

**Child Care Policy Research Consortium Annual Meeting
Renaissance Washington, D.C. Hotel
April 13–16, 2004**

SESSION 16

What can we say about the effectiveness of efforts to improve child care market functioning by providing comparative information on child care facilities to parents?

Initiatives are underway across the U.S. to provide comparative information on child care facilities through ratings attached to licenses, posting of licensing compliance reports, and consumer-focused initiatives. How do we expect these efforts to affect parents and providers? How can both parent and provider effects be measured?

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Discussants: Arthur C. Emlen, Portland State University
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Ann Witte, Wellesley College & National Bureau of Economic Research

Scribe: Tracy Dry, National Child Care Information Center

Bobbie Weber Presentation: Providing Comparative Findings on Child Care Facilities: Current Effort and Expected Effects

Introduction

- Very little known yet.
- Because these are going up all over U.S., if consortium comes up with the major research questions, we should ask and how they should be evaluated, and on scale. If small, should still be evaluated and on a continuum.
- Move toward what are the research questions we should be asking and the research methods that would fit with what emerges.

Discussion Points

- Rationale for a parent-focused initiative: should we do it, what effects it would have, and a logic model.
- The paper: Residency Roundtable: Improving Child Care
- Paper represented the consensus of the group.

- Group proposed that States should build on what is already there; build on the system already in place, such as R&R; don't build another infrastructure to talk to parents.
- Paper has gotten a lot of communication about this.
- National Child Care Information Center (Judy Collins, Anne Mitchell, Louise Stoney) has helped her with getting a handle on what is out there. She saw patterns of people assessing quality at different levels: to associate it with a license, to associate with dollars/monetary awards, and to provide comparative information to parents.
 1. Five States associate States with licensing: Only one State went to legislature to create a tiered license (North Carolina).
 2. Providing monetary rewards: A number of States are providing differential rate; other mechanisms in seven States. Maine and Arkansas double the tax credit for families that use the facility.
 3. Six States provide comparative information on quality to parents. They use a variety of ways to do it. The biggest is Educare Colorado, which is merging with CORRA—\$15 million.
 - Marketing is an important characteristic; want brand recognition like TEACH that will be recognized by parents
 - Other mechanisms: booklets, Web-based, data incorporated into R&R
 - What they share is in some mechanism they are assessing. Need to pay attention to this so as not to have different assessment levels for license and for information provided to parents.
- Since the parent (paper?) has come out, a lot of people are getting excited about using it as an aggregate/outcome indicator as to where the supply is and the level of quality—and using it as an accountability tool, as opposed to focusing only on providing information to parents.
- To improve the functioning of child care market, parents need more information.
- Need logic model as the basis: logic model (*Effect of Access to Qualitative Information on Parental Selection and Quality of Supply*) in paper and PowerPoint: parents need flexibility in areas that (research has shown) affect the child care decision.
- Supply also varies.

Art Emlen Presentation

Larger topic from the workshop yesterday on dynamics of selecting child care: Why do we want to know about providing comparative information? This will impact what we do and how we go about it—examine our motivations.

Do we believe parents lack the ability to assess quality? Or do we believe that parents can use good descriptive information about group size/ratio, etc.?

- Emlen believes parents want better factual information about providers, and providers

offering a high quality of care would want this information as a way to compete. He can imagine these market forces gradually improving quality of care over time, but we need to understand the limited relevance that abstract ratings of overall quality can have for parent decisions.

- Put consideration of quality into context and appreciate the complexity of the realities of life that enter the picture for parents when they make their child care arrangements, and appear, in effect, to make their choices.
- Parent choice involves a mixture of values, facts, and behaviors that take advantage of the realities of circumstance. Things that parents value, whether or not they seem to deal with quality explicitly or are what we think of as “practical” considerations, all contribute to quality of life for families. Here’s a partial list:
 - Family composition: Families use what they’ve got—i.e., relatives.
 - Proximity means less effort; distance from home is important.
 - Known relationships important for familiarity and trust; neighborhood, culture and safety are all part of this.
 - Warmth and interest in their child.
 - An interesting learning environment.
 - Care individualized for their child: Does my child feel safe and secure? Is this what my child needs?
 - Can they find a caregiver who shares their values?
 - Can they find a caregiver who brings something different, complementing their own ability and experience?
 - Complex considerations about money and service motives.
 - Group size: caregivers who don’t take too many children.
 - Avoiding possible threats to child’s health and safety.
 - Food: What’s for lunch?
 - Accessibility of care to fit work patterns.
 - Flexibility. It has to come from somewhere: 1) job shift, work arrangements, schedule, time off for emergencies; 2) from within the family, in the form of shared responsibility or support; and 3) finding a caregiver who is accommodating and responsive to the needs of parent and child.

Emlen believes that parents integrate these values and practical realities in a remarkable way, making the best choices possible. Of the popular belief that parents sacrifice quality for convenience, flexibility, and all the practicalities of life, Emlen says the evidence is just the opposite: Parents put all that flexibility to work positively to make quality of care possible and more likely. Parents live in the real world and are capable practitioners of the art of the possible.

In this context, Emlen thinks factual indicators will fit in rather well, and parents can use them. Someone else’s overall quality rating is something different. Too abstract. It is a yardstick conceived for other purposes. It expresses someone else’s evaluation. Parents cannot easily apply that kind of quality rating in their situation. But parents can understand and use factual indicators with which they can compare providers on group size, adult-child ratio, staff training, etc. and make their own evaluation.

Who will finance the creation of factual indicators related to quality? It's not realistic to expect it to come from parents and providers. They would fit in well with the information Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies make available, but the R&Rs can barely afford to do what they're doing now. The financing of this information so critical for improving the quality of the child-care market will need to come from governmental sources justified because the outcomes are in the public interest.

