

# Study of the Effects of Enhanced Subsidy Eligibility Policies In Illinois

Data Collection and Measurement Challenges and Lessons

October 2009

From Insight to Impact – Worldwide



# Overview

- Overview of research design
- Outcomes of interest
- Potential data sources
- Decisions about data collection strategies
- What happened
- Recommendations

## Research Partners

- One of four random-assignment studies that are part of the Child Care Subsidy Evaluation, funded by OPRE
- Abt Associates is the prime contractor with partners MDRC and National Center for Children in Poverty
- MDRC is taking primary responsibility for the impact study analysis

# Research Design

- Overview:
  - Families over income eligibility ceiling in Cook County, IL were randomly assigned to be eligible for subsidies for 2 years
  - 1/2 of the program group had a six-month redetermination period; the other half had a 12-month redetermination period.
  - 1884 families in the study, includes applicants and re-applicants
  - Incomes between 50-65% of SMI (\$18,000 -\$24,000/year)
- Research Questions:
  - What is the effect of receiving child care subsidies on child care, employment, and income?
  - What is the effect of extending the redetermination period on the stability of subsidy receipt?
- Data Sources:
  - Administrative records from Unemployment Insurance, public assistance, and child care subsidy program
  - Telephone interview with parents

# Potential Outcomes of Interest

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## Income and Earnings

- Income
- Earnings
- Job stability and gaps in employment
- Wage/job progression
- Schedules of employment

# Potential Outcomes of Interest

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## Child Care

- Type
- Schedule of arrangements
- Amount parents pay (co-payments and/or other out-of-pocket)
- Number of arrangements, per child, per family
- Interruptions in arrangements
- Satisfaction with arrangements

# Potential Data Sources

- Subsidy Records:
  - Available for all families who receive services.
    - Subsidy receipt
    - Type and months of child care paid for by subsidies
    - Assigned co-payment amounts
    - Earnings and demographic information at baseline and recertification
  - **BUT**, ½ families in study ineligible for subsidies at baseline.
  - Therefore, can only use information from records about months receiving subsidies.

# Potential Data Sources

- Unemployment Insurance Records:
  - Available for all families in the study
    - Provides information about average hourly, quarterly, yearly wages
    - Quarters of employment
  - **BUT**, many of the employment details (months of employment, schedules of employment, etc.) are unavailable.



# Potential Data Sources

- Interviews with parents to augment administrative records
  - Can be in person, over the phone, or mixed
  - Can ask questions about one point in time or get employment and/or child care histories for longer periods
  - Can focus on one or more family members (one child/all children; one adult/all adults)
  - Parents can be interviewed once or at multiple points in time

## Decisions Made for this Study

- Augment the administrative data with parent interview data
- Do the interviews by telephone, as opposed to in person (resource constraints)
- Interview at the end of Year 1 and the end of Year 2
- Content of the Interview:
  - Included information on **All** the jobs of the mother but not other household members
  - Included information **All** of the child care arrangements of **All** of the children
  - Gathered information on **All** potential outcomes of interest
  - Obtained **Histories** (not point-in-time information) of all jobs and all child care from random assignment onward

## Why ALL of mother's employment?

- We did not know how many jobs a mother on subsidies at this income level had.
- There could be an impact of subsidy receipt on a secondary job and we would not pick it up if we only asked about the primary job.
- We thought there may be impact on others household member's employment but thought that this was too hard to collect so left it off.

