QRIS FROM A PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE:
IS IT WORKING?

Kathryn Tout, Martha Zaslow, and Nikki Forry

Child Trends

QRIS assumptions about parent demand

- QRIS make information on child care quality more understandable and more accessible to parents so that parents will:
  - Be better informed consumers
  - Who choose higher quality care and
  - Help to increase demand for higher quality
  - Thereby increasing the supply of higher quality care (and decreasing the supply of lower quality care)

Lack of data on parents and QRIS

- How do parents engage with, understand and utilize the new information resources in QRIS?

- Very little research so far examining and testing the assumption that parents will seek out, access and actually use these resources

Purpose of this presentation

- Use emerging research to address three critical questions about parents and QRIS

- Provide a framework for supporting new research that can guide QRIS program improvements and improve the responsiveness of QRIS to parents

Critical questions about parents and QRS

(1) Do parents want comparative information about quality?

(2) Can all parents access information about quality?

(3) Do parents use quality information to make child care decisions?

(1) Do parents want comparative information about quality?

- Assumptions:
  - Parents lack information about the quality of settings in their communities
  - Parents perceptions of quality differ from "experts"
  - Parents want information that will allow them to compare or rank quality

(1) Do parents want comparative information about quality?

- Emerging evidence:
- Missouri study:
  - 225 parents from 30 cities across the state
  - 87.5 said they would use QRS in looking for programs
- Minnesota study:
  - 2004 statewide household child care survey
  - 54 % of respondents felt QRS would be very helpful and 34% somewhat helpful
  - Parents who were more likely to say QRS would be helpful included low-income parents and parents whose primary language was not English
- More evidence is needed to understand what information parents would like

(2) Can all parents access information about quality?

- Most QRIS offer information on the internet or on the phone via toll-free numbers to request verbal or written assistance

- Emerging evidence about parents' preferences for accessing information
  - 2008 study in Washington State: 20% of parents trusted the internet "a lot" for information about early learning and choosing child care
  - Parents in Washington were more likely to trust health care providers and child care providers "a lot" for this information (71% and 53%, respectively)
  - Preferences varied depending on family characteristics

(2) Can all parents access information about quality?

- In contrast to WA, the internet was top response in MN focus groups when asked where parents would like to get information about child care

- Low-income families in MN pilot QRS report less access to the internet in their homes

- Additional focus groups in Minnesota indicated that low-income parents don't trust unfamiliar institutions for information about child care

  - Recommendations focused on using "peer to peer" marketing strategies and engaging "credible" social service agencies to deliver information

(2) Can all parents access information about quality?

- Results from MN and WA highlight the challenges of collecting valid information about parents' preferences

- A variety of marketing strategies may be needed

- Some evidence that parents will respond swiftly to marketing campaigns (tracked by hits to websites)

- Challenge of promoting QRIS too early before there is sufficient density of programs

(3) Do parents use information from QRIS to make child care decisions?

- What do parents value?

- What terms do they use and understand?

- What type of information do they focus on?

Parents' values

- Data from NACCRRA (2009) indicate that parents value dimensions of quality:
  - Learning environment and activities
  - Training of the caregiver
  - Safety and cleanliness
- Parents need to weigh other factors such as cost and convenience
- Quality is not the only factor that influences decisions - it may be difficult for some parents to use QRIS information in their decision-making

Parents' understanding of terms

- Other NACCRRA research indicates that parents are confused about the distinctions between key terms used in QRIS and other early learning systems:
  - Licensing
  - Certification
  - Accreditation
- Are the terms used in QRIS confusing to parents?

Formats of information

- Summary ratings vs. components
  - Parents may want to determine own "weighting" of quality components
  - States often present both summary rating and components
- Number of levels
  - How do parents perceive the levels?
  - Differences between 3-level system vs. 5-level system
- How should additional information be included?
  - Cost, philosophy, hours, licensing status and violations

Future research needs

- Need for research on the core questions about parents and QRIS

- Need to understand
    - Timing: at what point in decision making is QRS information most useful?
    - Characteristics: Are some families constrained in their ability to use QRIS?
    - Efficiency: Does QRIS simplify or complicate the decision-making process?

Providing Information on Child Care to Parents:
Preliminary Findings from Oregon

Shannon T. Williams

Dynamic Research and Evaluation

shannon_tw@yahoo.com

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Preliminary Findings from Research in Oregon:

- Quality Indicators Project Evaluation (State-wide)

- Community Child Care Initiative Evaluation (City of Portland)

- Oregon Population Survey

- Market Rate Survey

Oregon Quality Indicators (QI)

- 7 structural indicators of quality.

- Measured on all certified centers and family providers in Oregon.

- Currently building website for parents, others.
  - Definitions and importance
  - National standards
  - State licensing minimums
  - Community averages
  - Individual Provider levels

Community Childcare Initiative (CCI)

- <u>Quality Enhancement Services</u>
  - Centers with need for improvement on Quality Indicators (QI)
  - Receive $ and support for improvement on QI

- <u>Affordability Services</u>
  - Subsidies for low-income families using "quality" providers (above standards on QI, FCCERS)

Parents Care about Quality

- CCI evaluation: 69 low-income parents using "quality" providers.

