

Instability in Subsidized Child Care

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The Question

- Stability of subsidized child care arrangements is confounding—despite subsidies, recipients tend to have short spells of arrangements and numerous changes in both subsidized and unsubsidized patchworks of arrangements of care
- Why?

Data Sources

- Two different studies, 10 years apart
- MDRC's Project on Devolution and Urban Change, Cleveland Ethnographic Component
- Expanding Oregon's Child Care Research Partnership

Urban Change

- In-depth qualitative interviews conducted with 38 low-income women residing in Cleveland, Ohio between 1997 and 2001; analysis covers last 2 years of study
- All women were welfare-reliant at the start of the study in 1997 when Cleveland implemented new regulations under PRWORA

Urban Change continued

- 21 respondents were African American; 17 were white
- 21 respondents had preschool age children
- All respondents with a preschool age child who were moving from welfare to work had access to a child care subsidy through the welfare department
- 24 respondents had elementary school age children—one used a subsidy for after school care

Expanding Oregon's Child Care Research Partnership

- In-depth qualitative interviews conducted in 2009 with 24 recipients of Oregon child care subsidies through the employment-related daycare system
- Respondents were randomly selected from a sample of people who had received subsidies at two points in time: Summer 2007 and Sept. 08
- Follow-up interviews were conducted with 17 respondents in Summer 2009
- Study is ongoing, with 20 more recipient and 20 provider interviews planned

Expanding Oregon's Child Care Research Partnership continued

- 20 respondents were white; 2 were Latina; 1 was African American; 1 identified herself as "mixed"
- 13 respondents had preschool age kids
- 20 respondents had elementary school age kids
- We interviewed at least 4 people in each of the five categories of care-type (center, relative care, own-home/non-relative, unregulated family/neighbor, regulated family care). All were working.

Child care characteristics

- **Quality of care**

Alice (Cleveland Study):

"Some crazy things going on. The woman was going to sleep all morning [while caring for a number of children] and she hit them on the arms with a ruler."

Child care characteristics

- **Providers no longer available**

Violet (Oregon Study—In-home, non-relative care)

Her provider left in January to “do taxes.”

“She was wonderful. They would go to the library, go for walks....She would stay [at the house] until 6:30 or 7:00 if they needed us at work.”

Employment Characteristics

- **Need for nonstandard hours or hours that exceed the subsidy allotment**

Maria (Cleveland Study)

“My caseworker asked, “Why was I gonna leave a full time job for a part time job.” And I told him because I had nobody to take my kids to school.”

Employment Characteristics

- **Erratic and/or changing schedules**

Mary (Oregon Study, Center-based care)

Describing her new plan for care when she switched from day shift to graveyard, she said: *“A friend of mine is going to watch the kids for me, and then I’ll come home from work, get them up, take them to school, and come home and go to bed.”*

System Characteristics

- **Problems maintaining subsidies**

Sarah: *“I have a job that I could have started but I don’t have a babysitter. [Why?] I have to pay a previous baby sitter off in order to get my vouchers to start up for the new babysitter, then I can start working. So, they just put me on part-time for like two or three days out the week.”*

System Characteristics

- **Problems maintaining subsidies**

Rochelle: *“She wanted to give me one voucher at a time. You know, one month at a time. And everybody else was getting 6 months at a time or 3 months at a time. Let me tell you, this broad down there is thick. You know. Cause I have to take off. And I’m just getting the new job. She wants me to take off and come down there. You know. And sit all day for that bullshit. You know what I mean? So that’s primarily why I just left em alone.”*

System Characteristics

- **Changes in eligibility rules**

Julia (Oregon Study, Relative Care):
“I called my worker when my day care got cut off and my worker told me, “When you get a real job, you’ll get help again.” Well, I have a real job. I built this business out of nothing. I could have been one of those welfare moms. Happily.”

System Characteristics

- **Market rate subsidies are critical!**

Oregon provider story:

“Financially, the center wasn’t making it. It was heartbreaking. We had to charge the additional amount to all our subsidy clients. I lost 60% when we asked them to pay that. It broke my heart...but when the state set the new rates I was able to call all of those parents. Almost all came back. I had to scramble to make space.”