## Why ALL child care for ALL children?

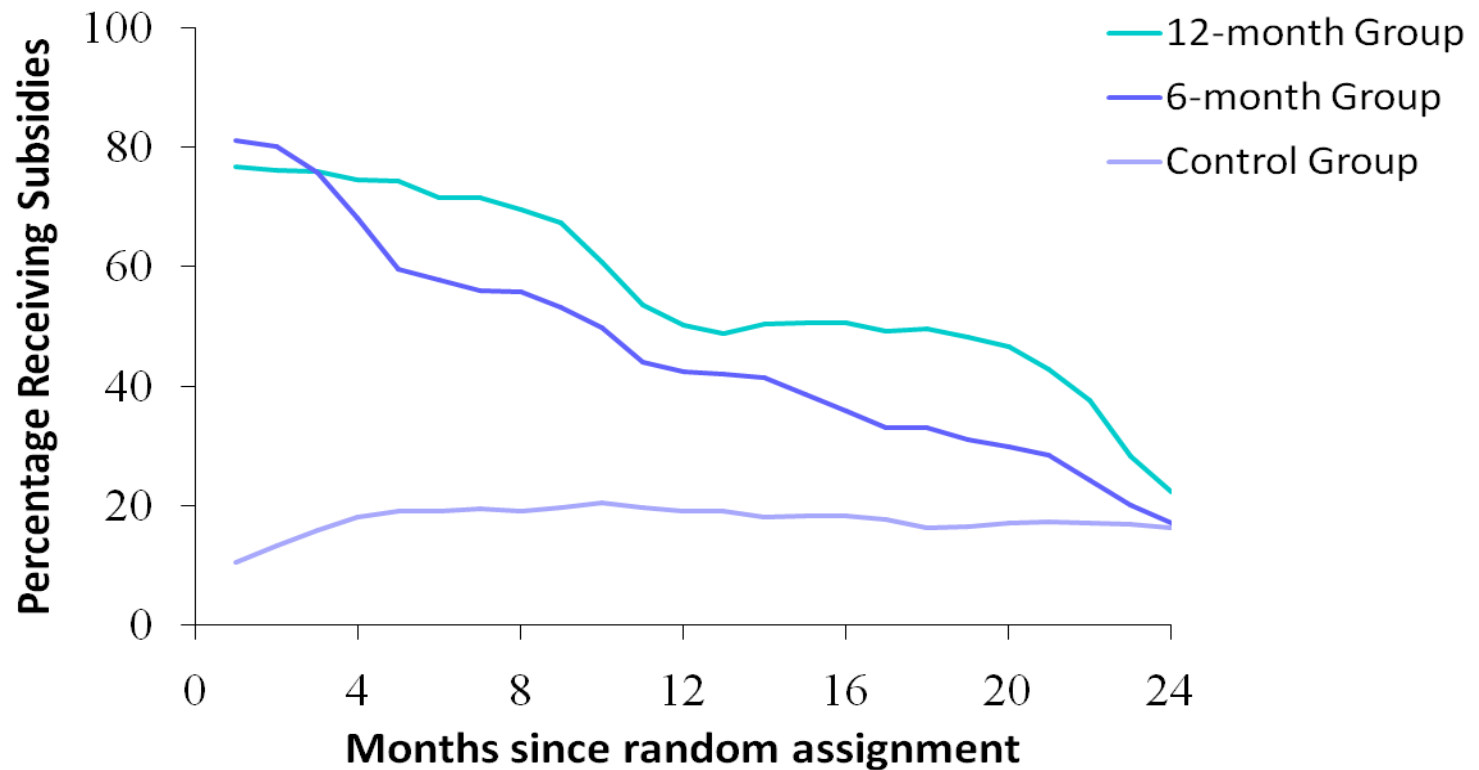
- Child care selection is made according to the needs of individual children as well as the family as a whole.
- Subsidy receipt could affect both arrangements that are paid for by these subsidies as well as those that are not (e.g., whether grandma should take care of child for free; whether after-school program should be used).
- Fear that we would miss impacts if we only looked at one child, only looked at subsidized arrangements, or only looked at “primary” arrangements.

# Why so many details about child care and jobs?

- Subsidy receipt could impact many things, for example:
  - Number of arrangements per family/per child
  - Stability of arrangements
  - Whether arrangements could occur during non-traditional hours
  - Number of jobs
  - Hours of work
  - Schedules of work
  - Interruptions in work
  - Job or wage progression

# Why child care and employment HISTORIES instead of point-in-time information?

Would you more likely see impacts of subsidies at a point in time or would their be a cumulative impact?



# What Happened

## Problems Locating Parents

- Relied on phone numbers from subsidy records. About 40% of them were non-working.
- Added field follow-up component and achieved 70% response rate.
- In some cases, long lag time between when one-year anniversary and when families were interviewed.
- Result: families were interviewed at one time, not two times.
  - 1/3 within 1.5 years after random assignment
  - 1/3 within 1.5-2 year after random assignment
  - 1/3 after more than 2 years

