



The role of parental immigration status in Latino families' child care selection



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ABSTRACT

Prior studies that have investigated child care arrangements among Latino immigrant families have often overlooked the role of parental immigration status and neighborhood factors in shaping child care selection. Thus, this study considers the effects of parental immigration status and neighborhood contexts, on child care selection among Latino immigrant families using a sample of 862 young children (ages 0–5) from the 2001 Los Angeles Families and Neighborhood Survey. Results from a hierarchical multinomial regression model suggest that, irrespective of immigration status, children of Latina mothers were significantly less likely to use center-based care than parental care, but the relationship was stronger for the children of undocumented Latina mothers. The findings also indicate that children living in poor neighborhoods were less likely to use formal center-based care, all else equal.

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1. Introduction

Among low-income families, the use of high-quality center-based child care tends to have stronger positive associations with school readiness and developmental outcomes than do the use of other forms of care (Belsky et al., 2007; Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2009; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Bideni, 2004; Zhai, Brooks-Gunn, & Waldfogel, 2011). However, high-quality child care is often expensive (Blau, 2001; Capizzano & Adams, 2003; Schulman, 2000) and less available in poor neighborhoods (Burchinal et al., 2008). Thus, most families, especially lower-income families, have to make concessions in their care arrangements based on cost, location, and availability of care and family work schedules (Chaudry, 2004; Scott, London, & Hurst, 2005).

Access to quality child care is of particular concern for children of Latino immigrants, the fastest growing group of children aged 0 to 6 in the United States (Fry & Passel, 2009). Latino immigrant children are less likely to be placed in formal child care (Chyu, Pebley, & Lara-Cinisomo, 2005; Delgado, 2009) and often enter school less prepared than their nonimmigrant peers (Denton, West, & Walston, 2003; Lee & Burkam, 2002). Low utilization of early childhood programs among Latino children is concerning because there is evidence that these programs improve the educational preparedness of children, particularly the children of immigrants (Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006a). Studies that have examined child care selection among Latino immigrant families

find that low levels of formal child care utilization is shaped by preferences for family-based care (Fuller, Eggers-Pierola, Holloway, Liang, & Rambaud, 1996), greater economic hardship on average, and less access to supportive services and programs (Capps, Fix, Ost, Reardon-Anderson, & Passel, 2004). These studies, however, did not address two key factors that might complicate child care arrangements among Latino immigrant families: parental immigration status and the impact of families' residential location, often referred to as neighborhood effects.

A significant number of children born to Latino immigrant parents are from undocumented families—families where at least one parent is without documentation to legally reside in the United States. In 2010, 5.5 million children in the United States were estimated to have an undocumented parent, 4.5 million of these children were born in the U.S. (Passel & Cohn, 2011), and about 91% of children under the age 6 with an undocumented parent were themselves U.S. citizens (Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). In addition to language barriers, a lack of information on formal child care (Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011) and financial constraints (Capps et al., 2004), scholars contend that undocumented parents forego publicly funded early childhood programs for their eligible children due to fears that a parent's undocumented immigration status will be detected. Yet little empirical evidence exists on the impact that parental immigration status has on child care arrangements among undocumented immigrant families.

With respect to residential location, the availability and proximity of child care options affect child care choices for all families. However, these factors might be more salient among immigrant families. For example, center-based care facilities are more common in economically

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advantaged neighborhoods, where Latino immigrants are less likely than non-Latinos to live (South, Crowder, & Chavez, 2005). At the same time, living in neighborhoods with high concentrations of fellow immigrants tends to increase social networks among coethnics, which may result in more knowledge about social programs, including formal child care (Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). Few studies, however, have focused on the role of neighborhoods in immigrant parents' child care selection.

To address this knowledge gap, this study aimed to disentangle the effects of parental immigration status and neighborhood characteristics on child care selection among Latino immigrant families with young children, including undocumented families. Using data from the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (LA FANS), this study examines the child care arrangements of children from citizen and documented Latino immigrant families and undocumented Latino families. As a point of comparison, we also include citizen and documented families in other racial categories (White, Black, and Asian).

2. Literature review

2.1. Child care arrangements and immigrant families

Nonparental child care arrangements are increasingly common for all families in the United States. On average, about 63% of the children under age 5 are placed in some form of regular care arrangement (Laughlin, 2010). The rate of nonparental care use is higher for children whose mothers are employed (68%), who are between 3 and 4 years old (69%), and who live in poor and single-mother families (66% and 80%, respectively) (Laughlin, 2010). In general, the use of nonparental child care or other early childhood education programs is less common among immigrant families relative to their nonimmigrant peers (Brandon, 2004; Capps et al., 2004; Magnuson et al., 2006a; Matthews & Jang, 2007). Capps et al. (2004) found that the children of immigrants are more likely to be in parental care (53% vs. 34%) and less likely to be in center-based care (17% vs. 26%) than their native counterparts, although these gaps decline when income, education, and two-parent working families are considered.

