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Informal Child Care in Detroit and the Bay Area:
Provider and Family Characteristics and Needs

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Presentation Overview

- **Provide motivation for and describe two studies of informal child care**

- **Share findings**
  - **Characteristics of parents and informal caregivers**
  - **Care arrangements and quality of care**
  - **Needs of parents and informal caregivers**

- **Discuss recommendations**

- **Raise issues for further discussion**

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What Is "Informal Child Care"?

- **Care provided by someone other than a child's parent or guardian outside a licensed child care center or family child care home**

- **Commonly called family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care**

- **Could be "listed" or "unlisted" using National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) definitions**
  - **Some receive child care subsidy payments and so would be listed; most are unlisted**
  - **Many receive payment**

Motivation

Informal Child Care Is Prevalent and Meets Parents' Needs

- **Informal child care makes up a large part of home-based child care in the U.S.**

- **Informal care meets parents' needs for trustworthy, affordable, and convenient child care**

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Concerns About Quality

- **"Structural quality" of informal care is consistently rated lower than regulated family child care**

  – Cleanliness, safety features, availability of developmentally appropriate materials

- **Levels of cognitive stimulation in informal settings have been shown to be low**

- **Mitigating factors include low child-to-adult ratios and warm, supportive caregiver-child interactions**

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Two Studies of Informal Child Care

Informal Caregivers Research Project (INCARE)

- **Funded by the Packard Foundation**

- **Research questions**

  1. **Who are informal caregivers in California?**
  2. **What are their existing networks and needs for support?**
  3. **What are promising outreach methods and approaches to meet their needs?**

- **Project activities**

  - **Key informant interviews**
  - **Site visits to community organizations in Alameda and Santa Clara counties**
    - Interviews with parents and caregivers
    - Ecomaps

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Informal Child Care in Detroit (ICCD)

- Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

- Research questions

  1. Why do parents choose informal child care?
  2. Are informal child care providers interested in promoting their own economic advancement through providing care to young children, and how might they do so?
  3. How do bartering and other nonmonetary exchanges support informal child care?
  4. What types of quality do children experience in informal child care settings?
  5. What types of support do parents and informal child care providers get, want, and need?

- Project activities similar to INCARE

Findings

Study Sample Characteristics

INCARE	ICCD
68 parents and caregivers	146 parents and caregivers
99 percent female	More than 90 percent female
Majority Latina	About 50 percent African American
Mostly Spanish speakers	Mostly English speakers, some Spanish, some Arabic
Most had a high school diploma or less education	Varying levels of education

Source: INCARE and ICCD parent and caregiver interviews.

Informal Child Care Arrangements

- **Most informal child care providers were family members; most commonly grandparents**
  - Motivation was to help family and friends, not to pursue a career in child care

- **Care arrangements were complex**
  - Parents relied on multiple informal caregivers on a regular or as-needed basis

- **About half of care arrangements involved payment or in-kind exchanges**
  - Very few caregivers received child care subsidy payments

Informal Child Care Quality

- **Caregivers understand the basics of providing quality care**

  – **Some caregivers are successful in providing enriching learning experiences**

  – **Others lack knowledge about early childhood development or access to resources**

    - Some see themselves as babysitters whose main role is to keep children safe

- **Caregivers strive to provide safe environments for children**

  – **Parents, caregivers, and others have some concerns over home and neighborhood safety**

