Working Meeting on Child Care Decision-Making

December 4-5, 2008
Washington, DC

Meeting Summary

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Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the *Working Meeting on Child Care Decision-Making* was to provide an opportunity for discussion aimed at deepening understanding of parental decision-making about care and education for young children.

The initial goals for the meeting were to:
- identify the critical components of a conceptual model of decision-making
- review strengths and gaps in measurement strategies
- highlight innovations in research methods and analytic techniques, and
- strategize about the implications for policy and practice of a more differentiated conceptual model of decision-making

Meeting Sessions

Welcome and Introductions
Susan Jekielek, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE)
Kathryn Tout, Child Trends

Susan Jekielek opened the meeting by describing parental child care decision-making as a research topic with direct relevance for policymakers. The Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) has an explicit goal of supporting parental choice in child care decisions. State child care subsidy programs, quality rating systems, and consumer education efforts are three examples of CCDF policy and program areas that could benefit directly from new knowledge on the process and outcomes of parental child care decision-making. Additionally, several grantees from the Child Care Policy Research Consortium are currently studying this topic, so the meeting proceedings will be applicable to ongoing research funded by OPRE.

Kathryn Tout then provided an introduction to the meeting binder materials and framed the meeting as a starting point for future work on this topic. Meeting materials included (see Appendix A) a draft conceptual model of child care decision-making, project descriptions and conceptual models from attendees currently studying child care decision-making, and a key topic resource list developed by Research Connections, which describes publications on child care decision-making. A table produced by Child Trends that summarized the research questions, methodology, research design, sample, strengths/limitations, and conclusions of articles in the key resource topic list was also provided. Additionally, resource binders that included reference lists along with survey instruments relevant to child care decision-making from attendees were available to meeting participants.

A Conceptual Model of Child Care Decision-Making
Bobbie Weber, Oregon State University

The purpose of this session was to introduce a conceptual model of child care decision-making that was created as a hybrid of models used within the Child Care Policy Research Consortium (CCPRC) and discussed during a session at the July 2008 CCPRC meeting. The session outlined critical questions about the model to be addressed in breakout groups. Of central concern was
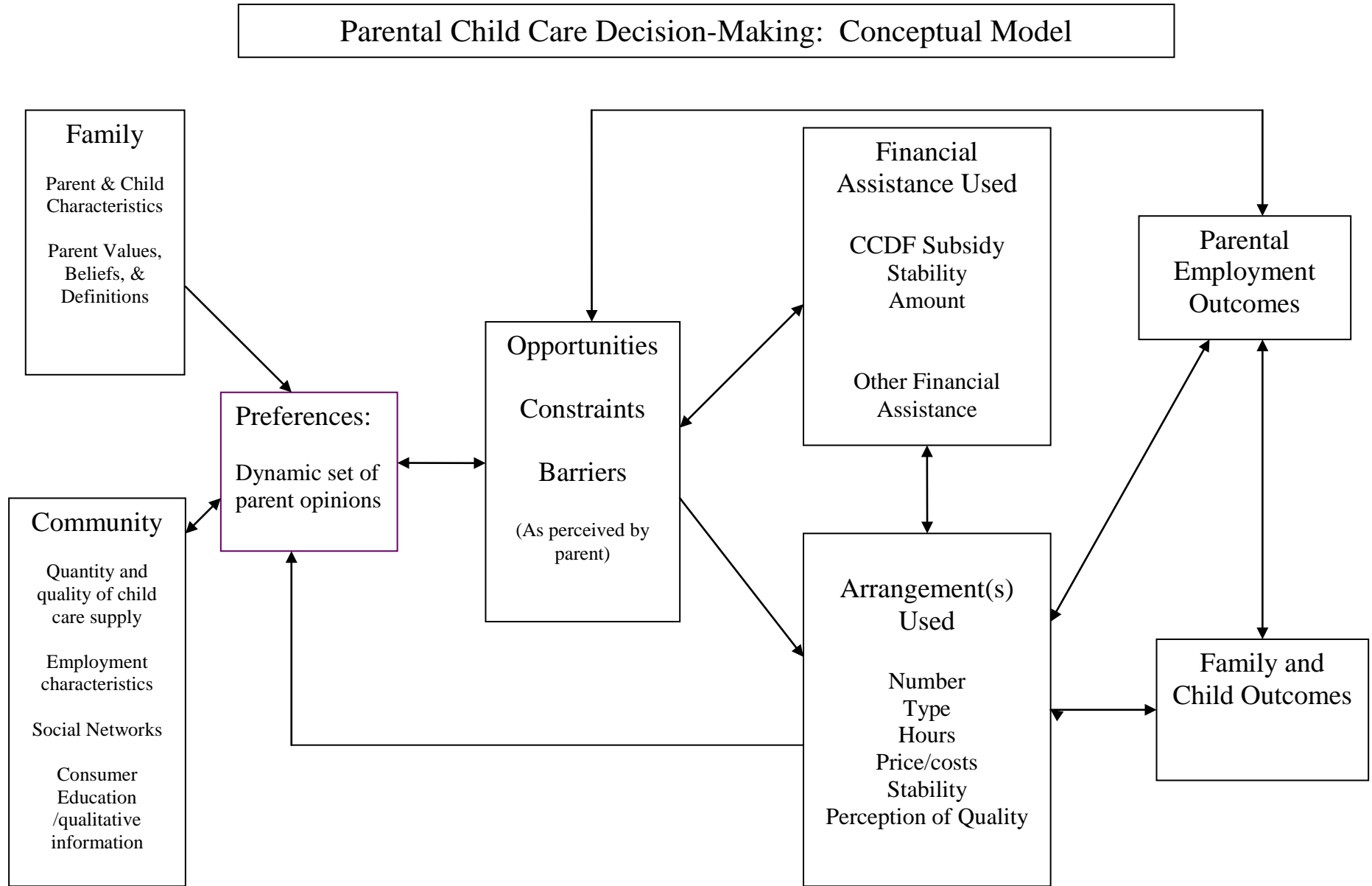
ensuring that the model serve as a guiding framework for research, practice, and policy, while still reflecting the complexity of decision-making processes. The session also addressed how a more differentiated understanding of child care decision-making has implications for policy and programs.

