Child Care for Low Income Working Families:
Child Care Landscapes, Utilization, & Quality in Four Indiana Communities
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Abstract
While the effects of child care quality on low-income children and parents have been documented, little is known about how local communities vary in providing child care of varying quality. This research addresses this issue by studying the child care experiences of low-income working parents and their young children (0-5 yrs).

In this paper we describe how four communities in Indiana vary in the provision of child care services to low-income working families. We describe the quality level of child care used by low-income working families in each community, and we suggest how community context may affect the quality of care received by children from low-income families.

Research Problems
1. What type of child care are low income working families using?
2. What is the quality of care received by children from low-income families?
3. Does the quality of care vary across communities, across different settings, and home vs. center-based settings?

Participants
- Annual family income less than $15,000
- Head of household working (employed, going to school, or in job training) at least half time
- Family having a child (0-5 yrs) enrolled in a child care center for 15 hrs per week
- Child mean age = 40 mos.
- Child race: African American (59%), European American (23.5%), Other (12.7%)
- N = 307 low-income working families of young children and their child care providers in 4 Indiana communities:
  - Marion (n = 76), Allen (n = 76), Lake (n = 76), St. Joseph (n = 76)
- % of the families fell below federal poverty level
- Child care settings: licensed center care, licensed family child care, Head Start
- % of observed adult responsive interaction

Types of Child Care Settings Used by Low-Income Working Families

Community Landscapes

Conclusions
- Low income working families use a variety of types of child care.
- The overall quality level of child care utilized by low-income working families is low ("minimal" to "good").
- Child care quality across type of child care: Group size was larger in center-based care than in home-based care.
- Child-adult ratio was different across types of child care.
- Adult responsive interactions were observed more often in Head Start (with the largest group setting) and unlicensed family child care (both relatively small-group sizes) and least often in licensed family child care.
- Child care quality in home vs. center-based settings: In general center-based programs provide higher quality care than home-based settings for this population.