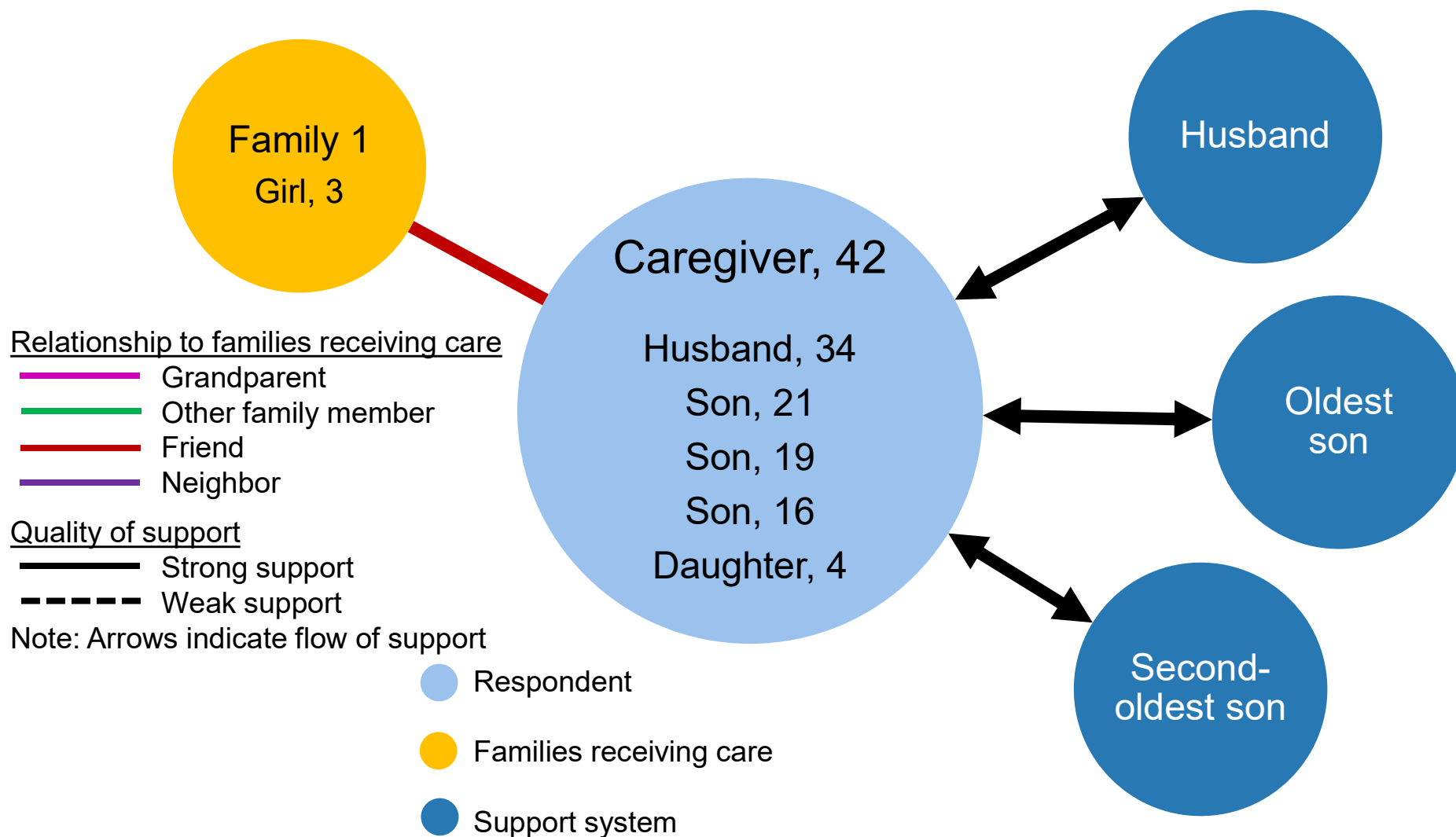# Parents and Caregivers Expressed Needs for Additional Resources

- **Materials**
  - Diapers
  - Clothing, books, toys
  - Car seats

- **Services**
  - Transportation vouchers or benefits
  - Parent support groups

- **Training**
  - Child development
  - Health and safety
  - Working with children with special needs

Parents and Caregivers Prefer Trusted Information Sources and Personal Outreach Methods

- **Information and advice from trusted sources**
  - **Friends, family, community members**

- **Outreach methods**
  - **Personal**
  - **Flyers**
  - **Internet-based technology**

Personal Supports Are Strong

Family 1
Girl, 3

Caregiver, 42

Husband, 34
Son, 21
Son, 19
Son, 16
Daughter, 4

Husband

Oldest son

Second-oldest son

Relationship to families receiving care
— Grandparent
— Other family member
— Friend
— Neighbor

Quality of support
——— Strong support
----- Weak support

Note: Arrows indicate flow of support

○ Respondent

○ Families receiving care

○ Support system

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Recommendations to Support Informal Child Care

Promising Approaches for Supporting Informal Child Care

- **Acknowledge the importance of informal child care**

- **Collaborate to facilitate access to resources and support**
  - Understand unique needs of undocumented and new immigrant families
  - Investigate ways to help parents and caregivers gain access to the child care subsidy

- **Pursue opportunities for further research**
  - Need for experimentation

Issues for Discussion

How Best to ...

- **Link informal child care providers to the "formal" system when providers face language and other barriers**

  - Child care subsidies

  - Subsidized food programs

  - QRIS

- **Enhance quality when some aspects of caregivers' environments are out of their control**

  - Housing conditions and neighborhood safety

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- **Key informants**

- **Bay Area and Detroit community organizations**

- **CAREGIVERS AND PARENTS**

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- **ICCD project page: https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/projects/informal-child-care-in-detroit**