

Running Head: CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES AND MOTHERS' WORK SCHEDULES

Taking Pressure off of Families: The Impact of Child Care Subsidies on Mothers' Work

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**ABSTRACT**

We shed light on the issue of work-family conflict caused by child care problems. Whereas the literature on the effects of child care subsidies on mothers' work typically focuses on labor force participation as the outcome, we extend this research to explore work outcomes for employed mothers. We use new, quantitative data from the *Philadelphia Survey of Child Care and Work* to model the effect of child care subsidies on the work hours, shifts, and overtime problems of low-income urban mothers. Comparing subsidy applicants who do and do not receive cash payments for child care, we find that mothers who receive subsidies are 17% less likely to experience work-hour related problems on the job resulting from child care. Further, we find that the effect of the subsidy is weakly mediated by the quality of child care.

Key words: child care, work-family conflict, subsidy, quality, low-income, mothers.

## TAKING PRESSURE OFF OF FAMILIES: THE IMPACT OF CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES ON MOTHERS' WORK

With the historic rise in labor force participation of women with children, social scientists studying the family have devoted considerable attention to work-family conflicts. Researchers have noted, for example, work-family spillovers that affect individuals' quality of life experienced in their family, including health and stress, marital quality, and the number and quality of hours spent with children. There is also family-work spillover that affects work organizations such as absenteeism, turnover, tardiness, and loss of productivity (Behson, 2002, Henly & Lyons, 2000, Glass & Estes, 1997). These conflicts are particularly important for low-income women, who are less likely to work for employers offering family-friendly policies. Still, our understanding of sources of work-family conflicts in general, child care-work conflicts in particular, and more importantly, possible strategies for reducing work-family conflicts, have been inadequate and incomplete. Too often, researchers have been preoccupied with a highly selective group of topics. For example, we have many studies documenting the costs of care and the types and characteristics of arrangements that families use and their effects on children (Capizzano & Adams, 2000, Helburn, 1999, NICHD, 1997, Emlen, 1997, Hofferth, 1995, Hofferth et al., 1990.) Conversely, we have a number of studies of impacts of various factors on the hours that women work and the effect of child care on their labor force participation (Presser, 2003, Powell, 2002, Meyers, 1993, Mason & Kuhlthau, 1992, Presser, 1988, Presser & Baldwin, 1980.) Still, although ethnographic research has provided ample documentation of the intersecting world of child care problems and work participation, our quantitative knowledge of this important area has lagged behind (Henly & Lyons, 2000, Edin & Lein, 1997.) Moreover, the possible mitigating factors that could mediate and reduce child care problems have largely been

framed within a *privatized* model focusing on resources within the family (such as men's hours or women's hours). The potential impact of state resources, for example, in the form of child care subsidies, has been explored less. Yet, the experience of European countries suggests that family policies can have an important impact on quality of family life. Moreover, in recent years a number of policy interventions have occurred but the impact of these policy interventions, and the light they shed on enduring problems in family life, have not been sufficiently examined. As a result, important questions are only poorly understood.

For example, one policy intervention is a child care subsidy, defined here to mean a state-wide child day care program that provides funds to help low-income working families get help paying for child care. Child care subsidies are meant to assist low-income families with the high cost of paid child care and to improve mothers' employment chances (Kimmell 1995, 1998, Meyers et al., 2001). Some researchers suggest that child care subsidies do facilitate moving mothers off welfare and into work (Danziger Ananat, & Browning, 2004). In other words, women who get a subsidy are more likely to enter the labor force than those who do not get one. Of course, the interventions have been small in scope. Only a small percentage of eligible families are served; non-welfare "working-poor" mothers are especially unlikely to be served (Shlay et al., 2004, Queralt, et al., 2000). Nevertheless, child care subsidy is a promising family policy since it seems to capture broader political support than other family interventions (e.g., child allowances). As such, they are likely to continue. However, research on the effects of child care subsidies has an unduly narrow focus. Research typically focuses on whether or not women enter the labor force. For example, data sets used for these analyses are often limited to samples of welfare participants (Meyers, Heintze, & Wolf, 2002, Queralt, et al., 2000) and the main research question usually asks whether government subsidy policy can move state-dependent

families to self-sufficiency (Berger & Black, 1992, Bainbridge, Meyers, & Waldfogel, 2003). Yet, the impact of a subsidy has the potential to be broader; there are signs that there could be consequences for the work experience of women, especially their ability to comply with employers' expectations in the important areas of the time the mother can spend on the job. There are also important questions about the tradeoff that subsidies provide in terms of the quality of child care and the ability to use formal child care centers.

In this paper we offer a somewhat different approach than other studies to the impact of subsidies on low-income women. Following a quasi-experimental model, we compare women who are eligible for and have applied for child care subsidies with women who have received them. This comparison, we argue, is superior to previous research that has largely compared women who have received subsidies with the general population. Since there are significant differences between women receiving child care subsidies and women in the labor force at large, these comparisons are problematic. In particular, it is impossible to be clear about the impact of subsidies since other factors not separated out by investigators in their research may be confounding the process.

