: We are trying to improve data to see
  - a. There is a study by Abt. Associates in Washington but there is an opportunity to test some measures and they will inform future policy-makers and find relationships that do not necessarily correlate
  - b. Another issue is how do you measure subsidy use when you talk to parents and what do they consider subsidy? When you are developing a survey it is a very complicated thing to develop because parents really are not sure what qualifies as a subsidy.
  - c. National Academy of Science is using a method of administrative data to improve on their survey materials so if they can play off one another to improve both.
  - d. Looking at all publicly supported early care and education is not a bad thing necessarily
  - e. Susan: I am not sure if self-sufficiency employment information is always necessarily accurate because there are so many variations on work schedules and measuring other self-sufficiency issues.
  - f. You get better earnings data from administrative data but when you are looking at the link between child care hours and work hours
  - g. Single moms have more likely variable work schedules and this is a demographic that we want to look at.
  - h. What would be our criteria for deciding if we are going from stability to a lack of stability? One thing they talked about in the education measures. There are disruptions that older children (who can probably understand what is going on more than younger children) experience which can affect their learning and experiences but just think about what this could do for a very young child.

- i. Researchers found that subsidies in and of itself causes more disruptions and instability in child care than not receiving a subsidy
- j. Research in attachment:
  - i. Most stability in research points first to attachment theory.
- k. Looking at just stability and change does not mean that all change is either good or bad but looking at what the affects of the changes are. Another thing to discuss is child characteristics. Some children are fine with it but some children are not and so attachment and temperament should both be examined.

#### KEY POINTS

1. In terms of measuring professional development, there is a working group and a working paper along with a survey that is meant to pinpoint the most effective questions to be asked in professional development surveys.
2. There are a lot of things that affect the market rate but they are not just prices and there is nothing obvious about it.
3. The parental choice process is not linear, it is complex and it changes over time, in addition, there is also a lot of room for measurement both on the theoretical side and the research side.
4. Measurement in parental outcomes will need to constantly be improved because they are subjective and you need to be sure that parents are understanding and answering the questions that you are asking them. In addition this is something that is difficult to capture and there are complex cause and effect relationships that need to be considered.
5. Continuity of care is difficult to capture because it can be such a complex issue. Moving forward it will be important to examine existing measures and adapt them to work better for the measurement of continuity of care.