

Child Care Preferences and Child Care Choices:

What types of care do low income families actually prefer, and are subsidies successful in helping them obtain care that matches those preferences?

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- In research funded by the Child Care Bureau, we found that low income African American parents prefer child care that emphasizes the quality of care children experience in child care (intrinsic factors) over issues related to accessibility (extrinsic factors).
 - Mothers appeared to place heavy emphasis characteristics associated with the caregiver, including her experience, training, level of warmth, and how often she interacts with the child.
 - Structural characteristics, such as accreditation and license status, were important but not as important as other care characteristics.
 - Least important to parents were issues of accessibility (travel time, hours of operation, and type of care).
 - Parents were willing to pay more out-of-pocket for quality care, but they rated quality care as more costly than they were willing / able to pay.
- We observed and rated the care use by low-income African American families. We found that subsidized families were more likely to use center care, somewhat more likely to use licensed care, and they paid half as much as non-subsidized families from the same neighborhoods and similar backgrounds.
 - However, the quality of the care was not different for subsidized and nonsubsidized families! Both were receiving the quality of care generally found in those neighborhoods – mediocre to just under good.
 - Possible conclusions:
 - Subsidies help parents access licensed center care at lower cost.
 - However, the quality of that subsidized care may be only as high as what's generally available within the neighborhoods families live and work.

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