Sociologists have made few inroads into this predominantly economic and policy oriented literature. We argue that important insights about the role that subsidies play in work-family conflict have not been systematically explored. To preview our argument, we use new quantitative data from the *Philadelphia Survey of Child Care and Work*, (Press & Fagan, 2003a) to show that the consequences of child care subsidies go beyond those documented in the literature. In this study we move the discussion beyond labor supply outcomes and re-center the analysis on employed mothers. First, we ask whether and in what ways child care subsidies help mothers succeed once on the job, defined here as the ability to work the particular shifts and

number of hours they choose and the ability to work overtime when employers request it. One area of special concern for parents juggling work and family conflict is their work schedules (Presser, 2003). In particular, for low income families struggling to make ends meet, jobs tend to be more regimented and workers have less autonomy over their time. They earn wages rather than salaries, they have to punch in and out, and they are more likely to do shift work. When employers make time-oriented demands of workers with young children, how do families cope with these demands? What is the role of child care subsidies, if any, in the work hours, shifts and schedules, and overtime capabilities of the working poor? Can subsidies improve the life chances of low-income families?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The scarcity model has been used widely in scholarship on work and family life (Marks, 1977). According to this model adults' personal resources, such as time and energy, are limited. Work and family responsibilities can be a drain on those resources, particularly when the demands of one domain spill over to the other domain. Spillover may be bidirectional, emanating from work and family life or vice versa. The consequences of such strain can be work-family conflict, poor performance at work, or diminished family functioning.

The scarcity model is the basis upon which much social policy and workplace programming have been developed. For instance, flextime at work is meant to provide employees with the opportunity to adjust work hours and work location as a means of supporting family life (i.e., caring for children.) On-site child care is another example of programming meant to lessen the divide between family and work.

In the case of low-income women, child care subsidies are part of the major federal/state response to the work-family scarcity. Low income women have little choice but to work to

support their families. Subsidies are intended to reduce the drain of employment on family resources, particularly financial resources. The idea here is that subsidizing families for child care helps parents with employment by insuring that the family can afford stable, safe care. Without such assistance, the combination of costly child care and low wages makes paid employment minimally rewarding and difficult to sustain.

Research literature to date has revealed that subsidies have a positive influence on work-family life. Low-income women receiving subsidies are more likely to be employed rather than unemployed (Anderson & Levine, 2000). Albeit based on data from 1979, Gelbach (2002) estimates the impact of free public kindergarten, which is equivalent to a 100% subsidy, to be 2 hours of additional work per week, thus increasing her wage by \$932. A recent study by Danziger, Ananat, and Browning (2004) indicates that a child care subsidy can be a major work support for recent and former welfare recipients. Their findings suggest that welfare-reliant mothers who received a subsidy were able to increase the amount of time they work as well as their overall earnings.

While some studies show positive results of subsidy on labor force outcomes, other studies show more varied results. Queralt, Witte, and Griesinger (2000) indicate that child care subsidies can have mixed effects on the earnings of low-income families. In their study of current and former welfare recipients in two Florida counties, they found that child care subsidies increase the odds of working. However, the *amount* of the child care subsidy also had a significant impact on a family's earnings. Mothers with very low co-payments saw no significant effect on their earnings, whereas mothers with co-payments in excess of 10% of their income experienced significant declines in family earnings.

In the present study we examine the relationship between subsidy and work-hour related problems. We also investigate mediators of the subsidy-work relationship. Few studies have attempted to explain the mechanisms by which subsidy may affect work outcomes. Subsidies may expand the set of child care options available to women, provided there is an available supply of different child care options in one's community. Subsidies increase the likelihood that low-income women will be able to purchase formal care such as center based child care instead of informal care from neighbors or relatives (Brooks, 2002.) Indeed, several studies have shown an increase in women choosing center-based care when they have a subsidy (Shlay et al., 2004). For many women center care may be the desired choice because they assume the quality is better (Adams & Rohacek, 2002, Press & Fagan, 2003b). For other women, subsidy rules and customs lead women to use center care even when they prefer relative care because the subsidy does not pay enough to make it worthwhile for a family member to care for one child full time, or because it is a hassle to get the payment when it does not go to an institution. Whether women choose to use center care or fall into it to make subsidy use easier, child care centers may be less supportive of women's work hours than more flexible forms of care (Henly & Lyons, 2000). Most centers have strict policies regarding drop off and pick up times. Mothers may experience considerable conflict when their employer asks them to work overtime while the child care center expects prompt pickup before closing time. Consequently, we hypothesize that child care centers will have a negative mediating relationship between subsidy receipt and work problems. That is, we expect that women receiving a subsidy will be more likely to choose a center, but center care will increase the likelihood of work-hours problems.

Subsidies also may allow low income mothers to purchase higher quality care (Adams & Rohacek, 2002, Brooks, 2002). Qualitative data suggest that many low income women



concerned about the quality of their child's care, given the choice, would place their child in a high quality program. Poor quality care can have far-reaching ramifications for mothers' work. Lemke et al. (2000) have shown that obtaining good quality care increases the odds that women will be employed. Good quality care also provides women with peace of mind to concentrate on work responsibilities and improve their career options (Berger & Black, 1992). When a mother is comfortable with the quality of her child's care, choosing to work over time or extra days may result in less work-family conflict. We therefore hypothesize that child care quality will be mediate the relationship between subsidy and work problems.

Subsidies also may enable women to obtain more convenient child care. With pressure of employers to meet organizational scheduling needs, women may use the subsidy to obtain child care with more flexible care hours and a more desirable location. In the current study we hypothesize that convenience of child care also will mediate the relationship between subsidy and work problems.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

To investigate the effect of child care issues on mothers' work outcomes, we collected new quantitative data, the *Philadelphia Survey of Child Care and Work* (PSCCW) (Press & Fagan, 2003a). The PSCCW is designed to broaden our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between child care problems and work outcomes. In particular, we investigate how various aspects of child care, including type and number of arrangements, costs, and parent satisfaction affect mothers' paid work, including details of her jobs as well as her reports of the many ways that child care interferes with her work life. These relationships are combined with macro level information about neighborhood poverty and racial residential segregation, and about TANF status and child care subsidies to hone in on current social policy aspects of the

child care-work relationship for low-income families. The broad aim of the PSCCW study is to shed light on the mechanisms for juggling work and family that shape and texture urban poverty and the ways that these mechanisms affect the landscape of social inequality in life chances and material conditions.

