

2009 CCPRC Annual Meeting
Breakout A-2
Thursday, October 29, 2009, 10:30 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Data and Measurement Challenges in Doing Subsidy Research

Description

There are recognized challenges in getting good data on subsidy use. The purposes of this panel were to: 1) Provide an overview of some of the key challenges with collecting subsidy information from different types of data; and 2) Examine more closely the challenges and promises posed by different approaches to studying subsidies.

To achieve these goals, the panel highlighted two particular studies that represent different research designs and types of data, and then introduced a new data source on State-specific subsidy policies of interest to subsidy researchers. Following the panelists' presentations, there was a facilitated discussion of what we have learned (from the studies that were discussed as part of the panel, other studies that were familiar to the panel and audience participants) and what we still need to know that could improve our ability to research subsidy-related questions.

Moderators

Susan Jekielek, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation
Deanna Schexnayder, University of Texas at Austin

Presenters

Ann Collins, Abt Associates, Inc.
Robert Goerge, University of Chicago
Linda Giannarelli, Urban Institute

Scribe

Julia Wessel, Child Trends

1. Documents in Session Folder

- "Data and Measurement Challenges in Conducting Subsidy Research," Deanna Schexnayder.
- "Study of the Effects of Enhanced Subsidy Eligibility Policies in Illinois: Data Collection and Measurement Challenges and Lessons," Ann Collins.
- "Measuring Subsidized Child Care Utilization in the National Study of Child Care Supply and Demand," Robert M. Goerge and A. Rupa Datta.
- "CCDF Policies Database: Providing Basic Information for Subsidy Research," Linda Giannarelli.

2. Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1: Deanna Schexnayder**
 - *Review of where the field is on child care subsidies and using data linking to conduct policy-relevant research on subsidies.*

- More about quantitative research, but qualitative research is important as well.
- Key topics:
 - Challenges in conducting research on child care subsidies.
 - Definitions of subsidies differ by type of user.
 - State of child care subsidy research.
 - Since subsidies are relatively new, this is a new research field.
 - A variety of research methods have been/should be used.
 - Many research questions of interest to OPRE.
 - Types of data used for quantitative research on subsidy policies.
 - Survey data, administrative data, and policy rules.
 - Advantages and limitations of administrative data.
 - Large sample size, detail, and accuracy of program information, linking across systems equals advantages.
 - Limited variables, quality of “non-required” variables may not be as good, not well suited for population-based research, statistics across States need to be done with caution, which means limitations.
 - Benefits of linked data:
 - Administrative data can be used to link program data across time.
 - Policy variables can be used to compare expectations and reality.
 - Many types of research can be done with linked data including experimental, quasi-experimental, and program evaluation.
 - Several projects will be discussed:
 - Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), employment outcomes for low-income families in Illinois, Maryland, and Texas; subsidies in Illinois; Supply and Demand; and CCDF rules database.
 - Reengineering the SIPP with nationally representative sample.
 - Employment outcomes study in Illinois, Maryland, and Texas.
 - Linked longitudinal child care subsidy, TANF, and earnings records to American Community Survey Data and policy rules.
 - Appendix for other researchers to use.
- **Summary of Presentation #2: Ann Collins**
 - *Study of the Effects of Enhanced Subsidy Eligibility Policies in Illinois.*
 - Data collection and measurement challenges and lessons.
 - Allowed families just above income eligibility level to receive subsidies.
 - Research Design.
 - Main Questions:
 - What is the effect of receiving child care subsidies on child care, employment, and income?
 - What is the effect of extending the redetermination period on the stability of subsidy receipt?
 - Potential outcomes of interest:
 - Income and earnings, child care.
 - Potential data sources:
 - Subsidy records, unemployment insurance records, interviews with parents to augment administrative records.

