Study of the Effects of Enhanced Subsidy Eligibility Policies In Illinois

Data Collection and Measurement Challenges and Lessons

October 2009
Overview

• Overview of research design
• Outcomes of interest
• Potential data sources
• Decisions about data collection strategies
• What happened
• Recommendations
Research Partners

• One of four random-assignment studies that are part of the Child Care Subsidy Evaluation, funded by OPRE

• Abt Associates is the prime contractor with partners MDRC and National Center for Children in Poverty

• MDRC is taking primary responsibility for the impact study analysis
Research Design

• Overview:
  — Families over income eligibility ceiling in Cook County, IL were randomly assigned to be eligible for subsidies for 2 years
  — 1/2 of the program group had a six-month redetermination period; the other half had a 12-month redetermination period.
  — 1884 families in the study, includes applicants and re-applicants
  — Incomes between 50-65% of SMI ($18,000 - $24,000/year)

• Research Questions:
  — What is the effect of receiving child care subsidies on child care, employment, and income?
  — What is the effect of extending the redetermination period on the stability of subsidy receipt?

• Data Sources:
  — Administrative records from Unemployment Insurance, public assistance, and child care subsidy program
  — Telephone interview with parents
Potential Outcomes of Interest

Income and Earnings

• Income

• Earnings

• Job stability and gaps in employment

• Wage/job progression

• Schedules of employment
Potential Outcomes of Interest

Child Care

- Type

- Schedule of arrangements

- Amount parents pay (co-payments and/or other out-of-pocket)

- Number of arrangements, per child, per family

- Interruptions in arrangements

- Satisfaction with arrangements
Potential Data Sources

• Subsidy Records:
  - Available for all families who receive services.
    • Subsidy receipt
    • Type and months of child care paid for by subsidies
    • Assigned co-payment amounts
    • Earnings and demographic information at baseline and recertification
  - **BUT**, ½ families in study ineligible for subsidies at baseline.
  - Therefore, can only use information from records about months receiving subsidies.
Potential Data Sources

• Unemployment Insurance Records:
  – Available for all families in the study
    • Provides information about average hourly, quarterly, yearly wages
    • Quarters of employment
  – **BUT**, many of the employment details (months of employment, schedules of employment, etc.) are unavailable.
Potential Data Sources

- Interviews with parents to augment administrative records
  - Can be in person, over the phone, or mixed
  - Can ask questions about one point in time or get employment and/or child care histories for longer periods
  - Can focus on one or more family members (one child/all children; one adult/all adults)
  - Parents can be interviewed once or at multiple points in time
Decisions Made for this Study

• Augment the administrative data with parent interview data

• Do the interviews by telephone, as opposed to in person (resource constraints)

• Interview at the end of Year 1 and the end of Year 2

• Content of the Interview:
  – Included information on All the jobs of the mother but not other household members
  – Included information All of the child care arrangements of All of the children
  – Gathered information on All potential outcomes of interest
  – Obtained Histories (not point-in-time information) of all jobs and all child care from random assignment onward
Why ALL of mother’s employment?

• We did not know how many jobs a mother on subsidies at this income level had.

• There could be an impact of subsidy receipt on a secondary job and we would not pick it up if we only asked about the primary job.

• We thought there may be impact on others household member’s employment but thought that this was too hard to collect so left it off.
Why ALL child care for ALL children?

• Child care selection is made according to the needs of individual children as well as the family as a whole.

• Subsidy receipt could affect both arrangements that are paid for by these subsidies as well as those that are not (e.g., whether grandma should take care of child for free; whether after-school program should be used).

• Fear that we would miss impacts if we only looked at one child, only looked at subsidized arrangements, or only looked at “primary” arrangements.
Why so many details about child care and jobs?

• Subsidy receipt could impact many things, for example:
  – Number of arrangements per family/per child
  – Stability of arrangements
  – Whether arrangements could occur during non-traditional hours
  – Number of jobs
  – Hours of work
  – Schedules of work
  – Interruptions in work
  – Job or wage progression
Why child care and employment HISTORIES instead of point-in-time information?

Would you more likely see impacts of subsidies at a point in time or would there be a cumulative impact?

![Graph showing percentage receiving subsidies over time]

- 12-month Group
- 6-month Group
- Control Group
What Happened

Problems Locating Parents

- Relied on phone numbers from subsidy records. About 40% of them were non-working.

- Added field follow-up component and achieved 70% response rate.

- In some cases, long lag time between when one-year anniversary and when families were interviewed.

- Result: families were interviewed at one time, not two times.
  - 1/3 within 1.5 years after random assignment
  - 1/3 within 1.5-2 year after random assignment
  - 1/3 after more than 2 years
Recall and Misreporting About Child Care

Question: “My next questions are about the child care arrangements you have used since (DATE OF INTERVENTION START OR LAST INTERVIEW). By child care, I mean the people or programs that have taken care of your children while you were at work or attending a class, school, or job training for more than 8 hours per week. I am not including regular school from kindergarten on up as child care.”
Child care recall and misreporting

Reported Child Care Use in Target Month

- **Yellow**: Subsidies 1 month before interview
- **Green**: Subsidies 1.5 years before interview
- **Brown**: Subsidies 1.5-2 years before interview
If there are recall issues about whether families used child care, there are recall issues for details about each arrangement as well.
What we did

• Limited interview sample to those interviewed 1 year after random assignment and weighted it to adjust for differential response between treatment and control group

• Were selective about the child care outcomes that we used from the survey

• Since we found no effects on employment from UI data, did not “look for” effects on parents’ own reports of wages, etc.

• We feel like we can stand by the findings
Recommendations for Individual Studies

• Decide on short list of outcomes and that are tied closely to conceptual model.

• Prioritize outcomes to make sure that your data collection strategy will get you the best data for your highest priorities.

• Don’t over-reach what your data collection strategy can do.

• If using mixed-mode (e.g., subsidy records and interviews), use what you know to anchor your questions (“We understand you were using child care subsidies in MONTH; could you tell me about the child care arrangements for your child in that month?)

• If the design requires it, have a plan and put a lot of resources into tracking parents. (Bad phone numbers, etc.)
Recommendations for the Field

• Validation studies
  – Whether any child care arrangements
  – Type of child care arrangements
  – Child care subsidies
  – Amount that parents pay

• Better and well-tested conceptual models to help limit information collected by any particular study

• Investments in cognitive testing of standardized instruments
Abt Associates Inc.