- Parents rate quality as significantly more important to them and their families than cost (t (68) = 3.91, p < .01).

- Parents rate the 7 QI as "very important" (3.95 out of 4.0).

Parents Want Information

- Parent focus group (QI process evaluation)

  - Want information about quality:
    - General guidelines of what to look for.
    - Specific, verified information on providers.

  - Prefer to interpret information on their own.
    - Requested information on each indicator.
    - Each family/child has different priorities/needs.
    - Do not want information aggregated into 1 score.

What is the impact of information on choices?

– Parents were skeptical about impact of QI information on their own decision-making.

  • Parents state that high quality care is <u>expensive</u>, <u>unavailable</u>, and <u>inflexible</u>.

– Choosing high quality care may require:

  • Generous subsidies for low-income families.

    – Parents reported that the CCI subsidy allowed them to stay with "quality" provider when income decreased.
    – Without CCI 55% were "likely" or "very likely" to leave (quality) child care provider for a less expensive one, or to miss work to take care of their children themselves.

  • Increased supply of higher quality care of all types.

Supply & Demand: Market Failure?

- Insufficient supply?
  - QI Parent focus group: demand for quality care won't be sufficient to increase supply of quality care in their communities.
    - Waiting lists for marginal quality providers.

- Are costs prohibitive?
  - Demand: Families in QI focus group reported that they were unable to pay for higher quality care.
  - Supply: Providers cannot afford to increase quality.

Logic Models

(See handout for full Quality Indicators logic model)
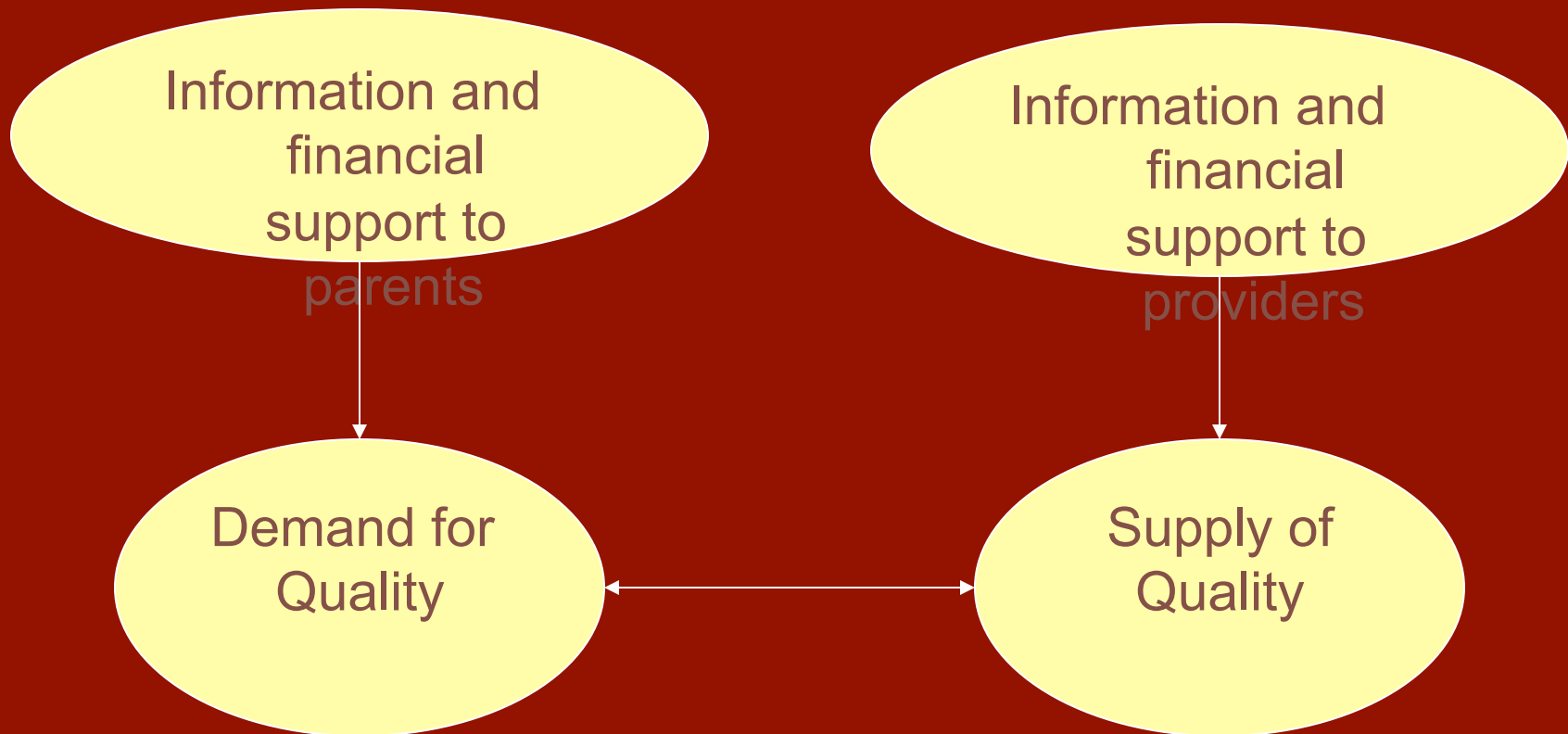
What if the market succeeds?