Dr. Weber opened the session by discussing the policy relevance of understanding child care decision-making. The information can be used to inform child care subsidy policies (including co-payments, maximum payment rates, eligibility rules, and rules governing re-determination), work-family policies (work schedules, access to paid and unpaid leave and sick leave) and the provision of information about quality (relevance of information to parents, type of information provided, and delivery system).

She then reviewed common assumptions about child care decision-making. Some of the assumptions emerge from research with contradictory findings. Examples of common assumptions included: race, ethnicity, and language affect the type of care preferred; parents are unable to discern how well an arrangement meets developmental needs, lack critical information in making child care choices, and prioritize cost and location over quality; and, low-income parents have few, if any child care options. Less common assumptions highlighted, based on the work of Arthur Emlen, included the beliefs that parents' own judgments blend values and practical considerations into the best feasible solution for the family, parents are best served with raw information rather than summary scores that reflect the priorities of quality rating systems, and quality is an abstract concept composed of judgments rather than objective measure.

Finally, Dr. Weber presented the conceptual model (see Figure 1). The stated purpose of having a conceptual model is to allow one to visualize complex relationships among families and communities, organize existing bodies of research, identify gaps in the research, and help build a research agenda by clarifying research questions and identifying areas in which little is known. The conceptual model presented is a hybrid of a model developed by the CCPRC in 2003, which focused on child care preferences, and a model developed by current Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation grantees in Minnesota. A defining feature of the updated model presented by Dr. Weber is the inclusion of bi-directional arrows, acknowledging a recursive process. Some questions posed to participants about the model included whether it adequately addresses the use of multiple child care arrangements and the impact of some children's special needs (for example, disabilities, non-English speakers), and how to handle simultaneous decision-making around employment and child care outcomes.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Parental Child Care Decision-Making: Conceptual Model

Family

Parent & Child Characteristics

Parent Values, Beliefs, & Definitions

Community

Quantity and quality of child care supply

Employment characteristics

Social Networks

Consumer Education /qualitative information

Preferences:

Dynamic set of parent opinions

Opportunities

Constraints

Barriers

(As perceived by parent)

Financial Assistance Used

CCDF Subsidy
Stability
Amount

Other Financial Assistance

Arrangement(s) Used

Number
Type
Hours
Price/costs
Stability
Perception of Quality

Parental Employment Outcomes

Family and Child Outcomes

Model comes from merge of products created by Child Care Policy Research Consortium (2003) and the Minnesota Child Care Research Partnership (2008).

