

The Intersection of Access and Quality: Understanding the Role of the Child Care Subsidy System in Parental Decision Making

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Project Description.

This dissertation is a mixed methods examination of how child care subsidy policies and practices affect the child care decisions of parents, specifically the quality of child care parents choose.

The responsiveness of child care subsidy policies to the needs of low income families and the implementation of these policies have been identified as important variables in the child care decision-making processes of parents

This study uses implementation and decision-making theory to understand the dynamics between caseworkers and parents in the child care subsidy system and the relationship of these dynamics to the decision parents make.

Research questions.

- In what ways do child care subsidy policies and procedures vary in their responsiveness to family needs, both as they are written and as subsidy workers implement them?
- How does the variation in the implementation of these child care subsidy policies, as determined by adherence, or lack thereof, to written policies, affect parental decision making as it relates to high quality child care choices?

Sample.

This study is being conducted in four counties in North Carolina. The sample currently includes 15 child care subsidy caseworkers, and 3 child care subsidy administrators. Four to seven more child care subsidy caseworkers and one additional child care subsidy administrator will be included. Additionally, up to 40 parents will be included in the next phase of research.

Methods.

Data will be collected from four separate sites, (two urban and two rural) chosen for both their availability of high quality care for subsidized children and the responsiveness (or lack thereof) of their local policies to the needs of low-income families.

State administrative data on the quality of child care facilities currently serving children receiving child care subsidies, and the local policy options of each county have been examined and analyzed to determine both the availability of high quality child care and the responsiveness of local policies. Data will also be collected through an internet survey of child care subsidy caseworkers, observations of meetings between subsidy workers and parents, and in-depth interviews with subsidy workers and parents at each site.

Content and thematic analysis will be used to analyze the qualitative data. Descriptive statistics and will be used to analyze the quantitative administrative data.

Progress Update.

At this time, data collection at three of the four local agencies participating in this study has been completed. Data collection at the last site will begin in July, 2011. Upon completion of data collection at the fourth site, parent interviews will commence.

Implications for policy/practice

Findings from this study will be significant for local and state child care subsidy disbursement agencies, and state level decision-makers. This study has the ability to inform policy in the following ways:

1. Documenting the efficiency of child care subsidy system policies and procedures in encouraging high quality choices by parents.
2. Illuminating the ways that the processes employed by various child care subsidy

- disbursement agencies affect parental decision-making.
3. Providing information that can improve the training and education of child care subsidy caseworkers in reference to consumer decision-making.
 4. Aiding policy makers in constructing child care subsidy policies that are effective at informing parents about high quality child care, encourage parents to choose high quality care, and ensure the availability of high quality care for these families.

Implications for research

This study will provide valuable information regarding the decisions made about child care, an area of study that requires more research.

For more information:

N/A

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Key Topics Please select all that apply and briefly describe/explain. This information will be used internally in planning the CCPRC Annual Meeting.	
<p><i>Child Care Subsidy Policies & Practices</i> e.g., How do policies and practices influence parents’ child care decisions, parental and/or child outcomes, providers’ behavior, access to quality child care?</p>	<p>I have collected data on the ways in which child care subsidy caseworkers feel, understand, and interpret child care subsidy policies. I have also collected data on policy variation between different counties within a state.</p>
<p><i>Parents & Families</i> What do we know about parent decision-making and how it is influenced by issues such as culture, employment, subsidy policies? What other family-level constructs are relevant to child care policies/practices?</p>	<p>I have collected data on the ways that child care subsidy caseworkers interpret parents inquiries about child care and parents desires for child care. This project has not yet worked with parents to gather their perspective, but will do so in the future.</p>
<p><i>Other (please describe)</i></p>	