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Parents' Reasons for Not Enrolling in Early Care and Learning Services:

A Mixed Methods Study of Parents in 10 Neighborhoods

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PRESENTED BY:

Zoelene Hill
New York University

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Abstract

As policy makers seek to expand early care and learning services, it is important to understand the reasons why parents are unable to, or actively choose not to enroll in existing programs. Current research on enrollment that relies on measuring the relationship between demographic characteristics (e.g., race, ethnicity, employment status, education level, etc.) and enrollment status has been informative of trends of utilization and can be predictive of future enrollment, but falls short of truly understanding parents' reasons for enrolling and not enrolling. Using data from the *Making Connections* Survey, a longitudinal study of low-income neighborhoods in ten cities, this study examines parents' responses when directly asked why they did not enroll their young (0-5 years old) children in community child care and preschool services. Qualitative analysis of parents' open-ended responses provides evidence suggesting that: many parents believe that informal family-based care is a substitute for center-based care and that their children are too young for center-based care; many parents do not trust others to care for their children; and that cost and the administrative burden of the application process are barriers to utilization. Findings shed light on possible areas for public engagement, outreach and program focus, as early learning programs seek to enroll more families.

Keywords: preschool, enrollment, decisions, preK, parents

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Introduction

Enrollment in high-quality preschool can promote school readiness and alleviate some of the developmental risks associated with poverty (Anderson, 2008; Barnett, 2011; Barnett and Yarosz, 2007; Campbell et al., 2012; Currie and Thomas, 1993). For many parents with young children, preschool is also a vital work support (Tekin, 2005; Herbst, 2010). With mounting research showing the inter-generational benefits of high-quality preschool programs, state and local governments are seeking to expand the preschool systems that serve children in low-income communities. However, the intended reach and effects of increasing the supply of public preschool may be dampened if programs do not also account for the factors that drive and suppress demand.

The term preschool encompasses a variety of early care and learning programs (e.g., nursery school, child care, Early Head Start, Head Start, pre-K programs) provided to children under the age of five. While governments are working to expand preschool for all children between zero to four years old, the focus of many program expansions has centered on providing services for three- and four-year-old children. Wishing to increase the number of families who benefit from high-quality preschool programs, state and federal governments have made significant investments. Between 2002 and 2017, state funding of preschool rose from \$2.4 billion to over \$7.6 billion (NIEER, 2018). During the same time, federal spending on Head Start and Early Head Start, programs for children in poverty (ages zero to five), rose from just over \$6 billion to \$9.2 billion. Combined state and federal spending on the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), a child care subsidy program that serves primarily children under six years old, rose from \$7.5 billion in 2002 to \$8.6 billion in 2016 (ACF, 2019).

Despite significant investments in program expansion and quality, sixty percent of low-income children between three and four years of age, the target population for many expansion programs, do not enroll in formal preschool (KidsCount, 2018). Hispanic children make up the fastest growing demographic in the nation (Brown, 2014), and they are less likely than black, white, and Asian children to be enrolled in preschool (e.g., enrollment rates: 41 percent, 51 percent, 49 percent and 47 percent, respectively: KidsCount Data Center, 2018). While expansion of preschool services will address issues of supply, simply expanding existing preschool systems will not alleviate various other barriers to preschool use.

Different barriers to preschool enrollment require different policy and program interventions to promote enrollment. From a policy perspective, the distinction between parents who are not enrolled because of a lack of program supply and parents who are not enrolled because they are not interested in applying, has different implications for the types of policies needed to increase enrollment. For the former group, increasing program supply will likely increase enrollment. For the latter group, increasing supply alone will likely not be enough. Therefore, a fuller understanding of families' reasons for non-use of existing programs can provide policy- and program-relevant insights into possible misalignments between dimensions of existing preschool systems and the needs of low-income families. Using a neighborhood-based survey conducted in ten metropolitan areas, this study examines low-income families' explicitly stated reasons for non-use of child care and preschool services in their community.

Background

The theoretical frameworks commonly applied to understanding parents' child care decisions (i.e., ecological systems theory; accommodation model) are explicit in the joint effects of multiple, complex, and nested contextual factors (Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Chaudry, Henly, and Meyers, 2010; Meyers and Jordan, 2006). Nested and interacting systems spanning government policies, economic contexts, community resources, various aspects of work and social lives, and individual preferences all come together to influence parents' decisions around preschool use.

