



Pre-kindergarten child care and behavioral outcomes among children of immigrants[☆]

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ABSTRACT

The school transition model suggests that children's transitions into formal schooling can have lasting and profound implications for their educational careers, though this model is rarely used to understand the outcomes of children of immigrants. Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), a nationally representative sample of kindergarteners in 1998–1999, we examine the pre-kindergarten child care arrangements of children of immigrants and how these care arrangements are associated with children's behavior. We find that minority and immigrant children are less likely than their native-born white counterparts to be enrolled in center-based care and other care, compared to parental care, prior to kindergarten. We also find that ethnic origin is an important predictor of child care usage. Finally, though center-based care, on average, is not independently associated with children's behavior in kindergarten, the association between center-based care and behaviors varies by race and immigrant status. Broadly, these findings underscore the importance of understanding how native- and foreign-born children experience the transition to schooling, a critical period in the life course.

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Recent demographic changes in the United States – including an increase in female-headed households and an increase in maternal employment while children are still young – have made child care an important concern for working parents (Burchinal, 1999; Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Indeed, in the United States, more children than ever before receive some form of care outside the home. At least 1.8 million children received nonparental care in 2005, with more than half of them being under the age of five (Administration for Children and Families, 2006). The majority (nearly 60%) of these children received some form of center-based care, which can include private child care centers or Head Start programs. Other children received care outside of a formal center, which is often provided by relatives in their own homes or in the children's homes (Administration for Children and Families, 2006).

In addition to the demographic changes that have made nonparental care a necessity for many parents, the population of children has become increasingly diverse with respect to race and nativity (Hernandez, 1997). Children of immigrants, for example, are one of the most rapidly growing segments of the United States' population, with one in four children being an immigrant or having at least one immigrant parent (O'Hare, 2004). Studying children of immigrants is especially important among Hispanic and Asian populations, as nearly 60% of Hispanic youth and 90% of Asian youth are immigrants or children

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of immigrants (Zhou, 1997). Social scientists have begun to examine the educational outcomes of this fast-growing segment of the school-aged population (e.g., Kao & Tienda, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Zhou, 1997). We know much more about adolescent children from immigrant families than young children from these families, despite the fact that ethnic differences in educational outcomes emerge well before high school. Examining the outcomes of young children is particularly important, of which child care is a crucial part, as educational experiences early in the life course put children on educational trajectories that are difficult to change (Entwisle & Alexander, 1993). Behavior in early childhood also has substantial implications for school readiness, cognitive outcomes, and life course trajectories (Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Knoester, 2003; McLeod & Kaiser, 2004; Shanahan, 2000).

In this paper, we examine the pre-kindergarten child care arrangements of children of immigrants and how these care arrangements are associated with children's behavior. We use data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K), a study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of a nationally representative cohort of approximately 22,000 kindergartners in 1998–1999. These data were collected in a multistage sampling frame in which students were nested within about 1000 schools in 100 counties.

1. School readiness and the beginning school transition

The school transition model (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988) suggests that children's transitions into formal schooling can have lasting and profound implications for their educational careers. Because children beginning kindergarten are at a critical period in their cognitive and social development, what happens to them at this age can have a more powerful influence than their experiences in later developmental stages (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993). For example, those students who enter kindergarten classrooms with more favorable internalizing and externalizing behaviors are more likely to experience high levels of educational achievement and attainment throughout the life course (McLeod & Kaiser, 2004). Those who enter formal schooling unprepared, however, are likely to fall behind as they progress through the educational system (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988). The school transition model also suggests that contextual factors may predict how students experience the transition to schooling. Children from minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged families, for example, have disadvantaged academic and behavioral outcomes before they enter kindergarten (Lee & Burkam, 2002).

Thus, the school transition model is a useful theoretical framework for understanding disparities in behavioral outcomes at the beginning of kindergarten. Children of immigrants are rarely included in this framework, though this model may be particularly relevant to this group of children who face particular challenges before and during the transition to kindergarten. Children raised by immigrant parents, for example, may face barriers in interacting with their classmates and teachers. Some cultural practices for showing respect, such as not looking someone directly in the eyes, may be interpreted as disobedience by American teachers, the majority of whom stress the social aspects of school readiness (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Thus, in this paper, we extend the school transition model to include children of immigrants, by examining how pre-kindergarten child care arrangements are associated with behavioral outcomes at the beginning of kindergarten.

1.1. Predictors of pre-kindergarten child care arrangements

Race and immigrant status are important predictors of child care arrangements. Black children are more likely than their white counterparts to receive formal care, and some research suggests Black parents may have better access to Head Start and state preschools (Fuller, Holloway, Rambaud, & Eggers-Pierola, 1996; Liang, Fuller, & Singer, 2000; Radey & Brewster, 2007). Hispanic children, on the other hand, are less likely than whites to receive formal care (Buysse, Castro, West, & Skinner, 2005). Minority children are also more likely to receive care from kin members (Early & Burchinal, 2001; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2004; Radey & Brewster, 2007). Additionally, children of immigrants and non-English speaking children are enrolled in center-based child care significantly less often than their native-born or English-speaking peers, and are more likely to receive informal care (Brandon, 2004; Crosnoe, 2007; Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006). This is particularly true among low-income immigrant families (Brandon, 2004; Nord & Griffin, 1999). Of course, other individual-level characteristics predict child care decisions. Research from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network (hereafter NICHD ECCRN), for example, suggests that socioeconomic characteristics most strongly and consistently affect parents' decisions about children's receipt of nonmaternal care (NICHD ECCRN, 1997; also see Early & Burchinal, 2001).

1.2. Child care arrangements and behavioral outcomes

The stratification of child care usage along demographic and socioeconomic lines is important because center-based care is generally associated with better cognitive outcomes (Burchinal, 1999; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004; NICHD ECCRN, 2000). Minority children may experience greater cognitive benefits from center-based care than white children, though this type of care is equally beneficial for native- and foreign-born children (Gormley & Phillips, 2005; Magnuson et al., 2006). On the other hand, center-based care may lead to more behavioral problems in children (Belsky et al., 2007; Gormley & Gayer, 2005; Loeb, Bridges, Bassok, Fuller, & Rumberger, 2007), and these effects are modest but long lasting (Burchinal, 1999). For example, early childhood experiences in center-based care

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