Small Group Work: Refining the Conceptual Model of Child Care Decision-Making
Small Group Facilitators: Bobbie Weber, Diane Schilder, Susan Jekielek, Helen Ward, Nikki Forry, Tamara Halle

Participants in the working meeting were then assigned to one of three small groups. The goal of the small group work was to address and discuss in-depth the questions and issues raised in the introductory session (for example, those related to the inclusion of multiple arrangements, the circular or bidirectional nature of influence between components, and simultaneous decisions about multiple children and arrangements). To guide the discussion, the following questions were posed:

1. What research questions about child care decision-making are most important to address, and how does the conceptual model provide the basis for addressing the questions?
2. What outcomes are we predicting?
3. How does the conceptual model account for bidirectional or circular relationships among the components?
4. How does the model account for:
   a. Multiple arrangements
   b. Developmental characteristics of the child
   c. Arrangements for more than one child in a family
   d. Cultural values and parental preferences
   e. The influence of family structure, including extended families and two parents

Following the break-out sessions, each group reported back to the larger group. The information that follows provides a summary of the key themes and issues raised in the group discussion.

Key themes related to the conceptual model.
Meeting participants reflected on a variety of issues related to the conceptual model. The key themes to emerge from the discussion included the need for further conceptualization of the model, clarification of the purposes, the importance of operationalizing key factors in the model, and recognizing the inherent complexities of the model. Each of these is described in more detail below.

Conceptualization
- Two of the groups introduced the idea of using concentric circles (levels) to represent the ecological nature of child care decision-making. The outer circle would contain factors that influence many aspects of the child care decision making process. For example, policies have the potential to affect everything from the family constellation (marriage support policies) to financial resources (child care subsidies) and parental employment choices (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families – TANF). Additionally, the child care market affects the options available to families and the price of care, thereby potentially limiting child care options. The inner circle would include more specific recursive relationships, such as those shown in Figure 1.
- Multiple possibilities for focal outcomes were proposed for the model, including:
  o Child care arrangement used

- o Dynamic process of decision-making (though this would be difficult to classify as an outcome, per se)
- o A trio of outcomes including child care arrangement used, employment decision, and financial assistance receipt
- One group introduced the possibility that two models should be created: one for outcomes and one for the process of decision-making.
- The importance of distinguishing child care preferences from child care decisions was highlighted.

Purpose
- The two identified purposes for the conceptual model were:
  - o To provide a foundation for research models
  - o To serve as an education tool to be used with policy makers, program administrators, resource and referral staff, etc.
- Considerations in using the conceptual model for research were discussed:
  - o Participants felt there is a need to focus on a particular aspect or level of the model in order to answer research questions, while still taking into consideration the complexity of the model.
  - o Though they are related, participants highlighted the need to make a distinction between the conceptual model and an analytic model.
- Consideration in using the conceptual model for educational purposes were discussed:
  - o The model needs to be simple enough for use with multiple stakeholders with various backgrounds.

Further Operationalization is Needed:
- A need to operationalize the concepts in the model was expressed. Specific suggestions included the following:
  - o Include both objective and subjective variables to measure some constructs (e.g. cost of care, quality of care).
  - o Define and clarify the term "self-sufficiency." For example, could it be limited to economic self-sufficiency or could it consider non-economic indicators of self-sufficiency as well?
  - o Distinguish between (and include both) micro and macro influences.
  - o Define parental employment outcomes: income, stability, number of jobs.
  - o Distinguish between "constraints" and "barriers".
  - o Consider the "package" of child care arrangements used for all the children in the family

Complexities
- There was consensus throughout the meeting that child care decision making is a complex process involving circular and simultaneous relationships. Thus, the model is not static or linear, but instead circular and dynamic. The concept of bi-directionality may not capture the true complexity of the process.
- Participants discussed specific suggestions to improve the model in light of this circularity. The ideas proposed included the following:

- o Parental and family outcomes could be brought into the model as a factor influencing the child care arrangement.
- o The model could highlight the relationship between child care decisions and availability of different arrangements in the market.
- o Arrows could be added from family/child outcomes to preferences, from parental employment outcomes to preferences, from parental employment to opportunities, and from parental employment to family.
- o A simultaneous relationship between child care decisions, employment decisions, and financial assistance for child care needs to be acknowledged.
- o The choice of care and employment decisions could be conceptualized as "impacts" rather than "outcomes".
- As child care decision making is not a static process, temporal considerations related to the model were also discussed:
  - o Questions about how to capture point-in-time in the model were raised.
  - o The suggestion was made to add a "past experiences" box on the left side of the model, reflecting that both lack of familiarityy with particular arrangements and positive/negative experiences can influence subsequent parental decisions and preferences.
  - o Participants noted that that he child care arrangements box in the model should allow for assessment at different points in time.
- Meeting participants were concerned about applying the model across diverse populations:
  - o Participants discussed the challenges of gathering data in a way that is reliable and valid across parents with different cultural backgrounds.
  - o Participants suggested that the conceptual model should be flexible and allow for different processes and the weighting of different factors across families, communities, time frames, and children.

Prioritized research questions about child care decision-making.
Meeting participants generate a number of questions about child care decision-making that could be used to inform a research agenda. The questions they posed are outlined below, by category:

Identifying the Dominant Factors in Child Care Decision-Making:
- Which connections between variables in the model are the strongest, across all families and across diverse subgroups?

Building Upon Existing Evidence:
- What evidence exists to support the hypothesized relationships in the conceptual model across all families and for particular subgroups that have policy relevance?
- In research areas where there are contradictory findings, how much of the contradiction is explained by not taking into account all aspects of the model?

Examining Parents' Thought Processes & Perceptions:
- How do parents assess the strengths and weaknesses of arrangements over time (now and looking back on them)?

- What factors are most important to parents, and how do parents weigh these factors over time?
- Why do parents put children in non-optimal arrangements (either in terms of their own preferences or formal assessments of child care quality)?
- How do parents with different characteristics (for example, characteristics related to culture or family dynamics) perceive quality?

Supporting Parental Decisions:
- What kinds of information are needed by parents to inform their decision making?
- Is information available in the community getting to families? If information is getting to families, is this happening proactively or in a passive way?
- How are parental decisions affected by community or cultural opinions of appropriate arrangements?

Additional Revisions to the Model.
Finally, meeting participants put forth a number of suggestions for making revisions to the conceptual model by adding new elements or moving elements of the model around. Specific suggestions included:

- The cognitive process of decision-making could be added to the model (that is, an examination of how the decision occurred, in addition to what the decision was).
- The cost of changing arrangements (financial costs as well as interpersonal costs) could be included in the barriers box.
- The amount of time one has to make a child care choice should be included as a constraint.
- Further consideration could be given to the placement of financial assistance in the model.
- Some of the variables in the community box could also be in the family box (for example, values, and religion). Also, there could be an arrow between the family and community boxes. Finally, internal family processes could be included in the family box.
- Family and community networks could be separated, and the social capital of neighborhoods could be included in the community networks box. Grandparents could be included in the family networks box.
- Other possible additions to the community box include: neighborhood context, crime, housing, transportation, cultural values, religious institutions/values, and community initiatives. A suggestion was made to disaggregate the community box into local, state, and national influences.
- Policies/systems could be included in the model (for example, pre-K, Head Start system changes, public education, the degree to which systems are coordinated and multiple services are combined).
- Child care market could be separated from the community box.
- Family structure could be added to the family box.
- Family functioning, children's happiness/safety, and school readiness are additional possible outcomes/impact.

Panel Discussion: Overview of Research Issues, Methods, and Measures

Ann Collins, Abt Associates, Inc.
Marcia Meyers, University of Washington
Gina Adams, Urban Institute

The purpose of the panel discussion was to highlight significant challenges and opportunities inherent to research on child care decision-making and offer guidance for how to address these issues. The discussion laid the groundwork on cross-cutting issues for the small group sessions that followed in which participants were able to discuss particular topics in depth.

Marcia Meyers opened the session by identifying unanswered research questions and contradictions in research findings related to child care decision making. She then presented two dominant research paradigms: "Choice" and "Accommodation".[1]

- The choice paradigm is a positivist approach drawn from microeconomic labor supply and consumption theories. This paradigm assumes parents are reasonable decision-makers who attempt to maximize their family's well-being in their child care choices by balancing factors such as their income, time (convenience), and quality of care. According to this paradigm, parents child care choices are rooted in relatively stable, pre-existing preferences and parents make decisions based on their evaluation of costs and benefits within the context of constraints. Using the choice paradigm, researchers would be interested in predicting parental choices and determining what can be done to change parental choices. Analyses using the choice paradigm rely primarily on multivariate models with representative samples or experimental designs. Conclusions about child care decision-making derived from this paradigm are that price, employment demands, family resources, child characteristics, and parental beliefs affect child care decisions.