Across states, the increasing cost of living, combined with low wages, requires that adults work long hours and/or that multiple adults in a household pursue work – which for some parents with young children requires the use of formal and informal early care and learning services. As an example of the gap between the cost of living and wages, a 2018 report by the National Low Income Housing Coalition found that a worker earning the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 would need to work 99 hours per week for all 52 weeks to afford a one-bedroom home at the national average fair market rent (NLIH, 2018). While rents vary across states, and counties, the report further describes that in “no state, metropolitan area, or county can a worker earning the federal minimum wage or prevailing state minimum wage afford a two-bedroom rental home at fair market rent by working a standard 40-hour week” (NLIH, 2018). Demanding work schedules often require many parents to seek out child care and learning services.

For many low-income families in need of social support, federal and state policies that mandate employment for program eligibility indirectly necessitate the use of formal and informal early care and learning services. Welfare reform enacted through *The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity*

Reconciliation Act of 1996 replaced Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as the program that provides financial support to low-income families, with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF requires that adults be enrolled in school or job training, or be actively looking for work for program eligibility. This work mandate requires many parents in need of financial assistance to pursue formal and informal child care, thus driving enrollment in child care and early learning services (Moffitt, 2002).

Parents' use of formal preschool services is also influenced by the availability of programs in their communities. States without state-funded preschool programs have lower proportions of children enrolled in formal preschool (KidsCount Data Center, 2018; NIEER, 2018; Cascio and Schazzenbach, 2013; Fitzpatrick, 2010). Similarly, a study of communities in Georgia found that in communities with fewer formal preschool centers, children have lower rates of preschool enrollment (Bassok, Fitzpatrick, and Loeb, 2014).

Studies examining the family-based contexts that influence enrollment consistently point to factors in the domains of family need, human and social capital, and preference. In the domain of family need, an unemployed parent and households with multiple adults and children are associated with lower rates of preschool enrollment (Crosnoe, Purtell, Davis-Kean, Ansari, and Benner, 2016; Early and Burchinal, 2002; Singer, Fuller, Keiley, and Wolf, 1998). In the domain of human and social capital, lower levels of education and less experience with social services are associated with lower rates of enrollment (Brandon, 2004; Crosnoe et al., 2016; Liang, Fuller, and Singer, 2000; Tang, Coley, and Votruba-Drzal, 2012; Yesil-Dagli, 2011). Transportation limitations and lack knowledge about free or subsidized early childcare are also associated with lower rates of enrollment (Sandstrom and Chaudry, 2012).

Research showing the relationship between parents' care and learning preferences and their use of child care and early learning services provides a closer assessment of the motives that impact enrollment decisions; however, such research is limited. There is a relationship between parents' use of early literacy practices and enrollment in center-based care, which suggests that parents with pre-academic parenting practices prefer center-based care, but the direction of the relationship is not clear (Fuller, Holloway, and Liang, 1996). A lower prioritization of academic development, socialization, professionally trained caregivers, and a higher prioritization of flexible care are associated with lower rates of enrollment (Early and Burchinal, 2001; Fram and Kim, 2009; Liang et al., 2000; Yesil-Dagli, 2011). Belief that local programs are low in quality is correlated with lower rates of enrollment (Crosnoe et al., 2016).

Current Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the reasons parents give for not using the child care and preschool services in their communities. A limitation in much of the existing literature on preschool use is that many studies examine the contexts associated with enrollment and non-enrollment, but never explicitly ask families the reasons behind their enrollment decisions. This study addresses this limitation by using a dataset that directly asks family members their reason(s) for non-utilization of child care and preschool services. This study examines three research questions:

- 1) What reason(s) do parents give for not enrolling in child care and preschool services in their communities?
- 2) How do reasons for not using early care and learning services vary by age of the child?
- 3) How do reasons for not using early care and learning services differ for Hispanic parents, a group recorded to have low rates of enrollment, compared to reasons offered by other groups?

Methods

Data

Making Connections is a neighborhood-based longitudinal survey collected from low-income neighborhoods in ten cities: Denver, Des Moines, Hartford, Indianapolis, Louisville, Milwaukee, Oakland, Providence, San Antonio, and White Center (outside Seattle). The survey was conducted in three waves between 2002 and 2011, and families with children who moved out of the neighborhoods were followed between waves. Respondents are representative of children in the survey neighborhoods at Wave 1. While the neighborhoods are not representative of the entire city, nor are they nationally representative, the distribution of the neighborhoods across ten cities and states and regions of the country allows the data to capture the experience and preferences of parents across a variety of local and state contexts.

