

Child Care Graduate Student Research Program: 2019 Research Scholars

Jonathan Borowsky

Project Title: Provider Choice in a CCDBG-Subsidized Population: The Role of QRIS, Distance, Local Supply Variation, and Household Characteristics

Mentor: Dr. Elizabeth Davis

Project Funding Years: 2019-2020

University Affiliation: The University of Minnesota

Project Abstract:

Two important goals of the 2014 CCDBG Reauthorization Act are to support parents in making informed choices, and to provide equal access to high quality care for young children. Achieving these policy goals requires understanding parent decision-making about which child care provider to use. In order to understand what options are meaningful and assess the effect of interventions or market trends, it is necessary to understand how households make tradeoffs between different desirable and undesirable provider attributes, and how parents' decisions are shaped by what is available. Specifically, how do households weigh quality, distance, type of care and other characteristics, within the context of the options available to them?

This project addresses three major research questions, each focused on families receiving child care subsidies: First, what is the effect of Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) ratings on choice of provider? Second, what is the effect of distance on choice of provider? Third, what role do changes in local supply versus changes in preferences play in explaining the declining use of family child care in the subsidized population?

We will answer these research questions by using extremely rich administrative data to estimate a nested logit model of provider choice for a subsidy-receiving population. Through a data sharing agreement, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) has provided seven years of de-identified administrative data from the CCDBG-funded Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), which we have geocoded to obtain household and provider locations. This data set is supplemented by merging it with provider characteristics and additional data on QRIS ratings and provider history provided by DHS.

Typically, research on child care choice has abstracted away from selection of a particular provider by using broad categories (e.g. private center vs. public center vs. family day care), as the outcome. Our innovative approach is to model the choice of an individual provider, and this has several important advantages. First, it allows us to directly test hypotheses about characteristics that vary at the provider level, such as location or quality rating. Second, child care choice is best viewed as an accommodation, where what is chosen is shaped by what is locally available. Existing research on child care choice is limited because it does not incorporate data on the full set of nearby providers. We address the role of local variation using data on the characteristics of individual providers and the geographic locations of households and providers. Third, we avoid relying on arbitrary boundaries to define child care markets. By modeling provider choice as a function of distance as well as other provider and household characteristics, we are able to capture how these factors interact to affect families' decisions.

The project will enhance policymakers' understanding of child care choices of families receiving subsidies in order to increase access to high-quality care. The research is conducted in collaboration and consultation with the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

Olivia Healy

Project Title: The Effect of Targeted Public Pre-K on the Broader Child Care Landscape in Illinois

Mentor: Dr. Terri Sabol

Project Funding Years: 2019-2021

University Affiliation: Northwestern University

Project Abstract:

Policymakers increasingly turn to public pre-Kindergarten (pre-K) programs as a strategy to improve children's access to high-quality early education (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018). While a proliferation of research supports public pre-K as a means to boost children's academic skill development (Phillips et al., 2017), we know less about how new public pre-K programs impact the broader set of early care and education options available to families. Emerging evidence suggests that *universal* pre-K, which is made available to all 4-year-olds in a state, does create new pre-K slots, but at the same time crowds out preexisting private child care providers, thus tempering net expansion (Bassok, Fitzpatrick, & Loeb, 2014; Bassok, Miller, & Galdo, 2016). One study suggests universal pre-K may undermine the availability and quality of private child care for infants and toddlers too young to attend (Brown, 2018). However, we do not yet know whether there are unintended market-level consequences of a *targeted* public pre-K program offered for only a limited subset of preschool-aged children in a state, particularly in terms of price, quality, and availability of care for young children birth through age 5.

My proposed dissertation study tests this potential, considering the market-wide consequences of a targeted public pre-K program available only to socioeconomically disadvantaged families. My research focuses on Illinois' public pre-K initiative that began in 2007 and was geared toward low-income and academically at-risk 3-and-4-year-olds. I examine the quantity, price and quality of the overall set of child care options available within a given community after public pre-K enters the market. I also consider the consequences of targeted public pre-K on these same outcomes for child care options available to younger children (infants and toddlers). Illinois' public pre-K program offers an ideal case study for this analysis, as it serves a sizeable share of 3-and-4-year-olds in the state – 20 and 26 percent respectively (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2018) – but does not come close to universal coverage, nor does it enroll more advantaged families who might otherwise have access to early education in the absence of public intervention.