- The accommodation paradigm is drawn from sociological, social network, and social construction theories. It focuses on negotiating complex role demands within social networks. According to this paradigm, decisions are dynamic and embedded in social networks. Child care preferences are both individual and learned through social construction via repeated interactions within social networks. Using the accommodation paradigm, researchers would be interested in determining what parents know about alternatives to their current child care arrangement, where parents get their information about child care, and how parents reconcile their child care, employment, and family choices with their values and the values of their family/community. Analyses using the accommodation paradigm rely primarily on ethnographic studies, spatial/social network analyses, and in-depth interviews. Conclusions about child care decision-making derived from this paradigm are that inconsistencies in child care decisions results from complex demands on parents as both caregivers and economic agents, child care decisions may not always conform to the cost-benefits calculus researchers might expect, and parents may reproduce the child care choices of those in their family or community.

In conclusion, Dr. Meyers suggested necessary next steps for research methods and measurement applied to child care decision-making. These included developing robust theories that recognize reasoned individual action and social context, developing multi-method research studies with sufficient power and depth, using multi-level and longitudinal studies to embed individual

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[1] See also: Meyers, M. K. & Jordan, L. P. (2006). Choice and accommodation in parental child care decisions. *Journal of the Community Development Society, 37*(2), 53-70.

decisions within social networks and temporal changes, and recognizing when phenomena are unable to be measured through survey methods.

Gina Adams discussed how policy influences the decision-making model. She began by highlighting the complexities involved in policy research, explaining that policies are not pure. How a policy is implemented at a local level depends upon resources, leadership, administrative structure, and other interrelated policies at the federal, state, and local levels. Characteristics of persons delivering services (e.g., training/knowledge, caseload/resources, discretion, personality, and programmatic responsibilities), communities, and families also affect how policies are delivered. Additionally, policies meant to affect parents may actually work through other parties (e.g., providers). Thus, research studies should consider evaluating the effects of policies on multiple stakeholders (e.g., parents and providers). Ms. Adams cautioned that terminology functions differently for different populations. She suggested focusing on the effects policies are aiming to achieve (e.g,. reduction in cost of care) rather than the names of the policies (e.g. child care subsidies) when developing survey interviews or protocols.

Key themes about the presented paradigms and measurement issues arose from the discussion moderated by Ann Collins.
    Paradigms:
- The choice and accommodation paradigms serve different purposes, but need not be irreconcilable. For example, the economic model can accommodate both choice and accommodation.
- The current conceptual model accommodates both paradigms through the strength and direction of the arrows.
- The choice and accommodation paradigms mirror the variable-centered and person-centered approaches from developmental psychology.
- Behavioral economists and social constructionists are not represented at this meeting, though their input would be valuable. The field could be enriched through lessons learned by researchers from different disciplines on similar topics (e.g., behavioral economists around health care choices).

    Measurement Issues:
- Language and cultural issues must be considered in developing measures.
- Survey questions are currently grouped into modules that make sense to researchers, but may not reflect how parents think.
- Cognitive testing is important to ensure parents are answering the survey questions we mean to be asking.

Interest Groups
Meeting participants were then split into to three facilitated interest groups: culture, language, and families; provision of information and information processing; and financial resources and employment. The goal of each interest group was to discuss significant challenges and promising approaches available to researchers as related to the group topic and child care decision-making. Interest groups were provided the following questions to facilitate this discussion:
1. What research questions/issues would your group prioritize in this topical area?
2. What are the most significant challenges facing researchers on this topic? In particular, what challenges and opportunities exist with respect to the particular area your group is discussing?
3. What new and promising approaches are available to researchers to address issues related to:
    a. Sampling
    b. Recruitment
    c. Measures
    d. Methodology