Analytic Sample

This study uses data from Waves 1 and 2, collected between 2002-2004 and 2005 -2007, respectively. This study uses a focal child dataset (file11 w1w2CHLD) with panel sampling weights (WCHLD_PANEL_WAVE12), and a supplemental data pull of parents' verbatim responses, provided by data managers at NORC. Wave 1 analysis is limited to respondents for whom the focal child was under

six years old, the age to be eligible for child care and preschool services. The 849 respondents, with weights applied, are representative of 43,062 young child households. In Wave 2, there are 271 households where either the focal child is still under the age of six, or there is another child in the household under the age of six. This analytical sample is representative of 13,371 young child households.

Approach

First, regression analysis using Stata14 examines the extent to which contexts shown to be predictive of enrollment in previous studies continue to be associated with enrollment among the sample population. Next, analysis of coded responses and open coding qualitative analysis of parents' verbatim response as to their reason(s) for not using child care and preschool services provides a descriptive look at how parents explain their reasons for not enrolling. Differences in responses are assessed by the age of the focal child (0 to 5 years old).

Measures

Use of child care and preschool services: During Wave 1, parents were asked: "Have you (or any member of your household) used child care services and preschool programs in the last 12 months?" and provided closed choice options: yes, no, don't know, and refused.

Ease of using child care and preschool services: Parents who indicated that they used child care and preschool services were then asked: "On a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 indicates that it is 'very difficult to use' and 7 indicates that it is 'very easy to use,' how difficult or easy is it for you to use child care and preschool programs?"

Reason for non-use: Parents who indicated that they did not use child care and preschool services, were then asked to provide the reasons why they did not use the services. During Wave 1, parents were asked an open-ended question and invited to provide their reasons for non-use. Parents' verbatim responses were recorded, then coded into choice options. In subsequent waves, parents were asked to select their reasons for non-use of child care and preschool services, and were provided with a list of closed choice options from which to choose.

Demographic characteristics: The survey also collected demographic information about respondents. This study uses these demographic characteristics to assess the degree to which use and non-use of child care and preschool services are consistent with trends of utilization reported in current research. These characteristics include: respondent's race, ethnicity, foreign-born status, education level,

and employment status; household income; TANF use; and number of adults and children in the household.

Results

Table 1 describes the demographic characteristics of the respondent population. There were 849 respondents with focal children between the ages of zero and five. This sample, with weights applied, was representative of 43,062 families. Twenty-two percent of the respondents identified as black (only), 17 percent as white (only), 4 percent as Asian (only) and .3 percent as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (only). Thirty-eight percent of the respondents identified as Hispanic, and 4 percent identified as Hispanic (only), not providing any other racial identification. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents were foreign-born. Levels of educational attainment were low: 39 percent of the respondents had no high school diploma, 26 percent had a high school diploma, and 5 percent had a college degree or more. Sixty-one percent of the respondents were employed. Fifty percent of respondents had total household incomes under \$20,000, and only 22 percent had income higher than \$30,000.

Table 2A provides the relationship between the use of child care and preschool services and sets of demographic characteristics previously identified to be predictive of early care and learning enrollment. Analysis uses logistic regression because the outcome variable is binary. Model 1 includes racial and ethnic demographic variables. Identifying as Hispanic (vs. not identifying as Hispanic) has a positive, statistically significant relationship with use of child care and preschool services. Identifying as white, Asian, and Other have negative, statistically significant relationships with use of services; for these variables, the comparison group is respondents who identify as black. Model 2 contains variables in the domain of education, income and work and Model 3 presents variables in the domain of household composition; none of these variables have a statistically significant relationship with service use. Model 4 shows how enrollment in services is related to city of residence. The comparison group is respondents in the City of Denver. Respondents in the Indianapolis neighborhood have a negative, statistically significant relationship with service use, whereas respondents in Louisville demonstrate a positive, statistically significant relationship with service use. Model 5 combines all of the domains of variables. Identifying as Asian and living in Indianapolis continue to have negative, statistically significant relationships with service use.

Table 2B presents that same analysis as Table 2A, but using data collected at Wave 2. In Model 1, white respondents are less likely to be enrolled, when compared to black respondents, and this difference is statistically significant. In Model 2, receiving TANF has a positive, statistically significant relationship

with enrollment. Models 3 and 4 show that there is no difference in rates of enrollment when comparing household composition demographics or when comparing neighborhoods in the various cities to the neighborhood in Denver. Model 5 combines all domains, and shows that respondents who receive TANF are more likely to enroll.

