

2012 CCPRC Annual Meeting
Workshop Session A-1
October 24, 2012, 10:45-12:15 pm

Child Care Subsidies, Access and Choice: Emerging Insights and Unanswered Questions

Description

The goal of this session was to use a review of existing literature and summary of the information needs of States to develop a list of needed research based on what we know and don't know about subsidy access and choice. The session started with brief presentations on: 1) what we know from research about child care subsidy use including who accesses subsidies and associations between subsidies and the use of high quality care; and 2) questions about these issues from the State perspective. These presentations were followed by facilitated small group discussions during which participants grappled with: what we know with confidence, what we know with less confidence, what we don't know (gaps in research), and the research questions we need to address next.

Facilitators

Patti Banghart, Child Care & Early Education *Research Connections*
Rick Brandon, RNB Consulting
Wendy Wagner Robeson, Wellesley College
Yoonsook Ha, Boston University

Presenters

Colleen Vesely, George Mason University
Lee Kreader, Child Care & Early Education *Research Connections*

Scribe

Sam Goldhagen, Child Trends

1. Documents in Session Folder

- "Taking Subsidy Research Forward: Parental Access and Choice of High-Quality Care;" CCPRC Planning Group.
- "A-1: Child Care Subsidies, Access and Choice: Emerging Insights and Unanswered Questions;" summary of small group work.

2. Brief Summary of Presentations

- **Summary of Presentation #1:** (Colleen Vesely)
 - Colleen provided estimates of subsidy use, including number of children served and percent of eligible families that use subsidies.
 - She also talked about contributors to subsidy access including parent-related (awareness, misconceptions about choice, applications, waiting list) and policy-related (waitlist, application, recertification process, income eligibility threshold, provider reimbursement) contributions.

- Parent characteristics related to subsidy receipt include parental education (high school degree or higher were more likely), race/ethnicity (African Americans most likely), and home language (mixed findings).
- Family characteristics include family structure (single mothers more likely than married mothers), number of children (inconsistent), and family income (higher income associated with use of subsidies).
- Community characteristics are related to subsidy receipt include region of country (parents in West and mid-west more likely), urbanicity (mixed findings), and distance to services. Many of these issues may point to the distance from home to the nearest services. The further away families are from services, the less likely they are to receive subsidies.
- Colleen indicated that quality is used to describe practices, environment, and relationships within an arrangement. Quality research currently focuses on centers serving preschoolers and a variety of measures are used. There are many aspects of quality that have not been tapped into yet, particularly as relates to home-based care.
- Looking at the comparison of quality ratings in subsidized versus unsubsidized arrangements, a study in Nebraska showed that quality ratings were lower in centers serving subsidized children (but this could be explained by teacher salaries and/or family incomes). Using a comparison of providers by subsidy density, one study found a negative correlation between density and quality, but it is unclear if these were different across subsidized and unsubsidized providers. There are also inconsistent findings related to quality ratings of providers used by non-subsidized versus subsidized children.
- Emerging issues include:
 - Comparison groups in existing literature are not well-defined
 - Consider indirect pathways between subsidy and quality (teacher salaries)
 - Measures of quality (this is an area we are still working on and many aspects of quality have not yet been measured)
 - Cross-state comparisons of quality of child care across States that vary in subsidy policies.
- **Summary of Presentation #2: Lee Kreader**
 - Speaking from the State administrator perspective (for Leigh Bolick who was unable to attend), Lee acknowledged the difficulties faced by administrators, especially in challenging economic times, and presented a series of questions from the policymaker perspective. These are questions that can be translated into research questions including:
 - How do we target families who need subsidies?
 - What are the family characteristics of the children receiving child care subsidies?
 - For which families with which risk factors are subsidies most effective and associated with child outcomes?
 - What is the level of quality required to achieve success?
 - How can we make the best use of existing resources, including subsidies?
 - Are there services that can be added with subsidies that would better predict success, e.g., home visiting services?

- What do providers need and how do we fund child care in a meaningful way that simplifies things for providers?
- What components of QRIS are most important to ensure good outcomes for children?
- Do we measure things like group size and ratios over a certain score in the environmental rating scale or some other measure?
- Measurement matters including research on how to positively impact parents' choice of quality care, particularly subsidy clients.
- Can research help show businesses how subsidies can positively affect their bottom-line? Can businesses help increase subsidy access, encourage investment of State dollars, and impact the quality choices of working parents?
- States need research that is affordable and has a quick turn-around.
- In South Carolina, the child care research team is using administrative data to answer some of these questions. Their updated data system enhances their ability to look at what happened in recent months (rather than trends years ago). They are trying to connect different data systems to answer some of the questions that are important.

3. Brief Summary of Discussion

- See summary of small group work, “Child Care subsidies, Access and Choice: Emerging Insights and Unanswered Questions.”

4. Summary of Key issues raised

- Existing research includes many conflicting findings. These may relate to peer-mediated and gatekeeper effects. This leads to the notion that there are many hidden variables that are not entering into the studies. Can we use synthetic controls to improve the rigor of our research? What can we do with existing data? Cross-state analyses?
- Findings differ (and are limited) related to infants and toddlers as compared to preschool children. We need to pay more attention to issues such as number of children in families, child age, teacher salaries, etc.
- We seem to know with confidence that subsidy use is associated with the use of more formal, regulated care and that price matters to parents. Why don't more families who are eligible for subsidies use them? Are subsidies a work-support or early education program?
- Do we know as much about quality as we think? Perception of quality is changing. What makes for quality effects and how much must be spent to achieve quality?
- Behavioral economics may help in thinking about the influences on parents and streamlining decision-making for them.