The PSCCW is a one-hour, door-to-door, face-to-face survey administered to a stratified random cluster sample of 1070 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania mothers. Interviews were conducted from November 2001 through November 2003. Participants had to have at least one child under age 13 in the household and had to have worked at least 6 months out of the last 12 months to qualify. The U.S. Census tracts sampled were stratified three ways:

- (1) Poverty concentration rate. High poverty: greater than 40%, medium poverty: 20% - 40%, low poverty: less than 20%;
- (2) Racial residential segregation rate. Highly segregated: 2/3 or more of one race/ethnicity dominates, and mixed race: no race has a majority; and
- (3) Race/ethnicity (Black/African American, White, and Hispanic/Latina).

Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Because subjects were recruited door-to-door by selecting census tracts, the individual income and other demographic characteristics of a household vary across the study. Further, given our work requirement for study participation, the hardest to employ are likely not included in the sample (e.g., serious substance abusers, seriously mentally ill, etc.) Streets were selected at random within the stratified-sampled census tracts and interviewers walked down blocks knocking on every door to screen for eligibility. In order to maintain rapport between respondents and interviewers, all of the survey interviewers were women and we were successful in matching the race of interviewers with the respondents for the vast majority of the respondents. Respondents were paid \$15 in the form of a

K-Mart or Target gift card at the end of the interview. The response rate for the number of completed interviews divided by the number of eligible households is 53%. While this is an ample rate to conduct analysis, concerns about potential nonresponse bias led us to examine possible explanations. We found that the rate of tract poverty or racial residential segregation had no significant impact on the likelihood of a eligible respondent completing a survey. Instead, we found that certain interviewers were less likely to follow through and complete surveys with eligible respondents. Therefore, we are confident that our findings will not differ drastically from the true population because our source of nonresponse is primarily the result of interviewer effects.

Some unique features of the data set include rich details on both child care and work in the same survey; direct questions on the role of child care problems at work; linkages between child care problems, specific job, and specific child care arrangement and child; inclusion of both employed and not employed mothers; child care data for up to four different arrangements for all children under 13; work characteristics for up to 3 concurrent or sequential jobs this year; and a complex stratification by neighborhood poverty and racial residential segregation to allow analysis of local urban issues.

The present analysis of child care subsidies includes only respondents from high and medium poverty neighborhoods, is restricted to mothers with household incomes below 200% of the poverty line, and includes the 215 mothers who received or applied for a child care subsidy (or who were signed up by a welfare caseworker) in the last 12 months. A respondent is counted as receiving a subsidy if she reported “still receiving” the subsidy at the time of the interview (89 out of 215 mothers, or 41.4%). People who do not apply for subsidies may not know about them (Shlay et al., 2004) or they may self-select out the program because they think they do not

qualify. We argue that non-applicants from the PSCCW may be different from applicants in so many ways, that simple regression models could not accurately account for the differences. Restricting the sample provides a simulated control group of similar mothers to statistically test the effect of subsidy receipt.

Our analysis proceeds by first comparing subsidy recipients with applicants not receiving a subsidy. We use chi-square tests to determine significant differences between the populations. Next we analyze the bivariate relationships between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable. Third, we inform our multivariate logistic regression models with the results of the bivariate analyses. Barron and Kenny's (1986) method of mediation is applied to determine whether individual factors that are associated with subsidy receipt mediate the relationship between child care subsidies and work hour related problems. We predict the probability of work-family conflict for segments of our population with the logit model. Finally, we present respondents' reports of the repercussions at work that result from their inability to meet their employers' and their own work hour expectations.

## **Measures**

### **Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable in this study is a measure of problems at work that respondents reported were caused by child care. We combined three survey questions relating to hours and scheduling issues. The questions ask whether the respondent had to change her work shift/schedule, had to work fewer hours per week than desired, or could not work overtime because of problems with child care. The response options for each item was "yes" or "no." The survey questions with original wording are shown in Table 1. About 20% to 31% of subsidy applicants said yes to each question. We conducted factor analysis using varimax rotation in

order to confirm that the three items load together as one component (with an Eigenvalue of 1.640 that explains 54.7% of the variation.) Finally, we computed a dichotomous dependent variable where 1 represents an affirmative response to at least one of the items and 0 represents a negative response to all of them. Almost half of respondents have multiple scheduling problems (46.5%) that they attribute to child care.

[Table 1 about here]

#### Independent Variable

The independent variable in the study is subsidy receipt. To measure receipt we coded as 1 all respondents who reported that they were still receiving a subsidy at the time of the interview. Those who either were no longer receiving a subsidy or who had applied but had not received one were coded as 0.