Table 3 shows the rates of child care and preschool service utilization and respondents' perceived ease of use. For all focal children between zero to five years old, 47 percent were enrolled in child care and preschool services, but rates of enrollment varied with the age of the child. Children who have not reached their first birthday had the lowest rate of enrollment at 28 percent and children four years old had the highest rate of enrollment at 61 percent. Overall, 67 percent of the respondents with children enrolled in child care and preschool services reported that services were "very easy to use," however there was slight variation with the age of the focal child. At 52 percent, respondents with two-year-old children had the lowest rate of classifying use as "very easy," while at 79 percent, respondents with five-year-old children, had the highest rate of classifying use of child care and preschool services as "very easy."

An assessment of whether Hispanic respondents' rates of use and perception of ease of use through logistic regression showed that Hispanic respondents with focal children (age four) were more likely to use preschool or child care services, compared to non-Hispanic respondents ($\beta = 1.22^* SE (0.578)$); and linear regression showed that Hispanic respondents with focal children (age four) were more likely than non-Hispanic respondents to rate that services were easier to use ($\beta = 1.12^* SE (0.462)$).

Table 4 presents the Wave 1 coded reasons for not using child care and preschool services in their communities, categorized by the age of the child. These categories were coded from respondents' open responses to the question about their reasons for not enrolling. For respondents with focal children between the ages of zero to five, the most commonly coded reason for not enrolling in child care and preschool services was "no need" (.80), followed by "other" (0.11). Respondents' reasons varied slightly depending on the age of the focal child, but "no need" and "other" were the top two most coded responses for not enrolling children of all ages: for children under the age of one, .86 and .13; for one-year-old children, .86 and .08; for children 2 years old .88 and .06; for children 3 years old, .77 and .06; for children 4 years old, .68 and .16; and for children 5 years old, .74 and .22. Across all ages, Hispanic respondents had similar distributions in their coded responses. However, a logistic regression revealed that Hispanic respondents with focal children (four years old) were less likely to be coded as "no need" in their reason for not using services ($\beta = -1.43^* SE (0.614)$).

To better understand the details that underlie coded categories, Table 5 presents results from an unweighted open-coding qualitative analysis of respondents' open responses about their reasons for not using child care and preschool services. While "no need" continues to be a frequently provided reason for not using child care or preschool services, other, more detailed categories that were previously folded into the categories "no need" and "other," emerge. In particular, five categories: (1) administrative (challenging application); (2) child is too young; (3) I, my family, or others provide care for child; (4) cost; and (5) I don't trust others to care for my child, emerge. Again, responses differ with the age of the focal child. Higher proportions of respondents with children between the ages of zero and two believe their child is too young for center-based care, compared to respondents with children aged three through five. Similarly, a higher percentage of respondents with children between the age of zero and two report not trusting others to care for their child, compared to respondents with children aged three through five. However, the percentages of respondents who report that they have other sources of care for the child remains relatively consistent and high, regardless of the age of the child.

Discussion

This study adds to the body of research dedicated to better understanding the contexts that influence parents' decisions regarding preschool enrollment. As policymakers and program administrators seek to expand and universalize preschool services, it is especially important to understand, directly from parents, the reasons why they do and do not enroll. The *Making Connections* data set provides a unique, direct examination of parents' reasons for preschool non-enrollment in community contexts that are the primary targets for preschool expansions. First, this study examines the extent to which trends of enrollment reported in extant literature continue to hold true among *Making Connections* survey respondents. Then, by examining parents' direct responses about their reasons for not enrolling, this study sheds new light on parents' preferences for the care and education of their young children. Five categories of reasons for non-enrollment emerge from parents' direct responses: (1) administrative (e.g. challenging application); (2) child is too young; (3) I, my family, or others provide care for child; (4) cost and (5) I don't trust others to care for my child. These reasons serve as evidence for the need for different types of approaches and messaging in outreach and possible areas for program quality development.

The survey was specifically implemented in poor, urban communities, therefore, it is not surprising that the demographic profile of the neighborhood populations differ from the national population. Compared to the racial and ethnic composition of the nation in 2000 (i.e., two years before Wave 1 of the survey was conducted) the neighborhood populations are more representative of people of color, and of people with lower levels of education and lower levels of income. In 2000, 75 percent of the national population

identified as white, whereas only 17 percent of the neighborhood sample identified as white (U.S. Census, 2018). Among the national population (over 25 years old) in 2000, 20 percent had less than a high school diploma, whereas almost double, 39 percent of the neighborhood population had less than a high school diploma (U.S. Census, 2018). Twenty-five percent of the national population attained a college degree or more, whereas among the neighborhood population, only five percent had the same (U.S. Census, 2018). The total household income of the neighborhood population was substantially lower. Fifty percent of the neighborhood population had total household incomes under \$20,000, whereas only 13 percent of the national population had such low income (U.S. Census, 2018).

