

Child Care Instability: Definitions, Context and Policy Implications

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Overview of Session

- Introduction and overview of key issues – *Gina Adams*
- “Stability” and children’s development – *Taryn Morrissey*
- “Stability” and parental employment – *Ajay Chaudry and Julia Henly*
- “Stability” and subsidies – *Bobbie Weber*
- Policy response – *Rolf Grafwallner*
- Discussion

Motivation for Session

- Rising concern from researchers and policymakers motivated by
 - Children's development
 - Employment implications
 - Role of subsidies
 - Intersection with other family domains
- Forthcoming paper *

** Adams & Rohacek, Urban Institute, 2010
Available at www.urban.org early November*

Challenge 1: Lack of Common Definitions / Measurement

- Changes in child care common
- Rich research base, yet terminology, definitions, and approaches to measurement vary widely
- Research usually focuses on one or more of the following kinds of child care change:
 - **Ending of an arrangement** (usually primary arrangement) – also sometimes referred to as **instability**
 - **Multiple arrangements** which involves the child transitioning between arrangements within a particular time period (i.e. day or week) but the arrangements continue over time
 - **Ending of a caregiver relationship within an arrangement** – also sometimes described as **turnover**

Challenge 2: Disentangling Forms of Change, and Likely Impacts

- Different forms of change can occur in any combination
- Different forms and combinations likely to have different implications for children and families, and to operate through different pathways
- Need to develop and test logic models for likely impacts of different kinds and combinations of change on child and family outcomes

Challenge 3: Determining Causes of Instability

- Causes of instability/endings of arrangements include:
 - Changes in parent's employment situation or schedule
 - Caregiver ends the child care arrangement
 - Parent dissatisfied with the arrangement
 - Child moves into next form of care due to age or time of year (such as going to school)
 - Changes in ability to pay for care (income and/or access to help paying for care)
 - Other changes, such as transportation, changes in residence/location, family composition, etc.
- Factors can occur simultaneously, and can interact – making it difficult to determine “the” reason

Challenge 4: Exploring the Importance of Context

- Effects of change on children and parents likely to depend on context and motivation (though often not measured):
 - Was the change predictable?
 - Was the change intentional?
 - Did it involve moving to higher quality care?
 - Does the child continue to have a relationship with the caregiver?
 - Is this a one-time change, or is it part of a pattern of frequent changes?
 - Are there other risk factors or instabilities in the child's or family's life?

Challenge 5: Understanding Interacting Family Domains

- Child care instability can be linked to instability in a variety of other family domains:
 - Employment*
 - Income
 - Help paying for care and subsidies*
 - Health and disability status
 - Housing
 - Family composition
- Instability in one domain can cause instability in others – complex patterns of causation and impact, intricate balancing act with cascading effects of instability across different domains

* *Topics being discussed in today's session*

Challenge 5: Understanding Interacting Family Domains *(continued)*

- Instability in multiple domains particularly common for low-income families
- Compounds risk factors
- Creates challenge in identifying the “cause” and in disentangling the effects

“Child care stability is better viewed as more of an indicator of other things working well in the family context, more than as a discrete indicator taken alone.” (Lowe, et al 2004)