Pennsylvania, the location where the present investigation took place, adopted its welfare reform plan in October 1997. The federal Child Care Development Fund is the major source of child care funding for low-and moderate-income families in Pennsylvania. To be eligible for a child care subsidy under Pennsylvania's child care plan, a family's annual household income must be below 200% of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines or less (\$23,880 for a mother with one child, \$30,040 for a family of three, and \$36,200 for a family of four as of 2002 when we surveyed women. The applicant also must work at least 25 hours per week. Recent reports indicate that there are an estimated 266,000 eligible families in Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, 2001). Families that are not a member of one of the priority groups (current welfare recipients or mothers transitioning from welfare to work) will likely end up on a waiting list. In urban areas such as Philadelphia the average cost of care for a preschooler

is \$494 a month, or about 40% of monthly income for a family earning \$15,000 (PA Department of Public Welfare, 2001).

### Mediating Child Care Variables

To test for the mediating effects of child care characteristics on work problems, we measured two types of child care information. First, we included the primary child care arrangement that the respondent uses for her youngest child, i.e., the arrangement in which the child spends the most hours. Dummy variables account for the type of care: family child care or babysitter, child care center, and relative, including the woman's spouse/child's father. Center care includes nursery school/preschool, Head Start, before and after school programs, and summer camps. Other forms of care were excluded from the multivariate analysis as comparison. Second, we used two measures of the mothers' satisfaction with care. All respondents were asked whether they would switch to a different child care arrangement if they could. Mothers who said they would like to switch were then asked why, and the answer choices included cost, convenient hours, convenient location, availability, quality, prefers family, prefers child care center, child's preference, or do not trust anyone else. We argue that mothers who answer "quality" to this question are indicating poor quality care in their current arrangement. We also combined convenient hours, location, and availability as a proxy of inconvenience in the current arrangement.

### Controls

To analyze work-hour related problems, in addition to child care subsidy reciprocity, we control for three theoretical categories of variables in predicting work-hour related problems: (1)

household demographics, (2) mothers' resources and obstacles, and (3) job related factors. We anticipate that mothers with more social resources to help her in a pinch will be less likely to report problems, whether or not she receives a subsidy. Responsibility for child care typically falls on mothers. Women who cannot access this resource through the marketplace often rely heavily on their social support networks (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003, Stack, 1974). These networks include social ties outside the household and older children and husbands inside the household. We condition on race/ethnicity to account for differences in who may be more likely to receive subsidies and be treated differently in the workplace by supervisors (Kennelly, 1999). Education level may also affect the amount of autonomy a mother has on the job and may affect her ability to control her environment in family-work spillover, as well as her self-efficacy in organizing her child care and home life.

We also anticipate that characteristics of the mother's job will be important controls. More work hours per week are probably correlated with a higher risk of work hour problems. Similarly, employees who are more regularly asked to work overtime have a higher frequency of conflict than those who are rarely asked. Finally, employees with flexible workplaces should experience fewer work hour conflicts.

Family and household characteristics include the mother's marital status (1=married or living with partner, 0= single or never married, divorced, separated, or widowed), the number of children under age 13 living in the household, and the race/ethnicity of the mother. To assess mothers' resources and obstacles, we included the number of teenagers in the household and the number of social network ties. Social ties were measured with a survey question that asked respondents with whom, outside of their household, they regularly discuss important matters. They were allowed to list up to three individuals. We use education as a measure of human

capital or skill including dummy variables for less than and high school degree, high school degree, or more than high school. Commuting to work by bus is included as a factor in work-family conflict. Although they are cheaper than car ownership, busses have limited schedules and make it more difficult to change work hours and child pickups and dropoffs with short notice. Characteristics related to mothers' jobs include job flexibility, hours worked, and the frequency of over time requests from the employer. The job flexibility index was computed from a series of eight items that asked how flexible the respondent's supervisor is in accommodating the personal and family needs of the respondent. Respondents without supervisors were assumed to have the highest level of flexibility.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table 2 describes the sample for the whole population of subsidy applicants and separately by whether the mother is a subsidy recipient or not. Statistically significant differences between the samples are starred next to the variable names. The first column shows results for the whole sample. While the PSCCW survey included roughly equal numbers of women by race/ethnicity, this subsample of subsidy applicants has a much higher proportion of Black/African-American mothers and Hispanics/Latinas than Whites, who only make up 14%. Forty-one percent of the 215 respondents are currently receiving a child care subsidy while the other 59% are not. About one-third of respondents lack a high school degree and about half rely on the bus to get to work. The vast majority of respondents report having at least one social network tie. These low income mothers are most likely to use relative care for their primary child care arrangement (41%) and are much less likely to use family day care (15%).

[Table 2 about here]



Table 2 also indicates fairly large significant differences between subsidy recipients and non-recipients on several measures. First, only 38% of subsidy recipients report child care-work conflict around the issue of work hours compared with 52% of the non-subsidy group. Other significant differences include marital status, child care center usage and low quality child care. A much lower percentage of subsidy recipients are married than non-recipients (38% v. 52%).

Subsidy recipients are also most likely to use a child care center (37%) -- and are much more likely than non-recipients (26%) to do so. Center care also costs the most, with a mean weekly price in our survey for the whole family of \$143. This is the price and not the out-of-pocket expenditure, which is lower or zero if some of the cost is subsidized. Among the families who applied for a subsidy but pay nothing for their child care (80 families), about 8% use a child care center and most of those are subsidy recipients. Further, respondents in the focus groups that informed the quantitative survey reported to us that it is much less cumbersome for them to receive the subsidy from the government when the payment is going to an institution rather than to an individual. Families receiving subsidies are also less likely to want to change child care arrangement because of poor quality (11%) compared with non-recipients (20%).

The only two child care factors that reach statistical significance, however, are center care usage and a desire to change arrangements because of low quality child care. These two variables, therefore, are possible mediators of subsidy's effect on work-family conflict.

