Parental Choice: Research Evidence from Two National Datasets

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9/3/09-2/27/12

Project Description
This project uses secondary data analysis of data from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development, and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Birth Cohort to analyze the relations among child, family, employment and program characteristics and parent choice.

Research questions. The study addresses the following research questions: [1] What are the most common eco-cultural profiles of parental preferences, attitudes towards maternal employment and beliefs about raising children; [2] Are parents in specific "ecological niches" more likely to hold these profiles? [3] What is the relation between parental preference profiles and child care utilization patterns (type of care, hours of care and quality of care used)?; [4] How do opportunities and constraints shape child care utilization patterns, given parental preferences, attitudes and beliefs?; [5] Do the relations among parental preferences, opportunities and constraints, and child care utilization vary for specific subpopulations of: [a] low-income working families at risk of needing TANF benefits, [b] language, ethnic and racial minority families and children, and [c] families with infants and toddlers?

Methods. For the analyses of the NICHD SECCYD, we used Latent Profile Analysis (LPA). LPA is a form of latent variable mixture modeling, which combines continuous and categorical latent variable modeling approaches in a single simultaneous equation model. LPA can be considered the latent variable equivalent of cluster analysis, basing model selection on more rigorous empirical criteria and accounting for random error in both the constructs and the assignment of individuals to latent profiles. Parameters obtained from these analyses represent estimates of the number of distinct profiles of characteristics, the direction and magnitude of differences in each characteristic across profiles, and the proportion of the sampled population expected to belong to each profile type.

Results. We found four profiles from the LPA analyses. Using multinomial logistic regression, we examined the ecological niches of women with these four profiles. Based on these analyses, we argue that these four profiles are more likely to be held by people in specific social-ecological niches. Profile 1 – child-centered values and a preference for center-based care over spouse/partner care – is more common among white, middle-class mothers. Profile 2 – similar to Profile 1, but with a greater value placed on child obedience, along with child-centered learning and autonomy – is more likely to be held by women who are married or partnered, slightly more likely to be held by women who are Black and lower income than Profile 1, but, relative to Profiles 3 and 4, more likely to be White. Profiles 3 and 4 – stronger preference for spouse/partner care over center-based care, and greater emphasis on child obedience and adult-directed learning – are more likely to be Black and/or Hispanic than is Profile 1 or 2, but do not differ from Profile 1 on income or household structure.

Progress Update. We are now preparing a journal article using the NICHD SECCYD data to examine parental preference profiles and ecological niches. We are in the data analysis phase with the ECLS-B dataset.

Implications. This research will inform CCDF program goals – improving child care subsidies as a work support and improving the quality of child care for low-income working families – by providing research evidence on parental choices using data from two large, national, prospective studies. The results of the proposed project will assist policymakers in developing policies that will

be most effective in supporting the efforts of working families to find child care that meets their family's employment needs as well as the needs of their children.

For more information:

Marshall, NL, Roberts, J, & Frye, A. (in preparation). Social context, child care selection and parental decision-making.

Contact

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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.	
Child Care Subsidy Policies & Practices e.g., How do policies and practices influence parents' child care decisions, parental and/or child outcomes, providers' behavior, access to quality child care?	
Collaboration, Integration, & Linkages e.g., What are characteristics of different types of collaborations? What are reasonable outcomes to expect? What are we learning from coordination across different systems? What is the value added of effective collaborations at the state and local levels?	
Quality Frameworks How well are QRIS living up to promise of improved outcomes at the systems, provider, family and child levels? How are they influencing parent decisions, professional development, workforce issues? What are we learning about collaborative professional development strategies and effective targeting of quality resources?	
Parents & Families 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?	**We can speak about the relation between ecological niches and parental decision-making.**
Other (please describe)	