

PROJECT BRIEF

Facilitating Continuity in Subsidized Care within Maryland

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Project Description.

Goal: Use research to refine policies and practices in order to facilitate greater continuity and stability in subsidized child care, thereby making services more family-friendly and supportive of positive child outcomes.

Objectives:

- Describe longitudinal patterns in the continuity of subsidy spells and identify differences in these patterns by child, family, and community characteristics
- Examine the association between use of high quality care and continuity in subsidized care arrangements
- Determine whether Maryland's shift to a private, centralized subsidy case management system is associated with changes in the length of (family) eligibility periods as well as voucher length.

Research Questions.

- What patterns emerge when examining the continuity of subsidy spells (e.g., returning within a few months or a year to the subsidy program, rapid cycling, continuous long spells)? Does continuity of subsidy spells differ across child, family, and community characteristics?
- Do children in accredited subsidized arrangements remain in these providers' care longer than children in non-accredited subsidized arrangements?
- Does the length of (family) eligibility periods and voucher lengths differ before and after the shift to a private, centralized case management system? Do (family) eligibility periods and voucher authorization lengths become more consistent

across counties after the shift to a private, centralized subsidy case management system?

Sample. Our sample was drawn from child care subsidy administrative data that included information on all children who received child care paid through the Maryland state subsidy system during the 2007-2016 time period. Data were provided at the child care voucher level with links to provider data.

We built three types of longitudinal data files:

- Subsidy spells - Record for each continuous time period in which the child received subsidized care
- Child-level - Record for each child (all subsidy spells and subsidized arrangements over time)
- Subsidized arrangement -Record for each continuous subsidized arrangement with a specific provider

Methods.

Research Question 1

- We conducted descriptive analyses two ways: examining patterns of continuity (with the child being the unit of analysis) and looking at children's subsidy spells over time (with the unit of analysis being the subsidy spell rather than the child) to illustrate subsidy continuity.
- We investigated whether continuity differed based on key characteristics of child, family and community (e.g., child age, family structure, county, etc.).

Research Question 2

- We used propensity score techniques to create comparable groups of children in high quality

(i.e., accredited) subsidized arrangements and children in lower quality (i.e., non-accredited) subsidized arrangements. We applied inverse propensity treatment weights to survival analyses to compare the median length of care between the two groups.

- Comparisons were also conducted for subsamples defined by: child age, jurisdiction, and co-pay amount.

Research Question 3

- Multivariate regressions compared the length of (family) eligibility periods and voucher lengths administered before and after the shift to private, centralized case management. Interaction effects asked whether these lengths became more consistent across counties following this shift. We presented the following descriptive statistics both before and after the shift: mean voucher length, mean eligibility period length, percent of eligibility periods that were 48 weeks or longer, and percent of vouchers that were shorter than their eligibility period. Soon after the transition to private case management, families receiving temporary cash assistance (TCA) resumed local, public case management, so we did not analyze vouchers of TCA recipients.

Implications for policy/practice

The goals and objectives of this project are relevant to children, parents, and child care providers as well as policymakers at the state and federal level. Identifying patterns in families' continuity on the subsidy program, identifying subgroups of families that exhibit these patterns, provided state and local administrators with information to help identify families at risk of subsidy discontinuity and to refine policies and practices to support these families. Additionally, examining the associations between administrative practices (such as privatization and centralization of Maryland's case management) and families' experiences with the subsidy program helped policymakers within Maryland and in other states understand how the administration of a subsidy

program shapes families' experiences with the program.

Implications for research

This study contributes to methodology in the field of child care subsidy research through the use of propensity score techniques to examine the association between the use of accredited care and continuity of care. To date, no research has examined the difference in continuity between subsidized families who are using accredited arrangements and those who are not. In order to develop as appropriate a comparison as possible, we used propensity score weights to create a control group that was demographically similar to families who were using accredited care.

This project also included many take-aways for researchers using child care administrative data. In particular, we found that getting feedback from individuals with on-the-ground experience in the subsidy program was crucial to properly interpreting data.

For more information:

All research briefs, fact sheets, and webinars produced under this project can be found on the project website: <https://www.childtrends.org/project/maryland-child-care-administrative-data-analysis>

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