

Frontiers in Child Care Research
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SESSION 8

**What Child Care Arrangements Do Low-Income Parents Use?
How Do State Policies and Programs Affect Their Choices?**

Parents use a variety of child care settings and arrangements. This breakout will focus on the types of care that low-income parents use. We will explore how subsidy policies ultimately affect the type of child care arrangements observed. The dialog will continue to delve deeper into what we know about the context in which low-income parents make child care arrangements and the constraints affecting their options.

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Impact of State Characteristics and Policies on Early Care and Education Use Patterns

Challenges with the Study

- Problems estimating patterns of child care use include:
 - Different types of care and hours used by parents
 - Need for demand data for child care
- Model could be developed to estimate the child care demand that takes into account the differences in parent, child, and household characteristics.

Results

- There is a lot of variation across the States in early care and education (ECE) usage patterns.

- State-level factors that affect ECE usage patterns include:
 - Affordability of care
 - Availability of formal care
 - State spending on Head Start and child care
 - Demographics (e.g., mobility, density, women's employment levels)
 - Center and family care regulations
- A multivariate analysis was used to assess individual and State variables on the overall use of child care, hours in care, child-to-staff ratios by setting, and age of child.

Findings

- Higher number of formal slots is correlated with the higher use of regulated care.
- Higher residential mobility is correlated with the greater use of family care and is correlated with the lower use of relative care.
- Higher market rates relative to family income in a State are associated with fewer hours in center care.
- Greater availability of kindergarten predicts more hours in center care and fewer hours in relative care.
- Greater availability of kindergarten is associated with higher levels of employment for mothers.
- A higher percentage of employed mothers is associated with the higher use of regulated care.
- Higher child-to-adult ratios are associated with higher use of regulated center and family care.

Summary

- States vary in their ECE use patterns.
- State-level policies and population characteristics explain part of this variation.
- The impact of State policies on low-income families may be greater than previously thought; more research is needed on this issue.

Lynda Laughlin

Access to Care: Working Mothers and the Geography of Child Care in Philadelphia

Objectives

- Examine child care usage by understanding how working mothers are embedded within a local community of paid caregivers, neighbors, friends, and kin.
- Examine how differences in race/ethnicity, household structure, neighborhood location, and social and economic resources contribute to our understanding of child care usage among working mothers.

Research Questions

- How is licensed child care distributed across Philadelphia neighborhoods?
- How does a mother's proximity to child care centers influence her child care use?

Analysis

- Distribution of child care center slots is uneven across the city.
- Bivariate results of child care usage are as follows:
 - Formal care—30 percent
 - Kith and kin care—70 percent
- Mothers in the study are located in medium- and high-poverty areas of the city.

Results

- Some areas of the city have more child care center slots available than others.
- Number of slots within _ and _ mile of a mother's location (149 and 709, respectively) in medium-poverty areas affected the number of children in center-based care.
- There is a weak association between child care center locations and use and a higher association between the number of available openings and use.
- Mothers who receive subsidies use centers more than those who do not.
- Mothers working more hours are more likely to use kith and kin care.
- Mothers in the welfare system are more likely to use kith and kin care.
- African-American mothers use formal care more than Hispanic mothers.
- Mothers who have center-based slots in greater proximity to their homes are more likely to use center care.

Challenges

- What are the consequences associated with using formal or kith and kin care?
- How do we measure the availability of informal care or kith and kin care?
- How can we support communities at both the structural and individual levels?

Question and Answer Session

How many low-income mothers were sampled?

Broad range of people in the low-income ranges were sampled as well as mothers with at least one child younger than 6.

Were children with no after-school supervision part of the survey?

This characteristic was not an official part of the survey, but there seemed to be only a few of them in the survey.

- African-American mothers find higher value in center care, and Hispanics find more value in home- or relative-based care.
- One study shows that the use of center-based care for infants is higher for African-American mothers than for White and Hispanic mothers and that African-Americans are more like to use formal child care than informal care.
- Maryland Child Care Administration had assumed that African-American mothers use formal child care less often than this survey indicates.
- African-American women are more likely to use subsidies; therefore, they may feel more empowered and use center-based child care to go to work.

- Child care employees are part of the fabric of the African-American community and are known to the mothers as relatives, friends, and neighbors; Hispanics have yet to reach similar child care employment levels in their communities.
- Tension exists between the need for affordable and available child care and the level of care actually found in neighborhoods.

What are the characteristics of the workforce in the child care centers?

In Rhode Island there are more African-Americans working in centers, and the mothers are more likely to use the centers, but that is not the case in the Hispanic community.

Michel Lahti

What Child Care Arrangements Do Low-Income Parents Use?

