Child Care for Low Income Working Families: The Relation between Quality and Child Outcomes

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Abstract

In this presentation, we examine the relation between child care characteristics and children's developmental status. This presentation addresses two questions: (1) Does child care quality vary in regulation status (licensed vs. unlicensed)? (2) How is the quality level of child care that low-income working families use related to children's assessed cognitive and social outcomes?

Research Problem

1. Does child care quality vary by regulation status and child age?
2. How is the quality level of child care that low-income working families use associated with children's assessed cognitive and social outcomes?

Participants

Criteria:

- Annual family income less than $35,000
- Head of household working (employed, going to school, or in job training) at least half time
- Child is 6 months to 6 years old, living with his/her biological parents in a home for at least 15 hours per week

Participants:

- N = 307 low-income working families of young children and their child care providers in 4 Indiana communities
- St. Joseph (n = 78), Marion (n = 76), Allen (n = 76), Lake (n = 77)
- 59% African American
- 23.5% European American
- 12.7% Other
- 12% Hispanic
- Only 25.7% living with fathers
- 75% of families fall below federal poverty line
- Child mean age = 40 mos.
- 152 boys, 153 girls

Measures

- Younger Children (6-35mos; n=121)
  - Cognitive Outcomes
  - Mullen Scales of Early Learning
  - Social Outcomes
  - Brief Infant Toddler Social and Emotional Assessment
  - Child race: African American (59%), European American (23.5%), Other (12.7%)
  - Only 25.7% living with fathers

- Older Children (3-6yrs; n=186)
  - Cognitive Outcomes
  - Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test III
  - Classroom Behavior Inventory – academic competence subscale
  - Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation
  - Caregiver Sensitivity

Conclusions

- Overall, children from low-income working families in licensed care settings received higher quality care than in unlicensed settings.
- Infants and toddlers received lower quality care than preschool-age children in general, and in center-based programs.
- Average group sizes varied considerably across counties in unlicensed care settings, ranging from more than 10 children in one community to less than 6 in another.
- Group size in licensed care settings were generally higher than in unlicensed care settings.
- Child-adult ratio was higher for preschool-aged children than for infants and toddlers.
- The percentage of adult responsive interactions did not differ between age groups overall. However, younger children experienced adult responsive behaviors in more licensed family child care and child care ministries, and older children in licensed family child care and child care ministries.
- Children’s cognitive outcomes were significantly and moderately associated with quality variables for both younger and older children including global quality, group size, and caregiver sensitivity. Social outcomes were not related to any of the quality variables.
- Community contexts and types of care are potentially important variables when addressing caregiver quality and child outcomes.

Data Collection

- 4 urban counties in Indiana: St. Joseph (South Bend), Marion (Indianapolis), Allen (Fort Wayne), Lake (Gary, Hammond, Elkhart, Chicago)
- Recruitment:
  - Government agency offices (e.g., WIC)
  - Public places (e.g., public libraries)
  - Adult schools (e.g., GED classes)

Notable Observations

- 2% of observation time in child care setting is used to assess structural and process quality of the setting
- Assessment of child's cognitive and social development
- Parent survey
  - Demographic information
  - Rating scales on children’s cognitive and socio-emotional development
- Child care providers survey
  - Demographic information
  - Rating scales on the target child's cognitive and socio-emotional development

Structural Quality: Group Size was Higher in Licensed Child Care Settings vs. Unlicensed Settings except Marion County; Child-Adult Ratio was Higher for Older Children than for Infants and Toddlers

Process Quality: For Younger Children, adults interact more responsively in Child Care Centers and Head Start than in Licensed Family Child Care and Child Care Ministries

Global Quality: Children in Licensed Child Care Settings Received Higher Quality Care than Children in Unlicensed Settings

Global Quality: Older Children Received Higher Quality Care than Infants and Toddlers

Process Quality: Caregiver Sensitivity was Higher for Younger Children than for Older Children

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