

## Child Care Choices of Low-Income Working Families: Immigrants in Washington and Rhode Island

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### **Description**

One of the primary aims of the current child care subsidy system is to ensure that low-income families can exercise their preferences in choosing child care that best suits their family's needs. Yet for policymakers and child care administrators, there is little available research to help explain what influences low income families' choice of care, and how their decisions are shaped or limited.

Moreover, we understand little about the particular child care choices made by parents who are immigrants and English Language Learners. To better understand child care choices and to assist policymakers in targeted strategies to support parental preferences overall, we are conducting a comprehensive study of child care choices of low-income working families.

This three-year effort focused on low-income communities in the Making Connections initiative, an ongoing multi-site project working to improve the lives of families and children living in some of America's most challenged neighborhoods. The sites include neighborhoods in Providence, RI and White Center-Seattle, WA and surrounding areas.

Researchers completed a qualitative study with two components: a family study and a community study. The family study involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews to understand the care choices they make for their children. The community study explored contextual factors that parents identified during the family interviews as facilitating or constraining their child care choices.

The study addressed the following research questions:

First, what factors influence choice of care among low-income working families in urban neighborhoods? How do different low-income families make child care choices?

Second, how does the process of choosing child care interact with several key contextual factors (e.g., employment, early care and education policies and programs, child care information and supply, public assistance use and other key services).

Finally, what family characteristics or contextual factors seem to particularly expand or constrain the child care choices of low-income working families? Which of these seem amenable to policy strategies to support choices for low-income working families, and what should these strategies be?

The data collection for the family study (N = 86 parents) began in the fall of 2008, and a second round of interviews was completed during the fall and winter of 2009. The community study site visits were completed in the summer and early fall of 2009. Researchers submitted a final report in 2011 (online: [www.urban.org/publications/412343.html](http://www.urban.org/publications/412343.html).)

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