### **Bivariate Results for Work Schedule Conflicts with Child Care**

We analyze bivariate descriptive statistics relating explanatory factors with the dependent variable in Table 3. There are some notable differences between respondents who report work problems compared with those who do not. Most importantly for this study, mothers who reported that child care caused work problems were much less likely to be supported by a child

care subsidy (34%) than mothers who did not have work problems (48%). There are several other significant differences between mothers with work problems and those without. Being married is negatively associated with child care-work conflict. Two racial/ethnic groups stand out in the table. Whites have lower levels of conflict and Native Born Hispanics have higher levels of conflict between child care and work scheduling than other groups. More teenagers in the household are associated with fewer child care problems, as is a flexible job. Women whose employers asked them to do overtime more often and those who commute by bus tend to have more conflicts with work. The use of babysitters or family day care settings is related to fewer conflicts, while poor quality and convenience of child care are associated with higher reporting of child care-work hour conflicts. In order to test the simultaneous effects of these variables, we conducted logistic regression analyses.

[Table 3 about here]

### **Multivariate Analysis: Predicting Work-Hour and Schedule Related Problems Resulting from Child Care**

Next we combine the variables we reported on in Table 3 in a series of nested multivariate logistic models. We analyze the effect of a child care subsidy on mothers' work-hour and scheduling problems that were caused by child care, net of all other factors. Table 4 shows the results of three nested models and a fourth model testing for mediation effects.

Model 1 estimates work problems conditioning on all of the control variables. We find that job factors are statistically significant in the expected directions: more flexible jobs and more hours worked are associated with fewer reports of problems, whereas women experiencing more requests for extra hours from their employers report more problems. Families with teenagers experience fewer child care-work problems, whereas social ties outside of the family seem to increase work-family conflict on average. When we add subsidy receipt to the equation

(Model 2), there is little change in the other coefficients or individual significance levels, but the overall model improves significantly. Model 2 shows that conditioning on all factors simultaneously (except child care characteristics themselves) families who receive subsidies are about half as likely to report hours/schedule related problems at work compared to those without subsidies ( $B = -0.63$ ,  $\text{Exp}[B] = 0.54$ ,  $p = .07$ ).

[Table 4 about here]

Baron and Kenny's (1986) definition of mediation was then used to examine whether child care factors mediate the relationship between subsidy receipt and mothers' work problems. Baron and Kenny (1986) have defined a mediator as a variable that accounts for the relation between a predictor and a criterion variable. In order for a variable to qualify as a mediator, an independent variable must have a direct effect on the suggested mediator and the dependent variable, the mediator must have a direct effect on the dependent variable, and the effect of the mediator on the dependent variable must reduce the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

The first step in testing for mediation was to calculate chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests of significance between subsidy receipt and child care factors, between subsidy and work problems, and between child care factors and work problems. The child care factors included preferring to change child care due to quality of the care, preferring to change care due to the lack of convenient hours, use of family day care, use of center-based care, and use of relative care. Subsidy receipt was significantly and negatively related to child care quality,  $\chi^2 = 3.7$ ,  $p = .04$  in a 1-sided test. That is, mothers who prefer a different child care arrangement due to the quality of the program were less likely to receive a subsidy. Subsidy was also positively associated with having one's child in a center-based program,  $\chi^2 = 2.9$ ,  $p = .06$ . Work problems were

significantly related to child care quality,  $\beta^2 = 7.25, p = .006$ , child care convenience,  $\beta^2 = 5.8, p = .014$ , and use of family day care as the primary child care arrangement,  $\beta^2 = 5.8, p = .012$ . Finally, subsidy receipt was significantly and negatively related to work problems,  $\beta^2 = 4.2, p = .028$ ; that is, women who receive a subsidy were less likely to have problems with work associated with work hours. On the basis of these analyses and the Baron and Kenny definition of mediation, child care quality is the only variable thus far that meets the requirements for the definition of mediation. This fact can also be seen easily and intuitively by looking at Tables 2 and 3, in which quality is the only child care factor that is statistically significant in relationships with both subsidy and work problems.

The next step was to examine quality of child care in the logistic regression analysis. The findings are presented in Models 3 and 4 in Table 4. Quality of care reduces the unstandardized slope for subsidy receipt from  $B = -.63, p = .07$ , to  $B = -.55, p = .12$  (the latter statistic for quality added alone is not reported in the table). In conclusion, the data suggest that quality of child care mediates the relationship between subsidy receipt and work problems, although quality is not a strong mediator of this relationship.

In Model 3 we add families' child care characteristics, including type of care, and quality and convenience of care, to the equation. Results show that as indicated in the bivariate analysis in Table 3, low quality and inconvenient care both increase the likelihood of work hours problems ( $B = 1.9$  and  $1.5$  respectively). The dummy variables for child care arrangement type are not statistically significant, although usage of a family day care setting is negatively associated with work problems. Child care center care usage cannot be a mediator because it increases rather than decreases the likelihood of child care problems at work. Similarly, inconvenient care is not a mediator because it fails to satisfy the bivariate effect on subsidy.

Nonetheless, center care is an interesting variable because it is associated with licensed, higher quality care than often be obtained from untrained relatives and friends. It poses a dilemma with respect to subsidy usage. While subsidies infuse cash to help families pay for better care, the center care they can now afford may be less flexible and more difficult for mothers to match with their own and their employers' needs for hours spent on the job. Thus, subsidy may increase center care use, which, in turn, increases work-family conflict.

