

Choice of Care among Low Income Working Families: A Study of Latino Families in the New South

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Project Description.

The purpose of this study is to increase knowledge about child care needs and utilization among Latino low-income working families living in North Carolina, one of the states in the South with the fastest Latino population growth in the last two decades. The majority of Latinos in the South are recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America, whose child care needs and preferences may be somewhat different from those of Latinos in states with long-standing Latino populations. Furthermore, the rapid growth of the Latino population in this part of the country is posing challenges to a child care system that is trying to meet the needs of a group that may not only have different cultural and linguistic characteristics, but also may be unfamiliar with child care options available.

Research questions.

- (1) How are family characteristics associated with Latino low-income parents' choice of care for their preschool age children?
- (2) How are program characteristics associated with Latino low-income parents' choice of non-parental care?
- (3) What are Latino parents' views about the characteristics of quality care? and, to what extent do the type and quality of child care used by Latino families meet their child care needs?

Sample. This study was conducted in three regions of North Carolina (Western, Central and Eastern). The proposed sample included 450 parents using three types of child care arrangements (center, family child care –including neighbor and relative care, and parental care), and 120 early childhood (EC) programs (n=60 centers; n=60 family child care homes-FCCH). We conducted 400 family interviews and a total of 101 observations of practices and provider interviews in a total of 44 EC programs (86 in centers and 15 in FCCHs).

Methods. The study used a mixed methods approach including quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Data collection measures and procedures

- *Semi-structured Family Interview.* The Latino Child Care Choices Family Interview Protocol (Author, 2008) was developed with specific adaptations for each type of childcare setting (i.e., parental care, center and FCCH, neighbor/relative care). This protocol has a structured section asking questions about Latino families' demographic characteristics, language use at home and parenting practices. The semi-structured section asks open-ended questions on Latino families' awareness and utilization of child care subsidies, child care preferences and expectations, and reasons for selecting the type of child care they use. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, and were audio recorded.
- *Parent Ethnographic Interview* (Castro & Skinner, 2009). This type of interview allowed us to expand and explore at a deeper level Latino families' views about child care utilization and their child care needs. We conducted a total of 38 ethnographic interviews with parents selected from the total group of 400 parents who participated in the semi-structured family interviews.
- *Classroom observations.* The *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised* (ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998) was used in center-based programs and the *Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised* (FCCERS-R; Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2007) was used in FCCHs. In addition, we used the *Caregiver Interaction Scale* (CIS, Arnett, 1989) in both centers and FCCHs. The *Early Childhood Practices to Support Latino Dual Language Learners Observation and Provider Interview Protocol* (Castro & Peisner-Feinberg, 2009) was

designed to obtain information about practices addressing the needs of Latino children and their families, including language and literacy materials, provider-child interactions, assessment, and family engagement, in both centers and FCCH.

- *Program description form.* Child care directors were contacted by phone to complete this form to gather information about program type, time of operation, Latino enrollment, bilingual staff, outreach activities, and indicators of quality (e.g., NAEYC accreditation).

Progress Update. Data coding and entry has been completed and we are beginning the data analysis on all data gathered through this project. Specific issues or findings that we will be able to address in November 2011 at the CCPRC Annual Meeting include family and program characteristics associated with choices of care among Latino low-income parents in the New South, as well as, Latino parents' views about quality child care and the extent to which child care used by Latino families meet their needs.

Implications for policy/practice

Knowledge about the views, needs and priorities regarding child care options of Latino low-income parents who are recent immigrants, can inform the revision and/or development of child care policies and practices aimed at increasing access to and improving quality of child care available for Latino families and their children.

Implications for research

This study included participation of a very large sample of Latino families. Recruiting this sample was challenging but we used a number of strategies that helped us be successful. In addition, we are using a mix methods analytic strategy that will allow us to both quantify and provide rich documentation of families' views. These will constitute a contribution to the research field.

For more information:

http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~latino_ccc/

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