



Characteristics of Center Care: Implications for Working Families

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Overview

- Excerpts from a forthcoming report, *Assessing Quality across the Center-Based Early Care and Education Workforce: Evidence from the National Survey of Early Care and Education*
- Why center care?
 - More likely to offer high-quality early care and education experiences and foster children's growth and development than home-based settings (e.g., Adams, Zaslow, & Tout, 2007; Bassok, Fitzpatrick, Greenberg, & Loeb, forthcoming; Dowsett, Huston, & Imes, 2008; Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, & Rumberger, 2007; Magnuson et al., 2007; Wrigley & Dreby, 2005)
- But how well do centers meet the needs of low-income working families?
 - Here we focus on center types defined by **funding stream, flexibility, and ages of children served**

Data and Methods

National Survey of Early Care and Education (2012)

- Center-based and Workforce Quick Tabulation files
- 7,770 centers and 4,811 classroom-based teaching staff working within them
 - With sampling weights, these files yield representative portraits of all instructional staff working at least five hours per week in center-based early care and education programs that serve children birth through age five, not yet in kindergarten, in the United States
- Limitations include: data censoring (top- and bottom-coding of some variables, omission of some centers and workforce members to protect confidentiality), responses from only one workforce member per center, and no information on demand or access (e.g., waitlists).

Centers by Funding Stream

Definitions

- **Parent tuition-only (14%)**
- **Any subsidy funding (29%)**
- **Any Head Start funding (17%)**
- **Any state pre-k funding (20%)**
- **Any local government funding (12%)**

Centers by Funding Stream

Parents who are eligible to take advantage of available cost savings through access to Head Start, state pre-k, and locally funded programs would not be sacrificing quality in doing so.

- Compared to staff in parent tuition-only centers, staff in these centers:
 - Have higher levels of formal education
 - Are far more likely to join professional organizations (29-41% versus 21%)
 - Participate in professional development activities at higher rates, on average.

Subsidized centers offer a more mixed picture of the relationship between quality and access.

- Compared to staff in parent tuition-only centers, staff in subsidized centers:
 - Have less experience and less formal education
 - But are roughly 10 percentage points more likely to take courses (36% versus 25%) and participate in supervision and review (68% versus 56%), on average.

Centers by Flexibility

Definitions

- **Offers flexible schedules and/or payments that vary from week to week (45%)**
- **Open during any non-standard hours (evenings after 7pm, weekends, overnight) (9%)**

Centers by Flexibility

Parents who depend on scheduling flexibility, including paying for different hours week-to-week, are likely to access centers with staff meeting fewer quality benchmarks.

- Compared to other staff, staff in centers with scheduling and payment flexibility:
 - Are younger and less experienced
 - Have much less formal education (31% versus 40% with a BA)
 - And participate in professional development activities at lower rates, on average.

Similarly, parents who require care during non-standard hours are likely to encounter staff meeting fewer quality benchmarks.

- Compared to other staff, staff in centers open non-standard hours:
 - Have much less formal education (31% versus 18% with a HSD or less, 28% versus 36% with a BA)
 - Are much less likely to join professional organizations (17% versus 27%)

Centers by Ages of Children Served

Definitions

- **Infants/toddlers and preschoolers** (0-5 years, 52%)
- **Only preschoolers** (3-5 years, 44%)
- **Only infants/toddlers** (0-3 years, 3%)

Centers by Ages of Children Served

The most powerful story to emerge from our analyses is that centers serving infants and toddlers—alone or in conjunction with preschool-aged children—have staff meeting substantially lower quality standards than do other centers.

- Compared to staff in centers serving children birth to age 5, those serving only infants/toddlers:
 - Are less experienced
 - Have far less formal education (16% versus 30% with a BA)
 - And participate in professional development activities at lower rates, on average.
- Staff in centers serving only preschoolers meet more quality benchmarks than do other staff on a wide variety of quality indicators.

Implications for Low-Income Working Families

- NSECE data suggests that teaching staff meeting the highest quality standards in center-based care are most likely to be found in programs
 - Receiving funding from Head Start or state pre-k
 - Operating during traditional hours
 - Serving only preschoolers
- Many policy efforts are focused on increasing the availability of this type of care.
- Even though low-income families are the target population for most of these programs, programs with these characteristics are unlikely to fully meet these parents' needs because
 - Their children may be younger or older than 3- and 4-year-olds
 - Their jobs are likely longer than the typical school day or they work non-traditional hours
- Child care subsidies provide parents with the most flexibility in choosing options that work best for them, but NSECE data suggest that programs receiving these funds do not have the same teaching staff quality.

Thank you

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