Group Discussion

Question: Is there a distinction between abstract indicators and the discrete? (This is the heart of the conversation, and the hardest issue in the conversation.)

Emlen: Parents prefer the discrete, closer to what they deal with. There is so much hype about quality in the media, it's hard to know in the abstract what that means to parents.

Ramey noted that the "Diamond" from yesterday deals with QR.

Ultimately the parent has to put all the judgments and information together to make a decision. The global assessment seems to be based on an experience that does not happen in parents' daily lives.

Ann Witte Presentation

Discussion on global assessments: Do parents want pass/fail assessments or more detailed information?

Florida

For 60 of 68 Florida counties (all Counties except the eight that have set their own standards and have control over licensing), the State puts up the results of minimum standard inspections—too much detail and not user-friendly. By way of contrast, the web site that provides minimum standard inspection and substantiated complaint information is very user friendly. It begins very simply but also contains detailed information, which the user can access if she wishes. Some question that arise when providing consumer information on child care

- What level of detail is correct?
- Broward's site is effective in that gives the name and director of the school, and name of the owner, gives the inspector name, address, phone number (critical element), how long the inspector was there, etc.
- There is a single pass/fail summary.
- Gives parents a single thing to look at.
- Will inspector revisit? Good succinct indicator (inspector will revisit if there are issues).
- Was there a fine? (More serious violations have a fine). This has credibility for parent. Won't give you a fine gradation, but provides some distinctions.
- Gives several years of inspections.

- Also indicates if inspectors have not been there; regulatory agency may take action if this is an issue.
- Is it the first summary page parents want, or additional detail?

Accreditation: Validator goes in every 3 years (now 5+)

Witte encourages multiple observations over time. If you go to 1995 forward, you can see the changes over time. More mixed information—more discriminating on the part of the inspector.

Are the Reports Utilized?

(The following discussion referred to seven handouts from Ann Witte's poster session and Witte's paper on inspections on the Web.)

If you put information on the Web, does it make a difference?

- Counted the hits at the site (copies at the poster session), substantial increase—the reports are used. Availability of reports on the Internet was announced in the local media, announced on TV, sent out to parents
- See large increases to the hits to the Web site as information is available

March 1999 to June 2002 data

Inspectors change their behavior. Does this changed behavior lead to a change in the quality of care?

- Looked at two external sources of data: R&R data, and in Florida, all subsidized provider sites are visited once or twice a year. All assessed observationally, drawn from environmental rating scales.
- Question about the reliability issues about the assessors: the inter-rater reliability? Not issue since a difference in difference design that adjusts for this is used.

Handout: *Differences in Difference Estimate* (refer to handout from poster session for data)

- Set up the design to control for differences in rater assessments
- Technique used widely in economics: Difference in before/after differences for treatment and control group.

What research is needed and what research is employed?

What about the inspectors? Usually a large variance with the inspectors.

What we know from years of licensing (anecdotally) is that when the parents are already attached to a facility, and licensing issues may support closing the facility, parents get stronger and are loyal. However, maybe the other parents left, and when your care is gone suddenly there is a reaction; so we can't generalize too much with this.

Evidence of demand for quality is slow (see handout from Witte's poster session, titled *Bad News in the Short Run*). However, there is some immediate impact.

General guidelines:

- **Survey the literature to think through what are the basic issues.** What is your model for the impact of information? Is your model for empowering parents: more information can empower consumers. Is your interest the impact on poor families? See the research on the impact of information on lower-income families. In Broward County, parents receiving subsidies receive information about providers.
- **What level of information is most effective with which audience you're trying to reach?** Some parents want a simple glance, some want different levels of detail. Helpful to find out from research what parents actually want and how it is presented. Example: using consumer reports for shopping.
- **Be careful with what information is presented.** Second summary page is just as important as the pass/fail. Did they fail because paperwork isn't in order or up to date, or was it because the garage was being used as the facility?
- **Consumer report model is what New York pilot is using.** However, Cornell model isn't sustainable. No mechanism to fund consumer reports on the Web. This also gets to the issue of overlapping systems.

Licensing: Does this add to their job? No, not in Broward. No additional cost after start up.

Effects over time: there is slow movement in parent choice.

Parent-level data are very important. What if the more informed parents are the ones leaving, and are the poorer parents are coming in and not checking ratings?

- What is the R&R role with the inspections on the Web? Are they using the data with parents? They will give the Web site out. R&Rs are moving more this way. But it will be different if they are distributing a rating (concerns about getting sued, etc.).
- Is the rating harder to sustain than the objective information? (But isn't the rating the objective data—just a shorter version? One commenter argued that this is still someone else's judgment. Allan Pence has a chapter that says when you take objective information and translate it into a rating, you have "moved" it, and it is no longer an objective reality. The descriptive base is lost when you jump to the symbol/rating.)

- Possible to add information/data to the licensing report on the Web? Director education, etc. For example, “Here are 5 facts that may be helpful...”

Additional Points:

- ERS can't be sustained—too expensive.
- Inter-rater reliability: Whoever does the rating should not be the reporter. You add greater trust, sustainability to separate the responsibility of the assessor and the reporter. Issues of liability go way down.
- Assessor has to be credible: hope we find one way to assess facilities.
- Licensing isn't quality: it's health and safety. But there are elements of quality within it.

Notes from Flip Chart:

Basic Questions

- What is model of impact of information?
 - Empower
 - Differences by demographic
- What facilitation is needed to get information to parents?
- What level of awareness raising?
- What level of information is effective?
 - What type of parents?
 - Summary: ability to drill for detail
- How sustainable is effort?
 - What is the cost?
- Look over time on all players—sustained effects
- How to measure effect on parents?
 - Which parents (income, education)?
 - What effect?