- Increasing demand coupled with increasing supply of quality care ➔ prices skyrocket?
  - Would a successful market further price low-income families out of high quality paid care?

- Oregon data shows similar pattern for paid care overall <u>2000-2008</u> (Weber, 2009):
  - Increased demand for paid care from 27 to 33% (Oregon Population Survey; Weber, 2009)
  - Increased price of care (Oregon Market Rate Survey; Grobe & Weber, 2009)
  - Low-income families are dropping out of the market (Oregon Population Survey; Weber, 2009)
    - As a proportion of all families using paid care low-income families decreased from 26% to 16%.

Future Research Questions

- Utilization of information on child care quality:
  - To what extent do parents access the information?
  - To what extent does it impact their decision-making?
  - Does this vary depending on the type of information and the ways in which it is available?
  - Do parents who utilize information end up more satisfied with their providers? Do they stay with their providers longer?

- Market forces:
  - Does increased demand for quality care stimulate sufficient pressure to increase supply of quality care?
  - Are costs of increasing quality prohibitive?
  - If demand does increase supply, to what extent do the costs associated with improving quality increase the price of quality care?
    - What impact might this have on lower income families' access to high quality care?

References

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- Williams, S. T. (2008). *Quality Indicators Evaluation: Summary of Focus Groups and Logic Model.* Unpublished manuscript submitted to the Oregon Child Care Resource and Referral Network.

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How Parents Use Child Care Information: The Known and Unknown

Cherie Rains, PhD

National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA)

Study Specifics

- 14 Focus Groups in seven US locations
- Total of 163 parents
  - 11 groups had children under 8 years
  - 3 groups had children who were 0-24 months
  - Low-income were over-represented
  - Hispanic, African-American, Asian and American Indian specific groups
- More than 8 in 10 participants were women
- Two-thirds were full-time working parents

How Parents Define Quality

- Their OWN child care is best
- There is NO clear and consistent definition
- An environment where their children learn and develop
  - "I like my son being excited about learning"
  - "To share, to say what they think, to speak about their feelings. We want our children to be emotionally as well as physically happy."

How Parents Define Quality

- A professional and loving caregiver
  - "Their attitude is the first thing you'll notice when you meet them and it shows how well you can trust a person to take care of your kids 8 hours a day"
  - "One of the questions I ask all the teachers I visited – are you happy working here? I found out if there was high turnover, that's not good for the kids."

How Parents Define Quality

- Cleanliness and safety of the setting
    - "Up-to-date in terms of cribs, beds, napping facilities. Not state-of-the-art, but I want toys to be clean and appropriate."
    - "I think that inspections need to be unscheduled. In my small community, they know before the inspectors come."

Choosing Child Care

- Most important factors – cost, safety, learning environment
  - "I can always find child care, but then its hard to find one I would actually use."
- Make "best" of limited options
- Listen to their "sixth sense"
- Multiple child care arrangements are needed to cover care (hours, costs, etc.)
- Most parents did not check to see if their child care program was licensed or recently inspected. They just ASSUMED it was.

Parent's Assumptions vs. Reality

Assumption	% parents who think it is true	Centers	Family Child Care
All caregivers provide learning opportunities	96	Only about 30 states address development in required activities	• 12 states require providers to read to children • 32 states require providers to plan learning activities
All caregivers must have a background check	84	9 states require state and federal checks using fingerprints	25 states require federal checks using fingerprints
All child care programs are required to be licensed	81	11 states license all child care centers	• 11 states license all family child care homes • 9 states do not conduct an inspections prior to issuing a license
All child care programs are inspected	76	• 41 states require at least annual inspections • Only 5 states require quarterly inspections	• 36 states require inspection before licensing • 25 states require at least annual inspections

Compromises made by parents

- More than 4 in 10 parents said they had to pay more than originally planned
  - "We didn't have a choice whether it was expensive or inexpensive because our choices were so limited."

- Parents had to travel further to find child care to meet their needs
  - "Distance – I have to drive hours and rearrange my schedule."

- Personal goals (jobs, going back to school)
  - "I gave up a promotion due to the hours of care."

- Their wish list for care
  - "Bi-lingual Day care setting."
  - "More aggressive teaching curriculum."

What information is needed

- A consistent use of terminology – too many communication gaps
  - Licensing, certification, star ratings, high-quality
- Knowledge of child care subsidy/fee assistance programs available in their state.
- Knowledge of providers in their area (Esp. quality-care child providers)
- Knowledge of "true" costs
- Questions to ask providers to ensure adequate care