In Model 4 we account for child care type as center care or not center care by removing the other types of arrangements from the model. We leave low quality and inconvenience of care since they were significant in the previous model. Measuring care arrangements in this way, we see that center care is not only *not* a mediator, but it actually increases the effect and statistical significance of the subsidy from  $B = -.57$  to  $B = -.69$ . Further, the effect of center care usage is about the same size as the subsidy coefficient but it has the opposite sign ( $B = .71$ ). Therefore, if a family receives a subsidy and also uses a child care center, the effect of the subsidy is completely crowded out by the effect of the child care center.

We also find that aspects of all of our main theoretical categories contribute to our understanding of characteristics that influence child care-work conflicts. Structural factors are more important in determining the risk of work and child care conflict than individual level characteristics like education. Factors that contribute to work problems are the number of children, the number of hours worked, and the frequency that employers asked respondents to work more than they were scheduled to do. More flexible jobs are negatively associated with work family conflict. Mothers' social resources show mixed results. The number of teenagers in the home seems to reduce work-child care conflicts whereas a larger social network outside the home has a negative effect. Network ties can provide a safety net for work-family imbalance, but

embeddedness also implies reciprocity that can come as a cost. There is a net cost in our model. Finally, the bus ridership is the transportation obstacle included in our analysis. If a mother commutes to work primarily by bus, then she is much more likely to report that child care problems negatively affected her work hours ( $B=.78$ ).

In sum, the results of our multivariate analysis show that net of controls for job factors and mothers' resources, child care subsidies reduce the likelihood of work-family conflict around the issue of work hours. This effect is mediated slightly by a mother's ability to use her subsidy to purchase better quality care and give her peace of mind.

### **Using Subsidies to Take Pressure off of Families**

How big is the effect of a child care subsidy on families' risk of work problems? On the basis of the logistic regression analysis, which is difficult to read as an equation because it is nonlinear, we simulated the probability of child care/work-hour conflicts for several types of respondent characteristics (Table 5). The probability of reporting work hours related problems, all else held constant in the model, is 35% if one is receiving a child care subsidy and 52% if one is not. These probabilities are calculated by multiplying the coefficients  $B$  from Model 4 in Table 4 by the mean values  $X$  and then using the sum of these values  $\mathbf{BX}$  in the logistic equation:

$$P(\text{Work Hour Problems}) = 1/(1+\exp(-\mathbf{BX})) \quad [1]$$

The gap in work-child care conflict between subsidy recipients and non-recipients is 17% on average (52-35). The table shows that while the gap between subsidized and non-subsidized families ranges from 9% to 18%, the absolute effects of some factors are much more severe than others. For example, a very inflexible job is associated with a high risk of child care-work hour conflict (81%). The subsidy reduces that risk to 68%. It is also clear that women who depend on

the bus are at a high risk of experiencing work problems (62%) compared with other women (42%). The subsidy has a large effect on this as well, reducing work-family conflict by 18% for bus riders. The effect of child care center usage is particularly interesting because it increases the chance of work problems from 47% to 64%. This gap is consistent with the positive coefficient in the model (by design). Subsidy usage then reduces that risk by 17%. While cash from a child care subsidy increases a family's ability to afford center care (usually associated with higher quality), center care is less flexible and leads to problems balancing child care hours and work hours. In the next section we investigate the repercussions at work that women in our sample say they experienced as a result of their altered schedule or shift.

[Table 5 about here]

### **Workplace Repercussions of Child Care/Work Hour Conflict**

The logistic regression models described in Table 4 shed light on the factors that cause mothers to experience work-schedule difficulties. In the *Philadelphia Survey of Child Care and Work*, however, we followed up several reports of job problems caused by child care by asking respondents what happened to them at work as a result of the conflict. Mothers in our study who told us that child care caused hours-related job problems also reported severe repercussions.

Among those who faced conflict, about 71% reported that their adapted work schedule or shift had negative consequences for their work life. The majority reported lower pay, more than one-third cited a lower chance of promotion and over one-fourth said they were given less desirable work tasks as a result. When we compare women by subsidy receipt, we find that subsidy recipients are less likely to report worse pay and job tasks as a repercussion of work-family conflict.

[Tables 6 about here]

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

This study asked what the impact is of child care subsidies on work/family conflict around the issue of scheduling, work hours and over time. Many studies have suggested that the primary impact is simply getting women into the labor force, for example, and off of welfare. These studies are incomplete, however. Our research suggests that subsidies also reduce work-family conflict. Notably, women with subsidies report 17% fewer work family conflicts on average in terms of work schedules than women who are on a subsidy waiting list. We think that these differences are not connected to different types of jobs that these women hold. Rather, the subsidies seem to make a crucial difference in providing more flexibility for women in ways previously not stressed in the literature. The subsidies seem to help women accommodate demands from their employers for overtime and shift work, and to accommodate their family needs for the income obtained from full time work.

We hypothesized that the mechanism by which child care subsidies affect work-family conflict is by increasing the family's child care budget, thereby enabling the mother to purchase higher quality and more convenient care. We found that quality of care, but not convenience, mediates the effect of child care subsidies, although quality is not a strong mediator. The effect of the subsidy can be attributed partly to the improvement in child care quality, which, we suggest, enables mothers to feel comfortable leaving their children in care in order to accommodate mothers' work schedules. However, subsidies used to purchase better quality care are being used to purchase formal, child care center-based care, a type of child care arrangement associated with higher quality. This is an interesting effect because at the same time that mothers are using subsidies to improve quality, they are decreasing flexibility, since center care is less flexible than more informal types of care.