The first set of analyses shown in Tables 2A and 2B show that a few demographic characteristics of *Making Connections* respondents and the neighborhoods they represent have similar patterns of association with preschool enrollment shown in previous studies. Regression analysis examined variables in the domains of racial and ethnic identity; education, work and income; household composition; and city of residence were examined, in domain clusters, then all together. In Table 2A, Model 1, respondents who racially identified as white, Asian, or Other had a lower likelihood of enrollment compared to the comparison group – black respondents. This finding is consistent with reports that show that nationally, among low-income populations, black families have the highest rate of enrollment compared to other racial groups (KidsCount 2018). However, this model also shows that respondents who identified as Hispanic have a higher likelihood of enrollment compared to non-Hispanic respondents. This finding is inconsistent with current and historic reports that show the opposite; and it is not immediately clear why this finding emerged (KidsCount, 2018). None of the variables measuring education, income, and work or household composition show a statistically significant relationship with enrollment among the Making Connection respondents.

City covariates were included in the model to capture a proxy measure of program availability within the city and state. Given previous studies showing that enrollment is responsive to the availability of preschool centers in the community, we expected to see that neighborhoods in states with more robust early education programs would have higher rates of preschool enrollment. Like Denver, Indianapolis had low rates of enrollment consistent with a report dating back to 2002, that showed there were no children between the ages of three and four enrolled in a state-funded preschool until 2016 (NIEER, 2017). Similarly, the finding that respondents from Louisville were more likely to report enrollment when compared to respondents from Denver, is consistent with reports showing that Kentucky had more robust (i.e. served a higher percent of children) state-funded programs than Colorado (NIEER, 2017). While reports at the state-level are not specific to the city or to the neighborhood sampled, they provide a rough measure of the availability of preschool in the broader context. Model 5 displays the results of a

regression analysis that combines all four domains. Only the variable Asian continues to have a statistically significant relationship with enrollment.

Table 2B provides the same analysis as Table 2A, using Wave 2 data. In Model 1, respondents who identified as white were less likely to be enrolled compared to those who identified as black. In the domains of education, income and work, receipt of TANF has a statistically significant positive relationship with enrollment; perhaps reflecting that parents' connection to one social support program facilitates connections to other programs. Model 3 shows that household composition does not have a relationship with enrollment, while Model 4 shows that the likelihood of enrollment across different neighborhoods does not have a statistically significant difference from the likelihood of enrollment in Denver. Model 5 displays the results of a regression analysis that combines all four domains. In this more comprehensive model, only respondents who were recipients of TANF were more likely to be enrolled; suggesting that familiarity with one support program may serve as a gateway or facilitate application to other programs.

These analyses show that only a few of the demographic characteristics of *Making Connections* respondents and the neighborhoods they represent have similar patterns of association with preschool enrollment shown in previous studies; with the exception of the Hispanic identity variable, which had a positive statistically significant relationship with enrollment in Wave 1. However, this analysis also reveals a challenge with using demographic variables to predict enrollment: the threat of omitted variable bias. Depending on the variables included in the models, some demographic characteristics measured to be statistically significant, while in other models, they did not. While studies that measure the relationship between demographic characteristics and enrollment are informative of general patterns, parents' reasons for not enrolling their children may not be discernable simply by assessing demographic contexts, because dimension of identity may intersect and interact with local contexts of child care to produce patterns of utilization that are not clear. Reliance only on this type of analysis for the development policies and practices to increase enrollment may result in focusing on individuals with certain demographic characteristics that have been misidentified.

Use of Child Care and Preschool Services

Consistent with national trends, rates of service utilization increased with children between the ages of zero to four, and decreased for children five years old (Table 3). The decrease in child care or preschool enrollment for five-year-old children may be attributable to the fact that at age five, children are eligible to enroll in kindergarten. The majority of respondents described that using child care and preschool

services was “very easy.” Additional analysis (not shown in tables) found that respondents’ level of education and TANF receipt did not have a statistically significant relationship with their rating of ease of use. Hispanic and non-Hispanic respondents had similar rates of enrolling in services for all ages, except for those for whom the focal child was four years old, when Hispanic respondents were more likely to have a child enrolled in services; a finding that is inconsistent with previous research. Hispanic parents were also more likely than non-Hispanic parents to describe use as “very easy” but only for parents with a four-year-old focal child.