The study was designed in partnership with the Illinois Department of Human Services' Office of Early Childhood (responsible for CCDF administration) and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. Findings from the study will inform the following CCDF research topic priorities; *issues related to increasing access to high quality care (topic 2), increasing access to, and quality of, care for infants and toddlers (topic 4), and factors promoting or hindering partnerships among child care providers and other early childhood systems (topic 11)*. The results of the research will be relevant to policymakers at all levels of government as they consider how and for whom to fund early care and education services in order to lower barriers and address gaps in child care access.

Danielle Riser

Project Title: Understanding Child Care Decision-Making for Families who have Young Children with Disabilities: An Explanatory Mixed Methods Study

Mentor: Dr. Rena A. Hallam

Project Funding Years: 2019-2021

University Affiliation: University of Delaware

Project Abstract:

Child care provides an essential service to many families by allowing parents to participate in the workforce and helping their children develop in a nurturing environment. However, families who have young children with disabilities have constrained child care options and often report more difficulty in finding child care. The child care decision-making process is more complicated for these families because they must navigate their child care needs and the early childhood special education system. Research is needed to examine the child care preferences and child care arrangement patterns of families who have young children with disabilities, and how these families negotiate between their child care needs and early childhood special education services.

This study aims to address this need by conducting an explanatory mixed-methods study. To explore national trends in child care preferences and arrangements, this study will use a national sample of households with young children who have disabilities or special needs from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE; NSECE Project Team, 2019). To gain a deeper understanding of the results from the national data, interviews will be conducted with a separate sample of families in Delaware who have young children with disabilities. Integrating the interview findings with the national survey results will provide useful insights into how to better tailor policy and services to facilitate access to child care for families who have young children with disabilities.

The research questions for the proposed project are as follows:

1. At the national-level, what are the child care preferences of families who have young children with disabilities in comparison to families of typically developing children?
 - a. How do parents of young children with disabilities rate the importance of care dimensions relative to parents of young typically developing children?
2. Do the patterns of non-parental child care arrangements across the day differ for young children with and without disabilities at the national level?
 - a. To what extent do young children group into latent profiles when their child care arrangement patterns are analyzed?
 - b. Does predicted profile membership differ based on whether the child has a disability?
3. How do families who have young children with disabilities navigate across systems when making child care decisions?
 - a. What are their child care preferences?
 - b. What opportunities, constraints, and barriers do they experience when making child care decisions?
 - c. How do they negotiate between their need for child care and their special education services?
- d. How does this negotiation influence their child care arrangements?

Jing Tang

Project Title: Examining Parental Child Care Decision-Making: A Mixed Methods Study of Parental Search Strategies

Mentor: Dr. Rena A. Hallam

Project Funding Years: 2019-2021

University Affiliation: University of Delaware

Project Abstract:

The proposed project is a mixed methods study that seeks to increase the understanding of the search strategies that parents use to make early care and education (ECE) decisions. Most children under age 5 receive non-parental child care on a regular basis. Although parents have difficulties in finding ECE programs, they typically spend limited time searching for child care and consider only a few options (Forry, Isner, Daneri, & Tout, 2014). Searching for child care is an important part of parental decision-making process. However, little is known about parental search strategies and how they affect parents' ECE decisions.

The proposed project will examine parents' perceptions of different ECE arrangements, their search strategies, and their opinions about consumer education resources. As one purpose of Child Care Development Fund (2016) is to help parents access reliable information to make informed ECE choices, there is a need to gain a better understanding of parental ECE search process.

This mixed method project focuses on parents with children ages 3 to 5. It consists of three studies. Because the type of ECE that parents consider is related to their existing perceptions of different ECE arrangements, the first study will use data from the National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) to classify parents based on their perceptions of different ECE arrangements and examine whether family characteristics explain the differences in parents' perceptions. The second study will still use the NSECE data to examine the effects of parents' perceptions and search strategies on their ECE decisions. It will highlight how the supply of child care affects the number of ECE options that parents consider and will examine whether the type of information sources affects parental ECE decisions. The third study will collect and analyze qualitative data from parents in Delaware in order to understand the parental search process in more depth. Additionally, this project is built on Weber's (2011) conceptual model of parental ECE decision-making and will add a new construct regarding search strategies to the model.

The proposed project will use both quantitative and qualitative data to examine the following questions:

1. Do parents group into profiles based on their perceptions of different ECE arrangements? And what family characteristics predict the profile membership?
2. What are the differences in family and community characteristics between parents who consider one provider and parents who consider more than one provider during their child care search?
3. How do parents' perceptions of different ECE arrangements and search strategies affect their ECE decisions?
4. Based on parents' profiles, how do local parents make child care decisions? What formal and informal resources do they use?