

Care in the Home

Family Child Care Providers and the Families That Use Them

Supporting Family Choices in the Home-Based Child Care

State Administrators Management Institute (SAMI) & Child Care Policy Research Consortium (CCPRC) Institute on The Intersection of Research, Policy and Practice

Solving problems, guiding decisions – worldwide

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The Neighborhood Substudy

- Substudy of The National Study of Child Care for Low-Income Families
- Conducted in 5 of 25 study communities
- Sample is 640 families receiving or eligible for subsidies, with a child under 9 years in family child care, and 640 linked family child care providers.

Who are the Providers?

- No neat distinction between relative and non-relative care. Less than half provided care only for unrelated children; almost one-third cared for a mix of related and unrelated children.
- Providers who cared only for relatives' children were much less likely to be licensed, less likely to have a college degree, much less likely to have taken one or more early childhood education courses.
- On almost all other aspects of care, clear distinction is between providers who care for only related children and all other providers.

What Do the Homes Look Like?

- Great variation in size – the number of children cared for ranged from a single child to 20 children.
- On average, homes had six children. Homes in which all children are related to the provider were smaller – with an average of three children.
- Almost half of the homes provided care for children in all age groups – infants, toddlers, preschoolers and school-age children. The majority (80%) had infants, usually with older children.
- More than one-quarter of the homes contained at least one child with a special need. Providers who cared only for unrelated children were more likely to care for special needs children (30% vs. 16%).
- Homes were ethnically homogeneous.

When is Care Provided?

- The child care day was long, on average 13 hours. Five percent of homes provided round the clock care.
- Care was flexible. More than half of the providers offered care during weekend hours, and a majority offered off-hours care.
- Almost half combine off-hours care with willingness to accommodate irregular and changing schedules. The majority are flexible about drop-off and pick-up times.
- Half the providers would provide care for a sick child.

Income from Child Care

- The average weekly fee for care was \$83.17; relative caregivers charged an average of \$60, and some did not charge parents for care.
- Average annual income from child care was \$19,000, representing just over half of total household income.
- Annual income from child care for those who provide care only to related children was \$4,000, compared with \$23,000 for those who care only for unrelated children.

Why Do They Do It?

- Providers who cared for only unrelated children chose this occupation because it allowed them to stay home with their own young children. Those who cared for relatives' children began by wanting to help out a relative.
- Only 20% said they began providing care because they enjoyed children. However, this is the most frequently cited reason for continuing to provide care.

What Are Parents' Work Schedules?

- More than three-quarters had a single fulltime job and most worked 30 to 40 hours a week.
- Most jobs did not fit a regular 9 to 5 schedule; one-quarter had irregular work schedules and almost half worked off-hours.
- When employment and educational activities were combined, mothers spent an average of 38 hours a week outside the home. In addition, they spent an additional 6 ½ hours a week in work-related travel.
- Most husbands or partners were working and were almost as likely to work non-standard hours. Two-thirds had irregular work schedules.

How Stable is Mother's Employment?

- Only about one-third worked continuously over the 12 months before the interview; almost half were unemployed at some point in the prior three months.
- On average, mothers worked eight of the 12 months before the interview.

How Stable is the Child Care Arrangement?

- The homes themselves were stable. Caregivers had provided care for an average of seven years at the beginning of the study.
- Most of the focus children were in a single full-time care arrangement at the beginning of the study.
- More than one-third of the children had been in the same care arrangement since birth.
- Over a 30-month period, more than half stayed in the same family child care home.
- Care arrangements were most stable over time for school-age children; children under four years were more likely to experience a change in care setting.

How Reliable is the Care Arrangement?

- Working parents experienced problems with child care on an average of four days in a three-month period.
- On average, they missed one day of work in that period because the child was sick.
- On two days, they needed to make alternative child care arrangements.
- On one other day, they arrived late at work or had to leave work early.

Why Did Parents Choose Their Care Arrangement?

- Safety, practical considerations such as location and hours that match work schedules, and the parents' relationship with the provider were the primary reasons for choosing the care arrangement.
- Almost two-thirds of parents identified provider warmth and attention to children as a factor in their decision.
- Only 20% mentioned aspects of the care arrangement that might be related to school readiness.

What is the Relationship Between Parent and Provider?

- Many parents and providers had close personal relationships, viewing each other as friends and seeing each other socially.
- Providers often made special arrangements to help parents with work, family or other problems.
- Parents and providers had generally positive attitudes to one another. However, there were some points of stress. Half of the parents, for example, felt that their children watched too much television while in care.

What Are the Advantages of Family Child Care?

- Almost half of providers saw flexibility of schedule as the main advantage for parents.
- Two-thirds of providers saw a home-like atmosphere and more individual attention as the main advantages for children.
- Almost half of providers and more than half of parents saw their close relationship as an advantage.
- Half of the parents believed that children get more individual attention in family child care and one-third saw the home-like atmosphere as an advantage.
- The provider's flexibility about schedules was seen as an advantage by 28% of parents.

What is the Home Environment Like?

- The homes had adequate space for play and learning activities, and offered a safe and unrestricted environment for children.
- The homes were safe and healthy places for children, providing consistent evidence of good health practices.
- Books and art materials were in short supply and materials for school-age children were inadequate in more than half of the homes.
- In about 40% of homes the television was on continuously.
- In general, the environmental characteristics were not very different across different types of providers.

How Do Providers Interact with Children?

- Providers were interested in and affectionate with children, supervised their activities and were responsive to their needs.
- Providers consistently encouraged children's play, provided opportunities and materials, and set aside time for physical play.
- Providers did not spend time teaching children social skills or supporting the acquisition of cognitive/language skills, either formally or informally.
- There were no large differences across types of provider.

How Do Children Spend Their Time in Family Child Care?

- More than a third of the children's activities involved routines.
- Less than 10% of the children's activities involved learning activities such as reading or being read to, math, science, or nature activities. In 60% of homes, no learning activities were observed.
- Television watching accounted for almost 20% of the activities. In the majority of homes, at least one child was watching television at each observation point.
- Reading aloud occurred in just over one-third of homes.
- Homes with all related children had the fewest learning activities and lowest levels of provider involvement.

Homes Compared with Center-Based Care

- The largest difference in activities was in learning and fine motor activities, where children in centers spent a third of their time and children in family child care spent 18% of their time.
- More than twice as many centers as homes had some learning activity. More than three times as many homes as centers had some television-watching.
- Children in family child care spent more time in routines.

Conclusions

- Family child care met the needs of parents whose employment was unstable and whose work schedules were irregular or off-hours.
- The safety of the home, practical considerations, and the parent's relationship with and trust in the provider were the most compelling considerations in the choice of care arrangement.
- Parents and providers agreed on aspects of care that are important for children and families.
- Family child care homes were stable, safe and comfortable, and met many of children's developmental needs, but.....
- Learning activities and opportunities, both formal and informal, were infrequent in most of the family child care homes.