More flexible work and child care arrangements lessens the incidence of problems with work schedules and hours. Centers are typically open from 6:30 or 7:30 AM until 5:30 or 6:00 in the evening. Many of them charge by the minute for every minute that parents are later than closing time and some double it for two children. Thus, the inflexibility of center care use combined with the increased use of this care arrangement by subsidy recipients creates scheduling problems for these families. We found that the coefficient for center care is about the opposite of the coefficient for subsidy receipt. In our model, if a mother has a subsidy and also uses center care, the effects cancel each other out. Putting children into family day care would help alleviate some of this strain on working mothers, but it would place the burden onto family day care providers and babysitters who have little power as workers themselves to avoid the extra hours (and often do not get paid for them) (Tuominen, 2003). This example highlights the complex nature of the work/family conflict faced by low-income mothers. The inability of the child care system to both accommodate the complexities of the labor force demands on parents and simultaneously to provide the child care workforce with the proper training, remuneration, and security is clearly problematic for individuals and institutions.

The gap in work problems between those with and without subsidies identified in this study points to important implications for mothers' long-term employment outcomes. These are hinted at in mothers' reports of the negative consequences at work, such as worse tasks, lower pay, and lack of promotion when they could not be available to their employers. These negative repercussions affect families' material well-being and family life.

Our results suggest that child care subsidies do far more than allow more women to enter the labor force. Instead they help make it easier for mothers to comply with employer demands

in low wage labor. Subsidies can be a tool to help working-poor families juggle work and family commitments and improve their life chances.

One limitation of the study is that it is observational and does not use experimental data. Therefore, is not a true evaluation of the subsidy as a family policy tool. Another limitation is the lack of information in the survey about why women were not using subsidies. It is possible that there are unobserved factors that help explain why some mothers are still receiving subsidies and why others are not, and that these unobservables are also correlated with work-family conflict. Future research on the effect of subsidies on work-family conflict should gather more information about the pool of subsidy applicants and their history of subsidy usage to help us understand better some of the differences between the groups.

Despite the limitations these data do support the scarcity model of work and family life. Our analysis reveals spillover from family to work in the form of child care problems that negatively affect low-income mothers' work hours and increase work-family conflict. Results also indicate that purely privatized models of work-family conflict neglect the important role of public resources, such as child care subsidies, in mitigating family-work spillover.

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Table 1. Hours-Related Problems at Work Resulting from Child Care, and Results of Factor Analysis to Combine Items

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INDIVIDUAL ITEMS	Percent of Subsidy Applicants
<i>Change Work Shift or Schedule</i>	
During the last 12 months, did you change your work shift or regular work schedule, or did you avoid a better position on a different shift because of your child care?	19.5%
<i>Reduced Work Hours</i>	
During the past 12 months, have you ever worked fewer hours per week than you wanted or reduced your number of work hours because of child care?	24.7
<i>Could not Work Overtime</i>	
In the past 12 months, were you asked to do overtime work or stay later or come earlier but weren't able to because of child care?	31.2
COMBINED ITEMS: Dependent Variable	
<i>Child Care Caused Work-Hour Related Problems</i>	
(Yes to at least 1 of the 3 items above)	46.5%
N (child care subsidy applicants)	215

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Table 2. Sample Means by Subsidy Reciprocity

	Total	Subsidy	No Subsidy
<i>Receiving Child Care Subsidy</i>	41.4%	--	--
<i>Demographics</i>			
Married or living with partner**	24.2%	15.7%	30.2%
Number of kids < 13 in house (mean)	2.14	2.2	2.1
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>			
Black	49.3%	44.9%	52.4%
Hispanic Native	21.4	20.2	22.2
Hispanic Immigrant	14.9	19.1	12
White	14.4	15.7	13.5
<i>Mother's Resources &amp; Obstacles</i>			
Number of teens in house (mean)	.34	.39	.30
Number of social network ties (mean)	1.9	2	1.8
<i>Education</i>			
Less Than High School	36.3%	36.0%	36.5%
High School	54.9	57.3	53.2
More Than HS	8.8	6.7	10.3
Takes Bus to Work	48.8%	53.9%	45.2%
<i>Job Factors</i>			
<i>Job Flexibility</i>			
Mean	16.6	16.9	16.4
Range	8 – 24	8 – 24	8 – 24
<i>Work Hours</i>			
Mean	34.7	34.6	34.9
Range	10 - 80	10 - 80	14 – 65
<i>How often asked to work overtime</i>			
Mean	3.03	3.03	3.02
Median	2	2	2.5
Range	1 - 7	1 - 7	1 – 7
<i>Child Care Factors</i>			
Family child care or babysitter	15.3%	19.1%	12.7%
Relative, including spouse/child's father	40.9%	36.0%	44.4%
Child care center/nursery school/camp <sup>†</sup>	30.7%	37.1%	26.2%
Low quality child care*	15.8%	10.1%	19.8%
Inconvenient child care	9.8%	10.1%	9.5%
<i>Child Care Caused Work-Hours Related Problems*</i>	46.5%	38.2%	52.4%
N	215	89	126

Chi-Square, 1-sided, <sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 3. Bivariate Means, Work Hours Problems Caused by Child Care