Survey Description

- Two surveys were used: One random digital-dial survey to households and a single mailout survey with one follow-up.
- Follow-up surveys were sent to 1,571 randomly selected households from a State agency list, child care subsidy recipients, and those on the subsidy waiting list.

Respondent Characteristics

- Total of 38 percent reported use of a government subsidy (n=529).
- The relationship to the child was as follows:
 - 76 percent were mothers
 - 22 percent were fathers
 - 2 percent were guardians
- Total of 75 percent were married or living with a partner.
- Of the 25 percent who reported living on their own, 83 percent of that group were subsidy recipients.
- Average age of the respondents was 33 years old.
- Respondents' level of education included 60 percent who reported having a high school diploma with some college education or higher.
- Those who reported using a government subsidy had significantly lower levels of education.
- Number of hours of work per week was 37 hours (SD = 12.75):
 - Those with a subsidy worked an average of 35 hours per week.
 - Those with no subsidy worked an average of 38 hours per week.
- Those with \$25,000 or less annual income:
 - Subsidy users worked an average of 34 hours per week.
 - Those with no subsidies worked an average of 36 hours per week.

Characteristics of the Children

- Average age of the youngest child in child care was 3 years old, and 52 percent were male and 48 percent were female.

Child Care Characteristics

- Children of parents using subsidies spend more time in child care than children of those not using subsidies.
- Cost of care is higher for parents receiving subsidies.
- Child care services are used more by lower-income families.
- Higher income families use home- and relative-based care, and lower income families use care from friends.
- Those who use more than one provider show no variation across incomes.
- Across all income brackets, most parents desire more child care choices.
- Regarding unexpected change in schedules and having to rely on someone for care, parents with subsidies were more likely than others to report that they cannot rely on backup care.
- Parents are more likely to work if they receive a subsidy.

Parent Rating of Choice and Quality

- High-income parents perceive having higher quality child care.
- Parents receiving subsidies rate their child care quality lower than do those without subsidies.
- There is little difference in perception of choice among those who do and do not receive subsidies.

Question and Answer Session

How do the studies define type of care?

- As we begin to study usage of care we need to use common definitions for the different types of care. CCDF collects data on different types of care, but States might have different definitions for these different types of care.

Can the child care community develop a common definition of subsidized care?

- People have differing ideas concerning definitions of subsidized care.
- Interruptions in use are a problem in some States; families may get penalized with a cut-off of their subsidies if they pull their child out of center care for an extended period because they are sick.
- The term “improper payment” has different definitions among the State agencies.

Why do parents use the types of child care they use?

- There is a need for qualitative research to accompany the quantitative analysis of parent choice.
- Problem with qualitative research is the disconnect between what parents say and what they do. For example, parents say that cost does not matter, but quantitative analysis of their behavior shows that it does.
- Providers and parents have similar values about the importance and meaning of quality.

- Mothers in poor rural and urban areas are living isolated from their communities, which play an important role in helping mothers understand their choices of care.
- No matter how much we improve the quality and accessibility of center care, parents will use other types of care for reasons of culture and convenience.
- Despite the relative availability of child care in the military, even at odd hours, transportation issues are a key to the child care choices of military parents.

Issues Regarding the Stability of Care

- How does a co-pay affect the choice for parents?
- How do affordability and access issues and cultural issues affect care choices?
- Is anyone addressing the issue of nontraditional hours?
- How do States address the issue of multiple providers?
- What is the availability of care for infants and toddlers and for children with special needs?

Burning Questions

Regarding child care characteristics across systems, issues such as rural versus urban differences, transportation issues, and the ways that the subsidy system creates instability in the application of regulations must be dealt with.

What factors affect child care selection? Each presentation touched on this question, with the proximity to child care centers, State policies, and number of center slots being among the factors that were considered. Parents' definitions of quality may be another factor. Would it be worthwhile to conduct a study that examines all these factors simultaneously to help determine parents' selection process?

One factor related to both the type of care used and the quality of child care settings is the child's age, which should not be ignored. Even among parents who prefer home- or relative-based care, there is a shift toward center-based care beginning about age 4. Parents recognize its social and cognitive benefits before kindergarten. Quality ratings are often based on adult-to-child ratios and caregiver interaction. There is more one-on-one attention in home- and relative-based care settings, but the overall care quality is higher in center-based care by the time that children enter preschool.

How do the issues that affect child care choices for low-income mothers, such as cost, subsidies, transportation, access and availability, cultural preferences, and trust, interact with the issue of a child's age; for example, how do varying levels of availability of care for infants and toddlers affect low-income mothers' choices? How does a child's age modify the effect of trust on parents' child care choices?