

2012 CCPRC Annual Meeting
Workshop Session C-2
October 25, 2012, 10:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

Child Care in the Lives of Low-Income Families: Findings from the Child Care Policy Research Partnership Grants

Description

The goal of this session was to describe emerging findings from the Maryland-Minnesota and Illinois-New York Child Care Policy Research Partnerships. This session provided the first opportunity for CCPRC members to hear the details and emerging findings from these Partnerships. Presenters described emerging findings and lessons learned from research examining child care in the lives of low-income families.

Facilitator

Susan Jekielek, OPRE, ACF

Presenters

Amy Claessens, University of Chicago
Liz Davis, University of Minnesota
Nikki Forry, Child Trends
Tamara Halle, Child Trends
Heather Sandstrom, Urban Institute
Kathryn Tout, Child Trends

Scribe

Jennifer Cleveland, Child Trends and University of Minnesota

1. Documents in Session Folder

- “Child Care in the Lives of Low-Income Families: Findings from the Child Care Policy Research Partnership Grants. Key Findings and Lessons Learned”

2. Brief Summary of Presentations

- **Introduction:** Susan Jekielek, Introduction
 - The Partnerships are a vehicle to encourage collaboration and, at a minimum, must include the State agency and a researcher. The presenters today represent four Partnerships, funded through two grants in 2010. Both grants represent Partnerships across multiple States.
 - These projects are ongoing and our presenters today will describe their projects and discuss lessons learned and preliminary findings.
- **Summary of Presentation #1:** Heather Sandstrom
 - Heather discussed the Partnership involving Illinois (IL) and New York (NY) which focuses on subsidy stability and child care continuity and the linkages between the two.
 - Low-income children move in and out of child care arrangements. What does it mean that children experience changes in continuity over time? Subsidy spells are

- often short-lived. Parents often leave the system and we want to understand what that means.
- Stability and continuity issues are especially salient for parents with non-traditional jobs, TANF families, immigrant and non-English speaking families, and families with multiple children and school-age children.
 - The study includes six main research questions, e.g., what are the patterns of subsidy use and stability over time? What challenges to subsidy stability and child care stability do parents perceive to be most difficult?
 - For example, NY and IL have different re-certification times. We can look at the differences between the two, and then family work circumstances, multiple jobs, work schedule, etc. How does that affect subsidy stability and child/family outcomes?
 - The study design includes three components: a survey of child care subsidy participants in four regions (two in IL and two in NY); indepth interviews with a subset of survey respondents; and longitudinal linked records of survey respondents in both States (will look at trajectories over time).
- **Summary of Presentation #2: Amy Claessens**
 - Amy discussed preliminary results from the IL survey data. This includes a sample of 72,000 children who were new entrants to the program in 2005. (A new entrant is a child who hadn't received a subsidy in the past 2 years.) Within and between spell changes in child care were examined. Preliminary results include:
 - 53.5% of the sample is Black
 - 26.5% of the children are infants (0-11 months)
 - Overall, the average subsidy spell length is about 6 months. The median length is about 4-5 months. Infants have slightly longer spells. The average gap is about 3-4 months and does not vary significantly by child age.
 - Most children do not experience changes in provider within or between spells (64%); among those who do change providers, 16% experience only a between-spell provider change; infants are most likely to experience a change in provider. Of the children with one or more between spell provider changes, 59% change to a different type of care during any between-spell provider change.
 - A goal of the larger study is to better understand the reasons for changes.
 - **Summary of Presentation #3: Kathryn Tout**
 - Kathryn discussed the Minnesota (MN)-Maryland (MD) Partnership which is led by an interdisciplinary team and builds on two previous studies, one in each State.
 - The Partnership focuses on three areas: choices and decision-making; perspectives on quality; and stability and continuity.
 - *Data Sources* include a longitudinal parent telephone survey; provider telephone survey; qualitative and cognitive interviews; and administrative data.
 - *Recruitment & Data Collection*: specific counties were targeted in each State; in each State, approximately 400 families were recruited at the time of application for the State's TANF program; approximately 300 families are being tracked in each State.
 - In the cognitive interviews, a small sample of parents is being asked their perceptions about child care quality and decision-making.

- Indepth interviews are being used to understand better the patterns observed in the longitudinal data; administrative data are also used to supplement the longitudinal parent survey.
- **Summary of Presentation #4: Nikki Forry**
 - Nikki discussed child care decision-making and Substudy 1. Kathryn Tout is co-PI for this substudy.
 - Using profile analysis, the research team asked whether there are different patterns in low-income parents' child care decision-making process (examining options considered, number of sources of information consulted, and how long the decision took to make).
 - This examination revealed two patterns (Group 1-quick deciders (82% of sample) and Group 2-time takers). The researchers wanted to know the relationship between these two groups and other variables/outcomes. In addition, do parent choices and satisfaction with care affect the type of care they use?
 - On average, quick deciders were less educated and younger than time takers.
 - The quick deciders were more likely to cite convenience as their primary priority than time takers.
 - There were no differences with satisfaction with care or the type of care across the two groups.
 - There may be a sub-group within the quick deciders. For example, some individuals in this group may have already had a selection in mind, whereas others may have been responding to external constraints in choosing a child care arrangement quickly.
- **Summary of Presentation #5: Tamara Halle**
 - Tamara discussed Substudy 2, perspectives on quality. Amy Susman-Stillman is co-PI on this substudy. Research questions focus how low-income parents perceive aspects of quality that research deems important.
 - Cognitive interviews were conducted in Year 1 on perceptions of quality. Nineteen parents in MN were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. Parents were asked to describe their ideal care. Although the sample was small, it was comparable to the larger sample of MN parents in the longitudinal survey.
 - Four constructs of quality were examined:
 - *Developmentally Appropriate Practice*: most parents perceived this as either extremely or very important.
 - *Social-Emotional Development*: again, most parents perceived this as either extremely or very important; more than 1/3 of parents said that the most important aspect of social-emotional development is helping children learn to control their behavior.
 - *Family Sensitive Caregiving*: more variation in parent responses; more than 1/3 noted that the most important feature of family sensitive caregiving is the caregiver working with parents around work schedules.
 - *Cultural Sensitivity*: less consensus on this item; half of parents noted that caregivers should promote a way of communicating with families who speak a different language.
 - In Year 3, the parent telephone survey data will examine aspects of quality and comparisons will be done between the indepth interviews and telephone surveys.