	No Work Problems			Work Problems		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range
<i>Currently receiving child care subsidy*</i>	.48	.50	0-1	.34	.48	0-1
<i>Demographics</i>						
Married/Living with partner*	.17	.38	0-1	.32	.47	0-1
Number of Children Under 13	2.1	1.1	1-6	2.2	1.3	1-6
Black/African-American	.51	.50	0-1	.47	.50	0-1
Hispanic/Latina immigrant	.14	.35	0-1	.16	.37	0-1
Hispanic/Latina native born†	.17	.37	0-1	.27	.45	0-1
White†	.18	.39	0-1	.10	.30	0-1
<i>Mother's Resources &amp; Obstacles</i>						
Number of Teens**	.46	.8	0-3	.2	.51	0-2
Number of social network ties	1.85	1.10	0-3	1.97	1.04	0-3
Less than High School Degree	.40	.49	0-1	.32	.46	0-1
High School Degree	.51	.50	0-1	.59	.49	0-1
<i>Job Factors</i>						
Job Flexibility***	18.0	4.4	8-24	15.0	4.6	8-24
Work Hours, job 1	34.6	9.2	10-65	35	9.9	14-80
How often asked to work overtime***	2.6	1.9	1-7	3.5	2.2	1-7
Takes bus to work*	.42	.50	0-1	.57	.50	0-1
<i>Child Care Factors</i>						
Family child care or babysitter*	.21	.41	0-1	.09	.29	0-1
Relative, including spouse/child's father	.41	.49	0-1	.41	.49	0-1
Child care center/nursery school/camp	.27	.45	0-1	.35	.48	0-1
Low quality child care**	.096	.30	0-1	.23	.42	0-1
Inconvenient child care*	.052	.22	0-1	.15	.36	0-1

Note: †  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

Table 4. Logistic regression model predicting likelihood of hours-related problems at work caused by child care (N=208)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		e <sup>B</sup>
	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B	B	SE B	
<i>Demographics</i>									
Married/living with partner	.65	.41	.54	.42	.71	.44	.64	.43	1.90
Number of kids under 13	.28†	.15	.28†	.15	.46**	.18	.39*	.17	1.48
Black/African-American	.53	.53	.40	.54	.51	.59	.42	.58	1.52
Hispanic/Latina immigrant	.21	.62	.23	.62	.69	.68	.55	.66	1.73
Hispanic/Latina native born	.77	.58	.74	.59	1.08†	.63	.88	.62	2.40
<i>Mother's Resources &amp; Obstacles</i>									
Number of teens	-.84**	.30	-.81**	.30	-.94**	.34	-.90**	.34	0.41
# of social network ties (0-3)	.46**	.17	.44*	.18	.49*	.19	.42*	.19	1.52
Less than High School Degree	4.6E-4	.63	-.0039	.64	.74	.72	.54	.71	1.72
High School Degree	.12	.60	.16	.60	.81	.67	.64	.66	1.89
Bus to work	.64†	.34	.74*	.35	.79*	.38	.78*	.38	2.17
<i>Job Factors</i>									
Job Flexibility level	-.15***	.042	-.14***	.042	-.16***	.05	-.16***	.05	0.85
Number of hours worked	-.037†	.019	-.036†	.019	-.040†	.02	-.042*	.02	0.96
Frequency of overtime requests	.33***	.089	.34***	.090	.34***	.10	.35***	.10	1.42
<b>Subsidy Recipient</b>			-.63†	.34	-.57	.38	-.69†	.37	0.50
<i>Child Care Factors</i>									
Family child care or babysitter					-1.19	.74	--	--	--
Relative Care					.048	.60	--	--	--
Child care center (possible mediator)					.52	.65	.71†	.40	2.03
Low quality child care (possible mediator)					1.90***	.53	1.81***	.52	6.12
Inconvenient child care					1.48*	.68	1.46*	.67	4.29
<i>Constant</i>	.29	1.33	.52	1.34	-.86	1.52	-.39	1.46	0.68
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup> (Cox & Snell)	.242		.254		.335		.319		
-2 Log likelihood	230		227		203		208		
Model Chi Square	57.5***	13df	60.9***	14df	85.01***	19df	79.85***	17df	

Note: †  $p < .10$ , \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 5. Predicted probability of work-child care conflict (simulation predicted using Model 4)

	No Subsidy	Subsidy Recipient	Difference
Average of all factors	52%	35%	17%
Number of children			
1	41	26	15
3	61	43	18
Number of teens			
0	60	42	18
1	38	23	15
<i>Difference</i>	22	19	
Number of social network ties			
0	33	20	13
1	43	27	16
3	63	46	17
Job flexibility			
Very inflexible job	81	68	13
Very flexible job	24	14	10
<i>Difference</i>	57	54	
Commutes by bus			
Yes	62	44	18
No	42	27	15
<i>Difference</i>	20	17	
Child care quality			
Low	83	72	11
Not low	45	29	16
<i>Difference</i>	38	43	
Child care convenience			
Inconvenient	80	67	13
Not inconvenient	48	32	16
<i>Difference</i>	32	35	
Child Care Arrangement			
Center care	64	47	17
Not center care	47	30	17
<i>Difference</i>	17	17	

Table 6. Repercussions at work from shift or schedule changes

	Total	Subsidy	No Subsidy
Changed Schedule/Shift Because of Child Care	(n=42)	(n=17)	(n=25)
<i>Result of schedule/shift change</i>			
Less desirable pay	52.4%	47.1%	56.0%
N	22	8	14
Less desirable work tasks	28.6%	23.5%	32.0%
N	12	4	8
Less Chance of Promotion	35.7%	35.3%	36.0%
N	15	6	9
No Change	28.6%	23.5%	32.0%
N	12	4	8