Culture, Language, and Families
Ajay Chaudry, Urban Institute
The issues covered in this group included culture, language, immigrant/refugee status, and family preferences and values around caregiving. Key themes arising from this interest group were:
- The Key Research Question(s) : What is the relationship between home culture/language preferences/family background and child care choices?
- Some of the potential questions for which we would want to probe families to help answer this question are:
    o How do you see your role as a parent? How do you feel about sending children to a caregiver?
    o What would your mother do differently in your native country?
    o What do you see as the role of care providers for your child?
    o What do you want your child to learn?
    o What is your expectation for your child at age 2,3,4, etc.?
    o What were your impressions when you left your child at a center for first time?
- Issues Affecting Research:
    o Legality: how can illegal immigrants who are not eligible for services be supported? How can we instill trust (alleviate fear) when parents put their children in care, or when we ask about their child care decisions?
    o Standardized measures across languages/cultures: There are not many normed measures for minority languages. Also, languages have different dialects. We need to be clear on the construct being measured before trying to translate measures. Finding translators and completing IRB applications for multiple languages/dialects is a further challenge.
    o Sensitivity to acculturation in measures/study development: Need to distinguish between words and actions in assessing acculturation.

- Subsamples: Studies with sub-samples of families who speak different languages will face translation issues. Can groups be compared across different measures if the measures don't have the same validation across languages? What to do if it is not appropriate to have uniformity across focus group or interview protocols?
- Research questions may need to vary depending on which group is studied (is it culturally competent to have the same research question applied across subgroups?)
  - Important to assess how the respondent perceives American culture
  - Ask what would be different in the respondent's home country
  - Be aware of majority assumptions when studying minority cultures (cultural beliefs may affect child care preferences, child care utilization, and what is expected of children at various ages)
- Recruitment/Retention: Longitudinal studies are particularly important for tracking and understanding behavior. Immigration patterns, residential instability and parent's complicated work schedules complicate matters and make recruitment and retention more difficult.
- Avoiding overgeneralizations about cultures: Focus on beliefs rather than cultural differences. Also, be cautious with small samples to ascribe differences in decision-making to culture.
- Don't forget about religious identify, which may be more significant than national identity or place of origin in families' decisions around appropriate care.

- Suggestions:
  - Develop programs to diversify the research community to better reflect the communities of research interest.
  - Look across disciplines/fields for examples of how to do cross-cultural research
  - Norm more measures in various languages
  - Develop more large demographic databases

Provision of Information and Information Processing
Marsha Weinraub, Temple University
The issues covered in this group included the ways in which families find and receive information about child care, how they weigh and prioritize various types of information, constraints on information, and differences between familial values and "expert" opinion. Key themes arising from this interest group were:
- Key Research Questions:
  - What do parents value about child care? What do parents know about the impact of child care on children's development? Assessing parents' knowledge, attitudes and behavior is necessary.
  - How can we learn about whether and to what extent Quality Rating Systems affect decision making?
    - *What* do parents want to know about child care and are Quality Rating Systems providing the information that parents want to know about the

care children receive? What is the match between information in Quality Rating Systems and parents perceptions of what their children need in child care? What is the intersection between the information in Quality Rating Systems and what parents want to know? Do parents even know about their child's center's rating?

- Descriptively, *where and how* are Quality Rating System information presented to parents? Given the variety of ways Quality Rating Systems are presenting information, are some approaches more effective with parents than others? With some subgroups? How is information perceived, is it valued, is it used? Under which circumstances do parents use information?
- What are the underling assumptions of Quality Rating Systems and should they be questioned about parental utilization of quality?
- How can and should the research on decision making inform the structuring of Quality Rating Systems and other quality initiatives?

- Issues Affecting Research:
  o Can you measure some of the key questions quantitatively? (e.g., are parents choosing not to go to a 4 star center because won't be comfortable there)
  o Though it can be time consuming, it is important to ask about the alternatives to choices made. What did you reject and choose not to do and why?
  o Confounding factors: availability of care
  o Choosing between methods for gathering information: prospective vs. retrospective.
- Suggested Methodology:
  o Creative data collection: recording thoughts, online blogging
  o Multiple means of data collection: survey plus focus group
  o Experimental design (e.g. vary time allowed to find a care arrangement)

Financial Resources and Employment
Julia Henly, University of Chicago
The issues covered in this group included the role that financial incentives (for example, subsidies) and resources (income) play in decision-making. Discussion of employment as an opportunity and barrier was also included. Key themes arising from this interest group were:

- Key Research Questions:
  o To what extent do finances affect the child care decision?
    ▪ What is the evidence that price affects child care decisions and subsidies lower price? Under what conditions does decreasing cost of child care lead to more child care usage vs. more expensive care arrangements? Under what conditions does reduced child care cost result in increased work hours, increased disposable income, etc?
  o To what extent do work conditions affect the child care decision?
    ▪ To what extent is the relationship between work conditions and type of care that has been demonstrated in the literature the result

of work conditions themselves or a proxy for erratic earnings and income? Do these work conditions make it more difficult to access child care subsidies?