- Decisions:
 - Augmented the administrative data with interviews with parents: two interviews, one at the end of Year 1 and the other at the end of Year 2.
- Included information on all of the mother's employment and all child care for all children in a household.
 - Used historical data, not just interviews (point in time) to see a cumulative impact.
 - Problems:
 - Problems locating parents to interview.
 - Recall and misreporting of child care information.
 - Details about each child care arrangement.
 - Recommendations for future research:
 - Short list of outcomes.
 - Prioritize outcomes.
 - Don't overreach what your data collection strategy can do.
 - If using mixed-mode, use what you know as an anchor.
 - Validation studies.
 - Have a well-tested conceptual model.
 - Cognitive testing of standardized instruments.
- **Summary of Presentation #3: Robert Goerge**
 - *Measuring subsidized child care utilization in the National Study of Child Care Supply and Demand (NSCCSD)*--summary of what we've learned and the approaches used.
 - Potential problems—questionnaires:
 - Some respondents provide inaccurate information (e.g., unclear definitions, respondent recall, subsidy program names, voucher versus contracted services).
 - Potential problems—administrative data:
 - Poor access to data, not always available electronically.
 - NSCCSD survey:
 - All income levels across the country; household survey approach.
 - Do not ask about CCDF subsidy receipt, ask how parents pay for child care and the child care arrangements.
 - In cognitive testing, parents could answer these types of questions.
 - Need to make some changes in asking about “co-payments” and who pays for some of the care; having definitions in some questions helps parents answer questions better.
 - Providing lists of child care programs to accurately identify where parents are taking their children.
 - NSCCSD- administered data:
 - Some electronic, some in local offices.
 - Informed consent.
 - Attempt to get a history of subsidy receipt.
- **Summary of Presentation #4: Linda Giannarelli**
 - *CCDF Policies Database: Providing Basic Information for Subsidy Research*

- Existing: no cross-State data sources, cross-time, or a comprehensive list of policies.
- CCDF Policies Database:
 - Through Sept 2012 with policies from Oct. 2005 and forward.
 - Available in mid-2010.
- What's in the database?
 - Policies that have been implemented.
 - Captures changes across time.
 - Different kinds of families included.
- Boundaries:
 - Policies for key programs that use CCDF money.
- Guidelines:
 - Useful for most policymakers, researchers, and administrations.
 - Has to be in the written documents available to all; won't have all of the answers, but will pull together a lot of information.
- Categories:
 - Policies related to families and providers; coded from State plans.
- Process:
 - Get information, code it, conduct internal review, put into tables, and finalize.
 - Provide printed data book and online access.
 - Some access to full database detail.
- How used?
 - Get ideas for variables for statistical analyses.
 - Analyses of CCDF characteristic data.
 - Participation-rate analysis.

3. Summary of Discussion with Presenters and Participants

- How long is the Supply and Demand Survey (NSCCDS) running? How do you collect respondents? Interview is about 30-35 minutes. Mixed-mode approach, if not over phone, will do in-person. Address-based selection.
- More information was requested about co-pay definition on the Supply and Demand Survey. Speakers said they consulted with experts to get a better definition of "co-pay" in order to help parents answer questions. When you look at full set of questions, it is apparent that it's a co-pay for the child care, and not for "extras" such as diapers and field trips.
- Bobbie Weber commented that they asked a number of questions about co-pay in their survey too. They found that parents are able to differentiate the term "co-pay" from "other expenses." But, after they differentiate, they then confuse the terms again. In their small group, parents could not define "co-pay" the way we did. It's easier to get the right definition in a qualitative interview, but in a telephone interview, a different definition may have to be understood. Robert Goerge added that we can't only ask one question; several questions are needed to address "co-pays."
- The group agreed that a mutual understanding of co-pay is crucial for the Supply and Demand Study, and it may be necessary to go outside of the parents' responses to get the correct answers. Linking to providers is a big part of this. There is a concern, however, about parents sending us to providers, leaving us to struggle with how much we go to

providers to validate what parents have said to see if it's true. It was added that this could be explored in a limited sub-sample of families who respond to the survey.

- In terms of supply and demand, how should researchers handle the data for “last week of care” if it's typical or atypical? Robert Goerge replied, “We are going to ask if it's typical or atypical.” There was a discussion about why “atypical” would be applicable? Deanna Schexnayder said it's important to think about which type of questions we can get from a survey and which ones need longer-term, historical, types of data sources. Using these different data sources is important and can often be beneficial.
- Timing of data collection is another issue (i.e., during the summer, arrangements often differ from those during the school year).
- Key research questions to add:
 - Who is eligible for subsidies, but not using them?
 - Do subsidies help families access better and more stable care (with a particular interest in family outcomes)?
 - Interest in family outcomes in relation to the subsidy system.

4. Key Themes and Issues

- Need for sharper terminology and common definitions (e.g., 801 data is actually 50 data sets, not one because the term “subsidy” means different things to different States and people).
- Pay attention to research questions and let them drive the data choices.
- Take advantage of multiple data sources and linkages.
- Be willing to look at subsidy use from different points of view. For example, what does financial assistance mean to families in addition to how it looks from the program point of view?
- Analyses are local so it's hard to paint a national picture.
- Better data—funding for the National Study of Child Care Supply and Demand.
- Conceptualizations: Child care outcomes and sharing common outcomes of employment.