Examining Coded Reasons for Non-Use

The *Making Connections* survey asked parents an open-ended question about their reasons for non-use of services. Their responses were recorded and subsequently coded. For respondents with children across ages zero to five, the most commonly coded reason for non-enrollment was “no need,” followed by “other.” These two categories were comprised of a high of 99 percent of responses, for respondents with one-year-old children, to a low of 84 percent for respondents with a four-year-old child. Other coded categories, comprised of only a small percentage of responses are: not in neighborhood; far away; too crowded; too expensive; don’t feel safe going there; don’t want it; don’t know; and refused. It is also informative to know the categories of codes that were used to describe reasons for not using other community resources, but were *not* cited as reasons for not enrolling in child care and preschool services. These categories were: inconvenient schedule; people of my culture are unwelcome; racial discrimination; language difference; too hard to get there; don’t know how to use it; don’t know where to find it; it’s not clean. Consistent with findings in this study, but inconsistent with previous research, Hispanic respondents with four-year-old focal children had responses that deviated from that of non-Hispanic parents. Specifically, Hispanic parents were less likely to provide a response that was coded as “no need” and more likely than non- Hispanic parents to have their response coded as “other.”

Open Coding of Verbatim Responses

Open coding of the 248 responses parents provided for not enrolling children in child care and preschool services began with identifying a general category for each response. The average length of each response was approximately 5.2 words. These succinct responses lent to readily identifying one distinct category per response. An initial 17 categories were collapsed into 15 categories, when the initial codes of “I care for child,” “my family provides care,” and “I have someone to provide care” were collapsed into one category. Eight categories of responses were provided by 5 percent or more of respondents in any age category: (1) administrative (challenging application process); (2) child too young; (3) costs too much; (4)

I/family/ others provide care; (5) in another school; (6) no need; (7) “no reason”; (8) I do not trust others to care for my child. For the purpose of informing the expansion of preschool services, the responses: “no reason” and “already in another school” are not informative. The majority of those who responded “in another school” were parents of five-year-old children. As stated earlier, it is likely that these children were not enrolled in child care and preschool service because they were already enrolled in Kindergarten.

While open coding was able to identify sub-categories of reasons for non-enrollment that were previously coded as “no need,” the response “no need” continued to be a frequently cited reason, comprising 26 percent of all response provided. While not explicitly stated, it is possible that respondents report that they do not need to use child care and preschool services because they have secured other sources of care for their young, focal child. The remaining five reasons provide important information to inform child care and preschool expansion.

I/ family/ others provide care (24 percent of all responses). Parents’ response that they are able to provide care suggests the belief that personal and familial care are substitutes for the care that a child would receive in a center. The push for the expansion of public preschool has been fueled by decades of developmental and neuroscience research showing the sensitivity of brain development during the early years and that high-quality early learning can promote school readiness and have a beneficial impact on long-term life outcomes. However, it is not clear whether research on the benefits of high-quality preschool enrollment is being translated and shared with the families whom the expanded preschool programs are intended to serve. Parents, who are aware of the value they place on familial care, may need to be provided with information about the benefits and value of center-based care. Similarly, a greater understanding of the qualities of personal and familial care that parents value could help to inform the expansion of preschool programs.

Child too young (24 percent of all responses). While parents with younger children were more likely to describe that their child is too young for child care or preschool services, 11 percent of parents with three- and four-year-old children also provided this response. Sharing with parents the ways in which preschool settings are designed to accommodate the age-appropriate developmental needs of young children could help parents make more informed enrollment decisions.

I don’t trust others to care for my child (8 percent of all responses). Expanded preschool programs could address parental concern about the trustworthiness of others by establishing workforce professionalism, quality, and monitoring standards, and by communicating these efforts to parents. Also

increasing parents' ability to monitor child care settings could help to allay parents' fears about placing their children in the care of others.

Costs too much (5 percent of all responses). While many programs provide free child care and preschool services (e.g., Head Start, Early Head Start, many state-funded public preK programs), CCDF programs administered by states provide subsidized care with a graduated payment schedules. As policy makers expand preschool services, following models of free, public education, could remove the barrier of cost to enrollment.

