

Child Care Decisions: What We Know about How Parents Make Child Care Decisions

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Overview

- Describe challenges in the study of child care decision making
- Share the Consortium Parental Child Care Decision-Making Model

Challenges

- The term “decision” may infer a linear process rather than the complex and dynamic processes involved in child care decision-making
- Parent may not be aware of how their values, beliefs, and preferences affect perceptions of child care options
- Decision is made within a set of social networks and cultural expectations
- Accurate measurement of usage is easier than measurement of preferences

Parental Child Care Decision-Making

Values
Beliefs
Definitions

Quantity and quality of supply
Social networks
Consumer education

Preferences: dynamic set of parent opinions

Opportunities
Constraints
Barriers

Use: child care (type(s), number, hours, costs)
financial assistance

Context: Conditions that exist when parent makes a decision

- Values and beliefs
- Definitions—language that shapes how parent thinks of child care
- Child care supply in their community
 - Types—paid and unpaid
 - Quantity
 - Quality
 - Prices and location
- What parent knows about child care
 - Expectations within social network
 - Sources of knowledge
 - Access to consumer education

Preferences: Dynamic set of parent opinions

- Child care is one component of complex set of family management decisions
 - May be simultaneous with employment
 - Need to “make it work” for all children and themselves
- Values and beliefs mix with what parent knows about child care options

Opportunities, constraints, and barriers

- Financial assistance for child care
 - Awareness
 - Timing
 - Ease in accessing and retaining
- Information about child care options in community
- Needs of multiple children
- Employment demands
 - Schedule
 - Location
- Need for flexibility from home, work, or child care
- Health needs of child and/or parent
- Transportation
- Competing demands on financial and other resources
- Complicated timing of child care, employment, and subsidy decisions

Effective child care options

- Fit cultural norms of what it means to be a good provider and a good parent
- Fit budget constraints
- Accommodate employment demands
- Are manageable in terms of schedules and transportation
- Work for the whole family

Use of child care and subsidy

- Type and number of child care arrangements
- Hours
- Costs
- Use of financial assistance
 - Subsidy
 - Public program
 - Tax benefits

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