Challenges in Understanding Child Care Decision-making for Populations of Interest

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Overview

- Use the experiences of parents of children with special needs as an example of the complexity of child care decision-making for populations of interest.
- Relate two vignettes from focus groups to bring these challenges to life.
- Share a few “lessons learned” about the challenges for researchers in studying these issues in relation to parents of ELL children.
Special Needs

- Child care and work challenges of parents of children with special needs
  - Analysis of national data from the NSAF
  - Case study in Maine
    - Parent focus groups/interviews (n=41), service provider interviews (n=60)
    - Survey of parents of children with diagnosed special needs (N=441)
    - Survey of licensed child care providers (N=189)
Broad themes

- Cascading issues:
  - Challenges accessing child care
  - Child care instability/concerns about quality
  - Lack of coordination of child care with IDEA Early Intervention/Preschool Special Education
  - Lack of workplace flexibility
  - Range of work problems, lower rates of labor force participation, more job instability, more financial insecurity
Child Care and Work Challenges for Parents of Children with Special Needs

- **TANF**
  - TANF work requirements: system of exemptions and sanctions

- **Impact on Family & Child**
  - Receipt of/satisfaction with
    - child care services
    - Employment/economic
    - well-being

- **Work**
  - Balancing work and care of special needs child
    - Workplace policies
    - Work problems
    - Work disruptions

- **Child Care**
  - Access to child care and issues of quality care for special needs child

- **Early Intervention Services**
  - Access to early intervention services and coordination with child care
Challenges for Researchers and Policymakers:

- Term “decision-making” implies that parents have a choice! Constraints on choice may be greater for some populations of interest.

- Discomfort, stigma, cultural, access issues may make parents reluctant to express concerns.
Challenges:

- The “Devil’s in the Details!” Cross systems issues can cause significant problems for parents and create challenges for researchers and policymakers.

- Need to take into account wide diversity within populations of interest so important distinctions aren’t lost.
## Special Needs: Reported Child Care Problems (N=441 All types of S.N.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of provider support/knowledge</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of inclusion in activities</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of safety</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of physical accessibility</td>
<td>16.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wouldn’t administer medications</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent calls to parent at work</td>
<td>11.4</td>
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</tbody>
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Parents of Children with Behavioral Problems Much More Likely to Report Child Care Problems (n=441)

- Lack of Support from Provider
- Lack of Inclusion
- Requested Child be Removed from Care
- Lack of Safety
- Work Disrupted by Provider Calls
ELL Study: Cautionary Tales

- Because of constraints on choice, recruitment and grouping of parents for focus groups can be a challenge.

- Watch out for tendency to automatically attribute child care use/decisions to cultural factors.
Cautionary Tales Cont.

- Avoid “opinion” questions and instead let these come out naturally in a narrative.

- Community leaders of the populations you’re studying can help you develop questions to get at more subtle factors influencing parental decision-making.
Final Thoughts:

- Importance of a diverse advisory committee
  - Preview of the issues
  - Credibility/trust
  - Mechanism for staying abreast of changes
  - Disseminating Findings
  - Sparks collaborative efforts
- Employ mixed methods and do qualitative research with parents first!
- Include parents who work and those who don’t.
“Can you explain for me this child care system? I don’t understand it...”

...Cambodian refugee parent in Portland
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URL: Child Welfare Study http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/promotingschoolreadiness
URL: ELL Study
http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/newamericans

References: