

The Changing Landscape of Publicly-Funded Center-Based Child Care: 1990 and 2012

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Project Description

The purpose of this study is to portray how the center-based child care options available to families have changed between 1990 and 2012 – two years when nationally representative data are available – and to describe how publicly-funded centers fit into these two portraits. We will also examine whether and how the characteristics of child care centers receiving and not receiving public funds, and the children and families they serve, have changed over this 22-year period.

Research Questions

1. Have the supply, distribution, and types of child care centers, defined by auspice/sponsorship and not- and for-profit status, changed between 1990 and 2012?
2. Have the sources, forms, and mix of revenues and payment sources that support child care centers receiving public funds changed between 1990 and 2012?
3. Have the qualifications, compensation, and retention of child care teachers within center-based programs receiving and not receiving public funds changed between 1990 and 2012?
4. How have the characteristics and mix of children and families served by center-based child care programs that receive public funds changed between 1990 and 2012?

Sample

The sample for this study is drawn from the 1990 Profiles of Child Care Settings Study and the companion National Child Care Survey, and the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education and its linked Household Survey. It consists of center-based child care programs that serve children under the age of 5 and are not primarily designed to serve children with special needs.

Methods

The initial analytic work for this study will consist of defining comparable samples of centers across the 1990 and 2012 surveys, followed by exploring different approaches to defining publicly-funded centers. In addition, “financially assisted” center-based enrollment will be defined from the Household Surveys. Creating comparable independent and dependent variables across the two surveys is the next task. Descriptive secondary data analyses primarily involving cross-tabulations of these constructed variables will then be conducted to address each of the research questions.

Progress Update

Preliminary codes for publicly-funded centers have been created along with both sample size calculations and initial cross-tabs of centers across several approaches to defining those that are publicly funded. The Household sample is in the process of being created. Initial comparisons of variables across the 1990 and 2012 datasets have been completed. We plan to present this work at the December 2015 CCPRC Annual Meeting for discussion and feedback.

Implications for policy/practice

Results from this study will inform efforts to ensure that center-based child care programs that serve low-income children and families in the U.S. are moving in the direction of improved (more equitable) access, higher quality, and reduced disparities between programs receiving and not receiving public funds with regard to the quality of their teaching workforce and characteristics of enrolled children.

Implications for research

To the extent that this study reveals stagnant or slow progress towards achieving current priorities focused on equity of access and the quality of care received by children and families reliant on public child care assistance, a next stage research agenda aimed at exploring the barriers to achieving these goals will be warranted. In addition, creating comparable samples and variables across the 1990 and 2012 center and household surveys will contribute to future efforts to examine trends over this 22-year period.

For more information

<http://www.crocus.georgetown.edu/>

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