- o What do we need to know in order to understand parents' decision making around subsidy use?
  - Do families use subsidies to improve the quality of care arrangements, to cover the care needs of more children, to increase the hours of care? Why don't some eligible families use subsidies? Why are families leaving subsidy care, even when they are still eligible?
- o How do subsidies influence parental choice in child care and employment choices? And how do child care arrangements and employment circumstances influence subsidy use?
- o In what ways do changes in work over time coincide with changes in child care arrangements and subsidy use?
- o What are the costs and benefits of making subsidy receipt conditional on employment? If parents are losing subsidies due to job loss, are the work-based eligibility criteria contributing to child care instability? If we did not as tightly link child care subsidies to employment, would the employment goals of subsidies be compromised? Would the child well-being goals be strengthened? Do parents who use child care programs such as Head Start and Universal Pre-K (which are not conditional on work) have a different relationship to employment than parents who use child care subsidies?
- o To what extent do parents use child care as a work support and to what extent do they use it as a tool for child development? How do the financial resources available to parents—either through work or subsidy use—relate to the function that child care serves for parents?

- Issues Affecting Research
  - o Populations to include in sampling: Families across the income distribution, those using family, friend, and neighbor care, and those who are and are not using subsidies. Consider sampling for employment studies from public schools.
  - o Confounding effects: Caseworkers and providers may be influencing the child care choices of parents, families having access to free care
  - o Parental "Co-payment": Parental co-pays vary widely. Also, receiving a subsidy may not decrease the cost of care for parents; parents may instead choose to select better care. There is an interaction of cost, quality, type of care, and subsidy.
  - o Misinformation among families about policies/subsidies, there is a need to separate perceptions from realities
  - o Some families lose child care subsidies due to general life instability, not employment instability
  - o .Survey items on the use of child care subsidies have not gathered reliable information.
  - o Lack of information on reasons why families have low take-up rates for subsidies.

- Suggested Methodology
  - Experimental studies done in different policy contexts, or natural experiments using waiting lists
  - Mixed-methods approaches including qualitative and quantitative components, especially as an add-on to experimental studies where a qualitative sub study can help explain the experimental condition
  - Use of different data collection techniques and the collection of data from different sources – observation, parent interviews, provider interviews, and bureaucratic/organizational data
  - Longitudinal studies, perhaps using qualitative approaches together with quantitative methods to track changes in employment, subsidy use, and child care choices over time
- Issues with the Conceptual Model:
  - Develop in greater detail the role that employment and financial resources play in the child care decision, and in child and family outcomes more broadly
  - Macro-employment indicators (factors such as community unemployment rates; poverty rates; etc) and personal employment circumstances (job characteristics, earnings, work schedules) and personal income packages (income from public policies, from family members, from other sources) are underspecified in the model

Key Points from the Day
Marty Zaslow, Child Trends
This session offered a synthesis of the day's presentations and discussions. Key themes are presented below.
- Conceptual Model
  - <u>Communicating with policy makers and practitioners</u>: What is it about a model that is important to policymakers and those involved in program implementation? What are the characteristics of the model that was useful in conversations with policymakers that we should seek to retain in any new models that are developed?
  - <u>How many models?</u>: Are we in agreement that there is a decision-making process model and an outcomes of the decision model?
  - <u>Completing the revision of the model</u>: We have some issues on the table for extending and revising the model. But what process would be needed to take the ideas on the table and actually create a next generation model?
- Methodologies
  - <u>Following up on need for multi-method approaches</u>: What do we need to understand more deeply and explore through qualitative methods? What are the highest priority variables to add to our quantitative analyses?
  - <u>How can we integrate the element of time into understanding of parental decision making?</u>: How does decision making differ when a parent is experiencing a problem in child care? What is the timeline that parents have? How long do parents have to decide?
  - <u>What are the aspects of parental decision-making that might be possible to work on via experimental design?</u>: There are different ways of presenting information

