



The use of child care center for infants of dual-working families in Korea ☆☆☆☆☆



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ABSTRACT

Using the first and second wave data of the Panel Study of Korean Children (PSKC), which is comprehensive longitudinal data with a nationally representative birth cohort, this study explores whether and when dual-working families place their infants and toddlers in child care centers and what factors influence these families' selection process. Among the 2078 families examined in the PSKC, 466 dual-working families which had any kind of nonparental care arrangement for their very young children at the time of the second survey were included in the analysis. Since our research questions address when the use of child care centers occurred, an event history analysis was conducted. The results show that 32.4% of the families had placed their infants in child care centers prior to the second interview. Family structure and income variables (number of children, nonparental adults in the household, and household income), mother's education level, and the mother's number of working hours turned out to be significantly related to the probability of child care center use.

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1. Introduction

A child's early years are fundamental for his or her healthy development, including the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes that follow this period. Among the factors influencing growing children, primary caregivers who have principal responsibility for the child's care are the most important influence during these early years. There is no doubt that parents, particularly mothers, traditionally have played the role of the primary caregiver in families.

In the past several decades, however, many countries have seen a dramatic increase in the number of women who have entered the labor force due to the increasing cost of living, the increased access to higher education, and the rise of the service sector (Kim & Shin, 2008). Such features have resulted in a dilemma: there is no one in charge of taking care of the children at home, while the assignment of traditional gender roles in a family remains prevalent. In Korea, such a

situation has led to the decrease of female employment after childbirth while female employment increases when the children have grown up, which is characterized by the *M curve* (OECD, 2011). Accordingly, the Korean government, in an effort to support working mothers, has begun to play a significant role in solving the problem of child care.

Child care policy has evolved into two relatively independent streams in many countries (Huston, 2008, p. 1). The first stream of child care policy supports parental care for children during their early years by supporting the temporary suspension of employment such as parental leaves. The second major policy trend covers some or all of the cost of child care through subsidies and tax credits. Between these two political directions, the Korean government has focused mainly on the second stream, rather than supporting political efforts such as promoting a family-friendly work environment through effective paid leaves. It is because the imbalance between work and family life is a societal-level characteristic which is projected to be difficult to change. That is, many Korean companies expect longer work service based on a strong emphasis on competition and productivity, and do not welcome policies allowing for child-related absences.

In particular, the Korean government, which has actively invested in the child care domain, has made a considerable effort to support child care by enhancing accessibility to child care centers even for families with infants and toddlers in order to bring prompt solutions to the child rearing matter. In other words, instead of making political efforts to support at-home care through child care benefit payment, subsidizing individual care, or dispatching individual care providers for families requiring nonparental care, the government has increased the number of child care centers and has subsidized expenses for the services at the centers to alleviate the parents' financial burden.

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Such a public policy direction taken by the Korean government was somewhat unexpected because institutionalized care for infants and toddlers was not yet popular in Korea. Particularly in Korea, where extended families are traditionally prevalent, kinship care has been a dominant form of nonmaternal care when nonmaternal care is necessary. A few studies have verified the negative influences of placement in center-based care *per se* (Clarke-Stewart & Miner, 2008; Sylva et al., 2011), and personal care at home is still preferred to center-based programs among Korean working mothers with infants.

There has been considerable growth in the number of infants sent to child care centers due to the drastic increase of financial support from the Korean government; however, at-home care tends to be the first choice for parents with young children. There were 396,453 children under age one in 39,842 child care centers nationwide by the end of 2011, with 40.08% of the enrollment rate in center-based care programs in accordance with the governmental efforts (Korean Ministry of Health & Welfare, 2011). These figures have increased immensely compared to the 10.10% enrollment rate of the same age group in 2004, which is when the Korean government ambitiously launched the facilitation of child care centers by amending the 1991 Korean Child Care Act (Korean Ministry of Gender Equality, 2005). The tremendous growth in the number of infants attending child care centers in spite of the family's unwelcoming attitude toward center-based programs leads to the assumption that there are systemic characteristics and special needs of selecting child care centers when Korean parents need nonparental care. Therefore, it would be beneficial to implement a comparative study with the Korean population in order to expand our understanding of the features of child care decisions that parents make for their children, particularly focusing on the use of center-based care for children under age one.