2.2. Child care among Latino immigrant families

Research on Latino immigrants and child care arrangements report mixed findings. Overall, Latino families have been found to use center-based care at lower rates and family-based care at higher rates than families from other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Fram & Kim, 2008; Laughlin, 2010; Radey & Brewster, 2007). For instance, in a study of children of employed mothers, about 45%, 50%, and 40% of White, Black, and Asian children under age 5, respectively, were placed in center-based care (day care centers, nurseries, Head Start programs, and family day care arrangements), whereas only 29% of Latino children had similar arrangements (Laughlin, 2010). Brandon (2004) examined child care arrangements among children of immigrant families and also found large variation in types of care arrangements by children's country of origin; in particular, Mexican, other Latino, and Asian children were significantly less likely to use center-based care relative to White and Black children, controlling for other family and child characteristics. The results were robust even when controlling for income and two-parent households (Brandon, 2004).

The use of family-based care among Latino immigrants has been explained not only by a preference for family-based care (Fuller et al., 1996; Yoshikawa, 2012) but also due to greater access to relatives who are able and willing to provide child care compared to non-Latino families (Buriel & Hurtado-Ortiz, 2000). However, other studies have indicated that the use of such care is also associated with time spent in the U.S. (Yesil-Dagli, 2011). For example, Yesil-Dagli (2011) examined 7,209 working, Latina immigrant mothers and found that those who had resided in the United States for fewer than 10 years were less likely to use formal child care for their children than Latina

immigrant mothers who were citizens or had been in the country for more than 10 years. This finding suggests that longer exposure to U.S. child care norms may lead to more knowledge of, trust in, and familiarity with formal child care systems and therefore a greater likelihood of using formal, center-based care. Moreover, the duration that families reside in the U.S. might also shape other aspects of family life, such as education, income, and gender roles. In turn, mothers' perceptions about early childhood education might change, leading to an increased likelihood of using formal child care.

Similar to their non-Latino peers, child care decisions among Latino immigrant families are largely shaped by economic resources, parental education, and access to governmental support (Capps et al., 2004; Delgado, 2009). For instance, the likelihood of selecting center-based care is similar across various racial and ethnic groups, including Latino immigrants once employment and education are held constant (Delgado, 2009). Similarly, barriers to formal child care access and utilization, such as language and distrust of governmental programs (particularly among undocumented families), coupled with below-average income, has been found to explain much of the gap between immigrant and native-born families in the use of formal child care programs (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Finally, a longitudinal study of Mexican immigrant mothers' use of formal child care found that increases in maternal education were associated with a higher usage rate of formal care although rates remained lower relative to native-born mothers (Crosnoe & Kalil, 2010).

Among undocumented immigrant families, there is "a level of vulnerability" (Glick, Bates, & Yabiku, 2009, p. 500) that may preclude families from seeking assistance or participating in programs because such interactions place them at risk of detention, deportation, and family separation (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Yoshikawa, 2012; Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). Thus, for these families, selecting formal child care might be perceived as having substantial risks. Only one study thus far has quantitatively considered the relationship between child care and undocumented immigration status (Yoshikawa, 2012). Yoshikawa (2012) interviewed 380 Chinese, Dominican, Mexican, and African American families—of which a large share were immigrants and some were undocumented—on participation in public programs, including child care. Overall, undocumented parents reported avoiding public programs due to their immigration status including child care (Yoshikawa, 2012). This study, however, relied on a relatively small sample and categorized families as 'undocumented' if they reported not having a savings or checking account, credit card, or driver's license. This measure of 'undocumented' status has its shortcomings, in part, because it is not uncommon for poor families to go without formal financial accounts (Barr, 2004; Barr & Blank, 2009; Caskey, 1994). Thus, while the study provides important information on undocumented families and access to services for children, it is limited in its generalizability.

2.3. Neighborhood characteristics

Extensive bodies of literature exist on the importance of neighborhoods in affecting economic and educational opportunities (Jencks & Mayer, 1989; Wilson, 1987), family well-being and health (Diez Roux, 2001), perception of safety (Austin, Furr, & Spine, 2002), and children's developmental outcomes (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). These studies have argued that economically disadvantaged neighborhoods have fewer resources resulting in poorer services, including disadvantaged schools (Jencks & Mayer, 1989; Wilson, 1987, 1997) and lower shares of quality child care facilities (Burchinal et al., 2008). Because families often select care based on the convenience of location, fewer high-quality child care facilities in low-income neighborhoods can result in the selection of lower-quality child care among low-income families (Sandstrom, Giesen, & Chaudry, 2012) or informal care options.

Many immigrant families intentionally locate in immigrant-rich communities to more readily access support from an established, welcoming community (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998). Thus, living in an immigrant-rich community might facilitate access to

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