and conducting outreach but also packaging of information. These are candidates for experimental design. Additionally, manipulation of time constraints could also be included in an experimental design.
- o Behavioral economics (and other colleagues who need to be at the table): What other colleagues need to be at the table? What would different disciplines add to this discussion?
- Policy Issues
  - o QRS: How can we learn about whether and to what extent QRS affect decision-making? How can research on decision making be informative to the way QRS structure and provide information? What is the intersection between the information in QRS and what parents want to know? Descriptively, *how* is QRS information presented to parents? How the information can be accessed? Parents' ability to un-package the information? Do parents access the information? Which parents? Can quality rating systems be useful given the reality of time pressure for employment among TANF families? Are parents more likely to use QRS if parents have resources of funds; time?
  - o Differences in decision-making process under differing circumstances: How do parents prioritize the factors in selecting care under differing circumstances of constraint? Are there circumstances in which parental decision making is severely constrained? Should these be a particular focus? Is brief decision making necessarily constrained? Under what circumstances is parental decision making of concern? Do parents have a subjective sense of constraint? Do they indicate that they are lacking in capacity to choose?

Panel Discussion: Analytic Strategies for Studying Decision-Making
Julia Henly, University of Chicago
Ralph Mueller, George Washington University
Lisa Gennetian, The Brookings Institution
Judith Levine, Temple University

In contrast to the Thursday session examining research issues in the design and implementation of a study, this session provided an overview of challenges and opportunities related to data analysis. The panelists represented both qualitative and quantitative analytic strategies and provided comments on issues related to the selection of analytic strategies that align with the questions of interest. For example: What parameters should be considered? What new and promising analytic strategies exist that could help advance knowledge in this topic area? What are the common pitfalls that researchers should avoid as they launch work using a new analytical strategy?

Ralph Mueller presented the topic of structural equation modeling. This method of data analysis is used to test competing causal theories or confirm/disconfirm a priori theories. Structural equation modeling is a blanket term for a number of specific analytic techniques, including path analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, and regression. Dr. Mueller discussed basic tenants of structural equation modeling, including the decomposition of structural and non-structural components of a model, the disattenuation of structural effects by isolating measurement error through the use of latent constructs, and an explanation for how one can test causality based on a

priori theories without an experimental design. Dr. Mueller then provided examples of studies using structural equation modeling.

Lisa Gennetian discussed additional approaches to analysis. Dr. Gennetian focused on experimental and non-experimental approaches used to identify causal effects. She then offered a description of instrumental variable modeling and its potential usefulness. Dr. Gennetian provided an example of a study using instrumental variable modeling. She closed by comparing estimates of experimental and non-experimental approaches to the same research question.

Judith Levine discussed qualitative and mixed methods. She began by providing an overview of qualitative techniques, including interviewing, participant observation, ethnography, and content analysis. Dr. Levine encouraged the use of mixed methods studies. This practice allows a researcher to capitalize on the benefits of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches, but is costly in terms of money, time, and releasing findings in a timely manner. Dr. Levine then elaborated upon challenges in collecting qualitative data on child care and provided strategies for overcoming these challenges.

Following the presentations, a discussion was facilitated by Julia Henly. In this discussion, the challenges and logistics of multi-method work, complexities in modeling bi-directionality, and specifying models with joint child care and employment outcomes were discussed.

Developing Products, Implications for Policy and Practice, and Next Steps
Kathryn Tout, Child Trends
Susan Jekielek, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation

This session gathered the group's input on the products that could be generated from the meeting and the ways in which the meeting proceedings or products could be used to inform policy and practice.

The group enumerated the purposes of having a conceptual model as: integrating complex information into one model, providing a framework that can be used in developing analytic models, identifying research gaps in the literature, providing a tool for presenting the complexity of decision making to policy makers/administrators.

The group discussed the usefulness of preparing a comprehensive literature review that would pull together research, theory, methodology, and analytic techniques related to/applied to child care decision-making.

The group also discussed the possibility of having multiple conceptual models, one simplified model for policy/administrator constituents (perhaps with a narrative) and a more differentiated model for the research community.

All materials produced as follow-up to the meeting will be publicly available at Child Care and Early Education Research Connections (www.researchconnections.org).