Administrative challenge (3 percent of all responses). The application processes for many preschool programs can be burdensome for many families. Documentation of residence, medical records, and other income verification forms can present an administrative burden to parents. Efforts to streamline and simplify application processes may promote enrollment.

Limitations

While direct inquiry allows researchers to capture the voice and opinions of parents, this type of research is not without limitation. Social desirability bias may impact how respondents reply to survey questions, and thereby threaten the validity of a survey instrument. Social desirability responding is the tendency of individuals to present socially acceptable and favorable images of themselves (Maccoby and Maccoby, 1954). As a result of impression management, survey respondents may downplay aspects of their decision making that may not portray themselves in a favorable light.

Directions for Future Work

Missing from this and many other studies about preschool enrollment is a direct examination of the qualities of the home or informal care environment that parents prefer. Future qualitative studies that specifically ask parents what qualities of the home environment they like, and what qualities cause them to keep their children at home can inform the development of expanded preschool systems.

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Table 1: Sample Descriptives

	% of Respondent Sample	National Population in 2000
Female	0.84	
Race		
Black (only)	0.22	0.12
White (only)	0.17	0.75
Asian (only)	0.04	0.4
Hawaiian (only)	0.003	0.001
Ethnicity		
Hispanic (any race)	0.38	0.13
Hispanic (only)	0.04	
Foreign-Born	0.29	0.11
Highest Level of Education		
Less than high school diplom	0.39	0.2
GED	0.05	
High school diploma	0.26	0.29
Trade or vocational school	0.04	
Some college	0.17	0.27
College (BA)	0.03	0.16
Graduate Courses/ Degree	0.02	0.09
Employed	0.61	0.64
Total Household Income		
\$0 - \$4,999	0.13	Not available
\$5,000 - \$9,999	0.12	0.1
\$10,000 - \$14,999	0.13	0.06
\$15,000 - \$19,999	0.13	0.06
\$20,000 - \$24,999	0.12	0.07
\$25,000 - \$29,999	0.06	0.06
\$30,000 or more	0.22	0.65
Use TANF or Welfare	0.54	

Table 2A: Logistic Regressions, Relationship between Demographic Contexts and Child Care and Preschool Service Use, Wave 1

	<u>Model 1</u>	<u>Model 2</u>	<u>Model 3</u>	<u>Model 4</u>	<u>Model 5</u>
Racial/Ethnic Demographic					
Immigrant	-0.24 (0.252)				-0.45 (0.315)
Hispanic	0.74 ** (0.285)				0.63 (0.335)
White (only)	-0.75 ** (0.275)				-0.62 (0.358)
Asian (only)	-1.27 ** (0.422)				-1.32 ** (0.534)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	-1.57 (0.985)				-1.79 (1.081)
Other	-1.17 *** (0.314)				-1.05 (0.385)
Education/Income/Work					
Highest level		0.09 (0.067)			0.05 (0.072)
Employed		0.31 (0.247)			0.35 (0.277)
Household income		-0.03 (0.065)			0.05 (0.077)
Receive TANF		0.37 (0.253)			0.19 (0.285)
Household Composition					
Number of adults			-0.18 (0.106)		-0.14 (0.137)
Number of children			0.12 (0.099)		0.09 (0.108)
Age of focal child			0.16 (0.067)		0.11 (0.077)
City					
Des Moines				0.29 (0.381)	0.28 (0.516)
Indianapolis				-1.23 * (0.444)	-1.37 ** (0.571)
San Antonio				0.06 (0.374)	-0.04 (0.475)
Seattle				0.01 (0.363)	0.29 (0.505)
Hartford				0.16 (0.407)	-0.21 (0.517)
Louisville				0.89 * (0.377)	0.28 (0.513)
Milwaukee				0.67 (0.423)	0.11 (0.578)
Oakland				-0.08 (0.369)	0.14 (0.522)
Providence				0.04 (0.371)	0.03 (0.511)
constant	0.5 ** (0.182)	-0.68 *** (0.099)	-0.42 (0.264)	-0.09 (0.285)	-0.33 ** (0.701)
n	805	728	849	849	697
population	41322	37275	43602	43602	36,106

Table 2B: Logistic Regressions, Relationship between Demographic Contexts and Child Care and Preschool Service Use, Wave 2

