

Illinois Study of License-Exempt Child Care

*Steven G. Anderson and Dawn M. Ramsburg
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Overview

The Illinois Study of License-Exempt Care is examining issues related to the provision of home-based license-exempt child care through the Illinois Child Care Program. Questions of primary concern include but are not limited to:

- Who uses license-exempt care?
- Why do parents choose license-exempt care?
- Who provides license-exempt care?
- What motivates license-exempt caregivers to provide care?
- What resources and supports are license-exempt caregivers seeking?

Sample

- Non-relatives who provide care in their own home;
- Non-relatives who provide care in the child's home;
- Relatives who provide care in the relative's home; and,
- Relatives who provide care in the child's home.

Methods

- Administrative data on caregiving patterns statewide.
- Focus groups with 55 parents receiving subsidies and using license-exempt care and 60 license-exempt providers receiving subsidies in three study areas¹.
- Key informant interviews with 24 community child care professionals in three areas.
- Statewide survey of 115 child care resource and referral subsidy specialists.

Characteristics of Families Using License-Exempt Care (Administrative Data)

- In January 2001, nearly 87,000 families and over 172,000 children received subsidized child care services. Of those, 54% of families and 65% of children used license-exempt care, 41% used licensed care, and the remaining 4% used a mixture of license-exempt and licensed providers.
- About 80% of school-aged children, and 61% of infants were in license-exempt care. Just over half of toddlers (55%) and preschoolers (53%) were in license-exempt settings.
- In January 2001, over 61% of families using license-exempt care had a relative caregiver (37% used a relative in the relative's home and 24% used a relative in the child's home). Over one-third (35%) of families used non-relative caregivers in the child's home, and only 5% of families used license-exempt family child care home providers.
- Non-relative providers were used more by families with more than one child and families with school-age children. Relative providers were used more by families with one child and families with younger children (infants and toddlers)

Characteristics of License-Exempt Providers (Administrative Data and Focus Groups)

- In January 2001, 60% of license-exempt providers were caring for one or two subsidized children, and an additional 23% cared for three subsidized children.
- 27% of LE providers were receiving TANF, Food Stamps or Medicaid along with their subsidy in January 2001; and, 40% had used one of these in the last two years.

¹ North and South Lawndale neighborhoods in Chicago (urban), Peoria County (mid-sized urban), and the Southern Seven Illinois counties (rural)

From our focus groups with 60 providers, we learned:

- Most caregivers provided full-time care (81%), with an average of 35 hours per week. In addition, 56% of caregivers provided evening care and 42% provided weekend care.
- Providers had an average of a high school education and had provided care for an average of 4.5 years.
- 64% of the providers in our focus groups were relatives of the children in their care, with 43% being a grandparent, 7% an aunt, and 14% another relative (cousin, great-grandparent, great-aunt/uncle).
- Providers stressed a desire to care for children, an enjoyment of providing care, and a desire to help parents work as motivators for caregiving.
- Providers, often grandparents, indicated they had begun caregiving before receiving subsidy, and many indicated that they would continue caring for these children even if they did not receive subsidies. However, they noted the subsidy promoted consistency of care and allowed them to purchase supplies, food, and activities for the children that they thought enhanced their ability to care for the children.
- Providers noted the personal attention and close relationships as strengths of their caregiving situation that may not be available in licensed settings. They also were worried about the staff turnover and higher ratios in licensed settings that may compromise the consistency of care.
- Providers thought it was important for them to play a variety of teaching roles, ranging from educational concerns, to safety issues, to social skills and character development.
- Providers argued that they did not need training on how to care for children because they had years of experience raising children. Yet, they were interested in receiving more information and resources on caring for children.
- Study participants identified several different types of resources and information that they thought could enhance license-exempt caregiving. These include:
 - Teaching and recreation-related materials and equipment (e.g., lending libraries, outdoor equipment)
 - Information about available child care and community resources and programs
 - Idea exchanges, support groups, and other networking arrangements with providers or child care staff
 - Training on various child care topics (e.g., health and safety topics, First Aid and CPR, communication between parents and providers)
 - Information about how the subsidy program works
 - Information or assistance with licensing

Future Project Activities

Two structured surveys were developed using results from first year findings—one for parents using license-exempt care and one for license-exempt providers. These surveys are being administered to a random sample of 300 linked pairs of license-exempt users and providers in the three project study areas. Administrative data analysis of statewide ICCP subsidy use patterns will continue to allow for longitudinal analysis of license-exempt care patterns.

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