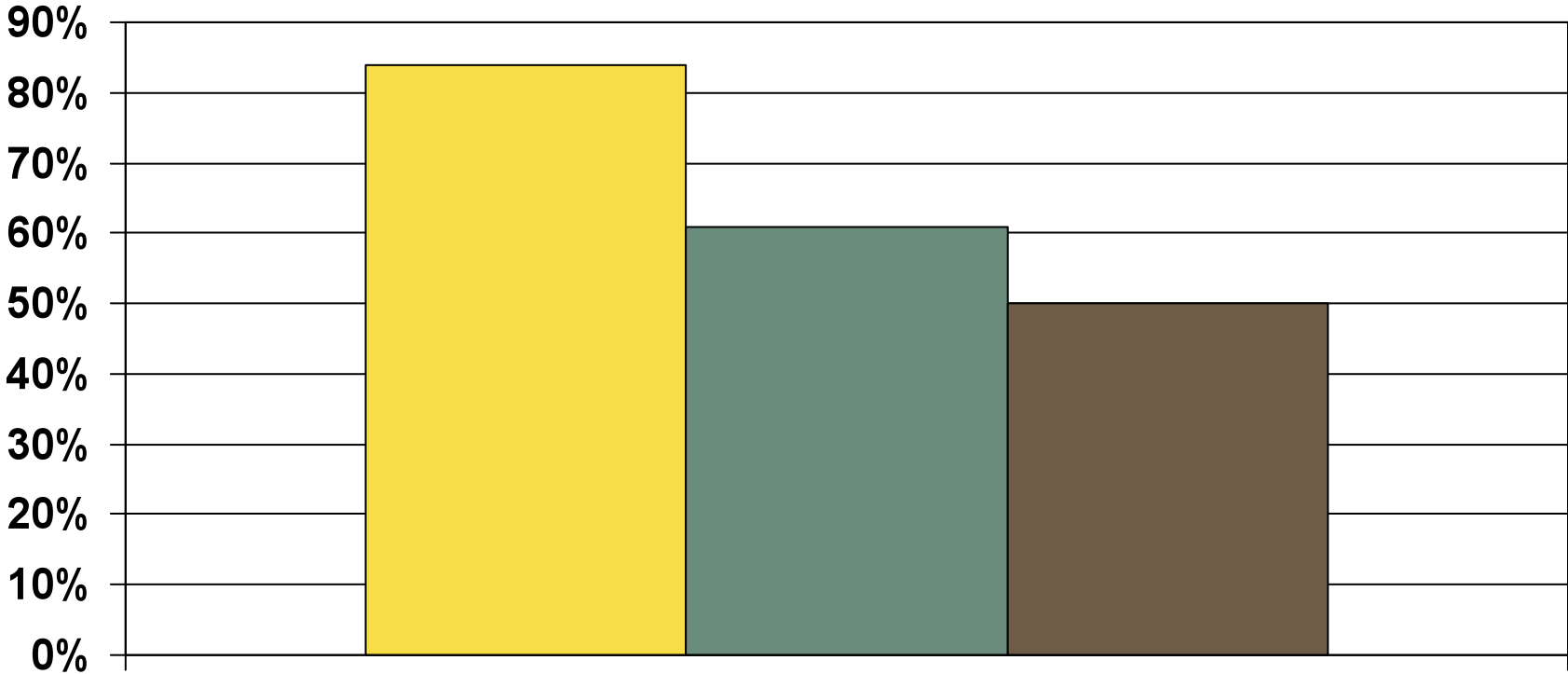
## What Happened

### Recall and Misreporting About Child Care

Question: *“My next questions are about the child care arrangements you have used since (DATE OF INTERVENTION START OR LAST INTERVIEW). By child care, I mean the people or programs that have taken care of your children while you were at work or attending a class, school, or job training for more than 8 hours per week. I am not including regular school from kindergarten on up as child care.”*



# Child care recall and misreporting



Reported Child Care Use in Target Month

- Subsidies 1 month before interview
- Subsidies 1.5 years before interview
- Subsidies 1.5-2 years before interview

## Details About Each Child Care Arrangement

*If there are recall issues about whether families used child care, there are recall issues for details about each arrangement as well.*

## What we did

- Limited interview sample to those interviewed 1 year after random assignment and weighted it to adjust for differential response between treatment and control group
- Were selective about the child care outcomes that we used from the survey
- Since we found no effects on employment from UI data, did not “look for” effects on parents’ own reports of wages, etc.
- We feel like we can stand by the findings

# Recommendations for Individual Studies

- Decide on short list of outcomes and that are tied closely to conceptual model.
- Prioritize outcomes to make sure that your data collection strategy will get you the best data for your highest priorities.
- Don't over-reach what your data collection strategy can do.
- If using mixed-mode (e.g., subsidy records and interviews), use what you know to anchor your questions ("We understand you were using child care subsidies in MONTH; could you tell me about the child care arrangements for your child in that month?")
- If the design requires it, have a plan and put a lot of resources into tracking parents. (Bad phone numbers, etc.)

## Recommendations for the Field

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- Validation studies
  - Whether any child care arrangements
  - Type of child care arrangements
  - Child care subsidies
  - Amount that parents pay
- Better and well-tested conceptual models to help limit information collected by any particular study
- Investments in cognitive testing of standardized instruments



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