2. Characteristics of nonparental care in Korea

2.1. Types of child care arrangement

Child care is used as an umbrella term for any form of nonparental care that occurs on a regular basis (Huston, Chang, & Gennetian, 2002). The types of child care arrangement are largely categorized into home-based and center-based care, depending on the child care setting. Home-based care is child care provided by relatives or sitters/nannies mostly in the parents' own homes. In the US, particularly, a family child care home is a care arrangement where a child care provider cares for a small group of children of different ages at his/her home. Center-based care is a type of formal care which is provided at a school-like facility for a larger group of children and is registered/licensed and regulated by local registration. Also, child care centers offer a curriculum for each age group in order for the children to engage in educational experiences led by qualified staff (Clarke-Stewart & Miner, 2008; Essa, 2007).

Categories and terminologies of care arrangements in Korea, however, are slightly different from those of western countries. The most notable feature of the Korean care arrangement system is that family child care homes do not exist; as a substitute, we have *home child care centers* in Korea. A home child care center is officially licensed as a type of *center* for a small number of children (five to 20 children), although it is based on home settings mostly at a house or an apartment unit as the name indicates. Except for the fact that the critical characteristics of capacity and place contrast with the traditional child care centers, a home child care center is still a type of child care center, and it should be established in accordance with the standard setting, follow government regulations and supervision, and provide care and education services as outlined in the formal curriculum. The directors and teachers should be certified as well.

Among various types of nonparental care arrangements, the preferred option for infants and toddlers is home-based care (Chernoff,

Flanagan, McPhee, & Park, 2007; Flanagan & West, 2004; Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996; Mulligan & Flanagan, 2006) because it offers comforting care in a setting similar to what babies are used to in their own home with only a few children. On the other hand, parents who pay more attention to the quality of child care such as the curriculum, providers' qualification, or environment/equipment are likely to select a formal program at a center-based care arrangement (Gamble, Ewing, & Wilhlem, 2009; Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien, & Roy, 2001). In Korea, the use of these home child care centers, where a formal program is implemented at a home-setting with a small group of children, has become prevalent among families with infants and toddlers because it is a midway arrangement between home-based care and center-based care. As shown in Table 1, home child care centers make a significant contribution to the enrollment rate of formal child care for children not yet three years of age in Korea; for example, home child care centers provide services for twice as many infants below age one as regular child care centers that are not home child care centers. It implies that home child care centers may lead Korean parents, based on their needs, to opt for center-based care even for infants.

2.2. Governmental financial support programs

The financial supports provided by the Korean government for families with infants and toddlers who need nonparental care were applicable only to child care centers, including home-based child care centers, but not to home-based care arrangements made by individuals, such as relatives or nannies/babysitters by 2011. That is, child care support in Korea exists mostly in the form of subsidies that are fully or partially provided for individual children when they attend child care centers: the program fees of child care centers for children of low-income families, children with disabilities, children from multicultural families, and children who have two or more siblings were subsidized. In 2012, when the new administration of President Park was launched in Korea, child care spending was extended to free child care services for all households with children up to 5 years old (South Korea's new president, 2013, January 5); under this policy, parents with non-school aged children can receive child care vouchers that can be used only for child care centers. Therefore, it is expected that the use of child care centers ought to be more prevalent.

In addition to the feature focusing on subsidy for child care center uses, another unique child care support program for infants and toddlers in Korea is *basic subsidies*. This subsidy is designed to lighten the burden of parents with children under age two because the program fees for those children are more expensive than those for preschoolers. Thus, the Korean government has paid a certain portion of the child care center costs for infants and toddlers regardless of the parents' household income. Because the subsidy is not sent to individual families but directly to the child care centers according to the number of registered infants and toddlers, parents do not recognize that they are the recipients of such governmental supports. Basic subsidy still exists even after free child care services are expended for all children; the child

Table 1
National Korean statistics on enrollment rates in child care centers (2011).

Age	Population	Children enrolled in child care centers			Enrollment rate in child care centers		
		Home child care centers	Regular child care centers	Total	Home child care centers	Regular child care centers	Total
0	451,579	101,229	45,437	146,666	22.47	10.05	32.47
1	470,224	111,249	138,538	249,787	23.66	29.46	53.12
2	445,437	85,992	256,887	342,879	19.31	57.66	76.97

Note. Regular child care centers include various types of child care centers excluding home child care centers. Sources are from Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare (2011) and Korean Statistical Information Service (2011).

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