

## **Gerilyn Slicker**

**Project Title:** Examining Provider Participation in the Child Care Subsidy System: A Mixed Methods Study

**Mentor:** Dr. Jason Hustedt

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**Project Abstract:**

Access to quality child care is essential for both child development and economic self-sufficiency for working families. Yet, child care is not affordable for most U.S. families. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) is a federal program that aims to help low-income families access more affordable child care through child care subsidies which offset or, in some cases, fully cover the cost of care. However, the number of child care providers who accept subsidies is declining, threatening low-income families' access. Research is needed to examine the factors that may influence center-based child care providers' participation in the subsidy system.

The proposed study will address this critical research need through secondary analyses of national datasets and primary data collection in Arkansas, paying close attention to the influence of state policies and other factors amenable to policy intervention. In particular, this will help in understanding how the state-level implementation of CCDF policies and practices may influence child care providers' willingness and ability to care for low-income children receiving subsidies and other families prioritized by the CCDF law (i.e., children with special needs, families experiencing homelessness).

The proposed study uses a three-phase, mixed methods design. Phase I, relying on a statewide partnership with the Arkansas CCDF agency, will be a mixed methods study that will illuminate experiences providers have with state policies that may influence subsidy participation within one state context. An explanatory sequential design will be employed, beginning with a survey of Arkansas providers and followed up with semi-structured interviews using a purposeful sub-sample of providers. Phase II will identify the features of providers, local markets, and state-level CCDF policies related to the proportion of children receiving subsidies and whether or not prioritized families are served in center-based programs. This phase will use a nationally representative sample of child care providers in the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) and state-level CCDF policy data from across the U.S., employing the 2018 CCDF Policies Database. Phase III will restructure NSECE survey data to mimic experimental data, strengthening the causal claims that can be made about the influence of state-level CCDF policies on provider subsidy system participation. Overall, this study will provide useful insights into how to implement state policies and practices that could incentivize center-based providers' participation in the subsidy system, and as a result better serve low-income families.

This study will use quantitative and qualitative data to examine three research questions:

- (1) In the context of a single state, how do qualitative interview data about providers' decisions around subsidy system participation help to explain the quantitative survey results about predictors of child care subsidy system participation in Arkansas?
- (2) At the national level, what determines the degree to which center-based providers participate in the child care subsidy system?
- (3) At the national level, what is the influence of variation in state CCDF policies on providers' participation in the subsidy system?