How Parents Use Child Care Information: The Known and Unknown

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Study Specifics

- 14 Focus Groups in seven US locations
- Total of 163 parents
  - 11 groups had children under 8 years
  - 3 groups had children who were 0-24 months
  - Low-income were over-represented
  - Hispanic, African-American, Asian and American Indian specific groups
- More than 8 in 10 participants were women
- Two-thirds were full-time working parents
How Parents Define Quality

• Their OWN child care is best
• There is NO clear and consistent definition
• An environment where their children learn and develop
  – “I like my son being excited about learning”
  – “To share, to say what they think, to speak about their feelings. We want our children to be emotionally as well as physically happy.”
How Parents Define Quality

• A professional and loving caregiver
  – “Their attitude is the first thing you’ll notice when you meet them and it shows how well you can trust a person to take care of your kids 8 hours a day”
  – “One of the questions I ask all the teachers I visited – are you happy working here? I found out if there was high turnover, that’s not good for the kids.”
How Parents Define Quality

• Cleanliness and safety of the setting
  – “Up-to-date in terms of cribs, beds, napping facilities. Not state-of-the-art, but I want toys to be clean and appropriate.”
  – “I think that inspections need to be unscheduled. In my small community, they know before the inspectors come.”
Choosing Child Care

• Most important factors – cost, safety, learning environment
  – “I can always find child care, but then its hard to find one I would actually use.”
• Make “best” of limited options
• Listen to their “sixth sense”
• Multiple child care arrangements are needed to cover care (hours, costs, etc.)
• Most parents did not check to see if their child care program was licensed or recently inspected. They just ASSUMED it was.
## Parent’s Assumptions vs. Reality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption</th>
<th>% parents who think it is true</th>
<th>Centers</th>
<th>Family Child Care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All caregivers provide learning opportunities</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>Only about 30 states address development in required activities</td>
<td>• 12 states require providers to read to children</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 32 states require providers to plan learning activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>All caregivers must have a background check</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>9 states require state and federal checks using fingerprints</td>
<td>25 states require federal checks using fingerprints</td>
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<tr>
<td>All child care programs are required to be licensed</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>11 states license all child care centers</td>
<td>• 11 states license all family child care homes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 9 states do not conduct an inspections prior to issuing a license</td>
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<tr>
<td>All child care programs are inspected</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>• 41 states require at least annual inspections</td>
<td>• 36 states require inspection before licensing</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Only 5 states require quarterly inspections</td>
<td>• 25 states require at least annual inspections</td>
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Compromises made by parents

• More than 4 in 10 parents said they had to pay more than originally planned
  – “We didn’t have a choice whether it was expensive or inexpensive because our choices were so limited.”

• Parents had to travel further to find child care to meet their needs
  – “Distance – I have to drive hours and rearrange my schedule.”

• Personal goals (jobs, going back to school)
  – “I gave up a promotion due to the hours of care.”

• Their wish list for care
  – “Bi-lingual Day care setting.”
  – “More aggressive teaching curriculum.”

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What information is needed

• A consistent use of terminology – too many communication gaps
  – Licensing, certification, star ratings, high-quality

• Knowledge of child care subsidy/fee assistance programs available in their state.

• Knowledge of providers in their area (Esp. quality-care child providers)

• Knowledge of “true” costs

• Questions to ask providers to ensure adequate care

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