

Juliann Nicholson

Project Title: Examining Child Care and Subsidies for Intimate Partner Violence Survivors and their Children: A Mixed Methods Study

Mentor: Dr. Yoonsook Ha

Project Funding Years: 2020-2022

University Affiliation: Boston University

Project Abstract:

An extensive literature has documented the negative effects of intimate partner violence (IPV) on young children's development and on survivor mothers' employment. Stable, quality early child care can provide important benefits for survivors and their children and may buffer the negative effects of IPV exposure on children's and mothers' outcomes. However, survivor mothers may face unique barriers to finding and utilizing stable, quality child care and accessing child care subsidies. Despite the importance of child care for families experiencing IPV, very little research has examined survivors' child care or child care subsidy utilization, or the influence of stable, quality child care on IPV exposed children or mothers.

This dissertation study draws from attachment theory and the risk and resilience model to conceptualize the potential benefits of stable, quality child care for children exposed to IPV. It also utilizes the social ecological framework and social cognitive theories of help-seeking to conceptualize the potential barriers and facilitators for survivor mothers as they make decisions about child care arrangements and child care subsidies. Methodologically, the study will employ a mixed methods approach. Quantitative analyses will use two waves of panel data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS) to examine survivors' child care arrangements and stability and the moderating effects of child care on children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors and mothers' employment outcomes. In addition, in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews will be conducted with a sample of survivor mothers of young children (n=20) and key informants (n=10) to understand survivor mothers' experiences and decisions associated with child care arrangements and child care subsidy use and how recent CCDF policy changes have influenced their needs and experiences with child care and child care subsidies.

The research questions for the proposed study are:

(1) What are the patterns of child care arrangements that survivor mothers utilize for their young children (age 5 or younger)? And how do these child care arrangements differ from those of non-survivor mothers?

(2) How do patterns of child care arrangements affect the relationships between children's IPV exposure and children's developmental outcomes (internalizing and externalizing behaviors)?

(3) How do patterns of child care arrangements affect the relationships between mothers' IPV experiences and their employment outcomes (employment status and the number of hours worked)?

(4) What are survivor mothers' experiences with child care and child care subsidies, and how do they make decisions about child care arrangements and subsidies?

Findings from this proposed study may have important implications for improving CCDF policies and systems to better serve families experiencing IPV, for supporting advocates' and practitioners' work with survivor mothers and their children, and for informing intervention strategies for early childhood education systems and providers. This study will also address a striking gap in the literature and contribute to our increased understanding of the roles of child care for families experiencing IPV.