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
Racial/Ethnic Demographic										
Immigrant	-0.60	(0.433)							-0.92	(0.616)
Hispanic	-0.49	(0.543)							-0.54	(0.595)
White	-1.20 *	(0.551)							-0.63	(0.661)
Asian	-1.36	(0.780)							-1.06	(1.037)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	omitted								omitted	
Other	0.24	(0.531)							0.92	(0.671)
Education/Income/Work										
Highest level			-0.09	(0.101)					-0.11	(0.127)
Employed			0.37	(0.375)					0.67	(0.560)
Household income			0.00	(0.001)					0	(0.139)
Receive TANF			0.94 **	(0.383)					0.97 *	(0.451)
Household Composition										
Number of adults					-0.432	(0.229)			-0.07	(0.244)
Number of children					0.153	(0.185)			0.18	(0.222)
Age of focal child					-0.07	(0.110)			-0.09	(0.125)
City										
Des Moines							-1.19	(0.989)	-0.25	1.367
Indianapolis							-1.25	(1.061)	-0.36	1.453
San Antonio							-0.45	(0.921)	-0.04	1.250
Seattle							-0.39	(0.918)	0.87	1.333
Hartford							0.83	(0.941)	1.69	1.285
Louisville							0.27	(0.906)	1.02	1.270
Milwaukee							0.98	(0.983)	1.65	1.374
Oakland							-0.35	(0.892)	0.8	1.403
Providence							0.27	(0.902)	1.71	1.308
constant	0.19	0.341	-0.523	0.681	0.684	0.589	-0.30	(0.808)	-1.39	1.461
n	255		229		270				218	
population	12,677		11,460		13,328				11,015	

Table 3: Rates of Child Care and Preschool Service Use and Ease of Use, Across Ages

Focal Child Age	Proportion of Child Population (Age 0-5)	WAVE 1	WAVE 1	WAVE 2
		Proportion Used Child Care or Preschool Services	Proportion of Respondents Describe using Services as "Very Easy to Use"	Proportion Used Child Care or Preschool Services
0	0.11	0.28	0.64	0.27
1	0.21	0.37	0.59	0.43*
2	0.17	0.51	0.52	0.39*
3	0.15	0.59	0.67	0.4
4	0.19	0.61*	0.78*	0.5
5	0.17	0.46	0.79	0.29
Average		0.47	0.67	0.39

* indicates statistically significant response for Hispanic respondents

Table 4: Coded Responses, Across Age Groups

Coded categories for not using child care or preschool services	Proportion of Respondents Who Selected							
	All Respondents	Hispanic Respondents	Age 0	Age 1	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4	Age 5
Not in neighborhood	0.002			0.006				0.004
Far away	0.004						0.029	
Too crowded	0.006	0.011				0.0412		0.008
Too expensive	0.004	0.003			0.013	0.004	0.01	
Don't feel safe	0.006	0.008		0.012	0.022			
Don't want it	0.017			0.037	0.016	0.0169	0.011	0.005
Don't need it	0.801	0.8345	0.859	0.857	0.875	0.769	0.679*	0.738
Other	0.116	0.106	0.127	0.078	0.056	0.057	0.165*	0.216
N/A	0.004		0.008	0.004			0.019	
Don't Know	0.007	0.034				0.021		0.027
Refused	0.028			0.006	0.015	0.089	0.085	

*indicates a statistically significant difference in the proportion of Hispanic respondents who were coded in this response.

Table 5: Open Coding of Parents' Verbatim Responses, Across Ages

Reason for not enrolling	Proportion of Respondents Across Child Ages					
	Child Age 0	Child Age 1	Child Age 2	Child Age 3	Child Age 4	Child Age 5
Administrative (Challenging application)	2.63%	1.59%	1.89%	3.70%	5.41%	3.13%
Child too old	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.70%	2.70%	3.13%
Child too young	23.68%	15.87%	22.64%	11.11%	10.81%	0.00%
Costs too much	5.26%	1.59%	1.89%	7.41%	2.70%	3.13%
Don't know about any	2.63%	0.00%	1.89%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
I/Family/Others Provide Care	23.68%	44.44%	33.96%	37.04%	32.43%	31.25%
In another school	5.26%	0.00%	3.77%	3.70%	5.41%	12.50%
No need	26.32%	19.05%	18.87%	18.52%	27.03%	46.88%
No time to look	0.00%	1.59%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
No transportation	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.70%	0.00%	0.00%
No reason provided	2.63%	6.35%	7.55%	3.70%	10.81%	0.00%
Centers not of good quality	0.00%	1.59%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Too far away	0.00%	1.59%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
I do not trust others to care for my child	7.89%	6.35%	7.55%	3.70%	2.70%	0.00%
Will enroll soon	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	3.70%	0.00%	0.00%
	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%