- Providers in MN and MD will be interviewed. Through collaboration with Johns Hopkins University, the provider interview will be done in MD EXCELS and will include provider perceptions of quality (how that aligns with QRIS standards will be examined).
- **Summary of Presentation #6: Liz Davis, Substudy 3: Continuity and Stability**
 - Liz discussed continuity and stability and talked about preliminary results from the MN telephone survey (Waves 3 and 4; 5 have now been completed). Nikki Forry is co-PI on this sub-study.
 - The focus of this presentation is on changes in the child's primary provider (a change occurred if the parent reported a different provider used most often between two survey waves).
 - Over half of children had a provider change in 6 months and only 19% had no provider changes in 1.5 years.
 - Changes of child care arrangements were correlated with changes in family composition and circumstances.
 - Losing a job was associated with an increase in ending of non-parental arrangement.
 - Families receiving a subsidy at the prior survey were less likely to drop out of non-parental care and less likely to switch non-parental care types
 - The parent's assessment of the child's experience was associated with a change in provider. The less positive the experience, the more likely they were to make a change.
- Paper soon to be completed; will be presented at APPAM.

3. Brief Summary of Discussion & Summary of Key Issues Raised

- Questions and Answers:
 - Should we be thinking about parent care as a change; is it really a change? Liz: this is a good point and may depend on the analysis being done. The studies did separate out the change from parental to non-parental care and vice versa, but our numbers on children with changes do include parental changes. Those should probably be separated out as a distinct type of change. Perhaps this is an opportunity to change the language we use on this issue.
 - Parents appear to be considering one option right away and are taking about two weeks to make a choice; then we find out they're switching. How are they deciding where to go? Are they aware of multiple options? What about location and convenience? What kind of quality were the centers that are located by their home and their work? These are great issues, ones we can try to address in interviews with parents and also in linking with administrative data.
 - Did you collect information about children and whether they have disabilities? Nikki: Our study indicates that about 10% of children fall into this category, which makes for very small cell sizes. In the administrative data, there would be info about whether the child had a subsidy.
- Lessons Learned:
 - *Let's Be Friends! Let's be friends with State leaders.* While it's important to have an ongoing relationship with the State administrator, in the end, there are lots of hurdles to getting administrative permissions in place (for example, it takes persistence to get data sharing agreements signed).

- In county administered States such as NY, there are county partners to work with. It's important to keep communication open and to understand what partners want to contribute and how much they want to be involved.
- Context matters, e.g., RTT-ELC created urgency that wasn't there before.
- Administrators are very busy but they are motivated by findings.
- It helps to have someone on the inside.
- *How to Get Permission to Play in the Sandbox!* It takes persistence and relationships with the administrator, legal team, subsidy agency and data people to get projects like this off the ground.
 - It helps to have examples of other agreements that have been approved in the past (do your homework).
 - Recognize that there is a lot of turnover in government so relationship-building is an ongoing process.
 - Understand the lines of authority.
 - Make sure you understand the IRB requirements, purviews and order of reviews.
- *Hello? Is Anyone Out There? Lessons Learned in Recruiting Low-Income Families*
 - In NY, a third party survey group is doing this.
 - In IL, it's working because the cohort is of really recent entrants and they have the phone numbers parents used to apply for subsidy.
 - MN had to recruit 150 families extra just to get to 300 because so many people were lost along the way.
 - It is important in designing your survey to know your permissions ahead of time (in MN and MD, the researchers are required to obtain permission to contact parents recruited through the county case workers before we can speak to them about the study).
 - If you are using case workers to help with recruitment make sure to thank them.
- *Building Bridges between Experiences and Statistics*
 - A couple partnerships are trying to link administrative data and survey data. In MN, the interview was structured around the focal child, and finding that focal child in the administrative data was a bit of an issue.
 - In IL, there are systems in place to do administrative data linking. In NY we haven't done it yet and it's going to be costly. Ideally, we'd like to have administrative data on our entire universe. We need some kind of identifier to be able to link the data over time. If all identifiers are stripped, how do we link over time?
 - In MD, we work with RESI of Towson University, which operates halfway between the two parties (research team and state administrators). RESI of Towson can create identifiers that don't mean anything if they are intercepted. You need a third party in order to do it in the best way possible.