



Factors influencing child care-related maternal work exits



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ABSTRACT

For mothers with young children, child care challenges can pose significant barriers for their labor force participation. Working mothers must arrange for someone else to care for their children when working outside the home. Previous research has shown that women with children spend less time in the labor force compared to women without children. This study used the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study to examine whether a range of child care characteristics, neighborhood factors, and individual factors caused mothers of young children to leave the work force. The results indicated that child care-related work exits are common occurrences for mothers in large urban areas. Of those mothers in the FFCW sample who used non-parental child care, more than one in ten mothers reported work exits due to child care-related problems. Logistic regression analysis further revealed that common risk factors for work exits included changing child care arrangements, using multiple types of child care, living in neighborhoods with a higher percentage of Hispanic population, being African American, and having household income between 50 and 99% of FPL. The findings are useful in informing social policies and interventions to help mothers better bridge the gap between adequate child care and gainful employment.

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1. Introduction

Studies have found that women with children spend less time in the labor force compared to women without children (Pew Research: Social & Demographic Trends, 2013). Challenges related to child care often pose significant barriers that may partially explain such differences in labor force participation (Dodson & Bravo, 2005). For example, using a national sample, Usdansky and Wolf (2008) found that 31% of mothers of young children had to make special arrangements because their child care arrangements fell through at some point in the month preceding the interview; among them, 46% reported missing work or school as a consequence. Henly and Lyons (2000) utilized a sample of low-income mothers in California and found that two-fifths of the sample experienced child care problems that interfered with their ability to retain employment.

Understanding the predictors of child care-related work exits is a necessary first step toward developing programs and policies to help mothers to better bridge the domains of child care and employment (Usdansky & Wolf, 2008). In addition, breakdowns in child care are

estimated to cost U.S. businesses \$3 billion each year in workplace disruptions (Shellenback, 2004). Nonetheless, there have been relatively few studies examining the factors that make some mothers prone to child care-related job termination. Hofferth and Collins (2000) examined how cost, quality, and availability of non-maternal child care influenced the probability of a maternal work exit using the National Child Care Survey (NCCS); Han and Waldfogel (2001) utilized Census Population Survey (CPS) and the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data to examine the effects of child care costs, quality and availability on probability of employment for women with pre-school-aged children; Bub and McCartney (2004) used data from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) to assess how hours in child care during infancy, toddlerhood, and the preschool years predicted mothers' maternal wages and hours of employment when their children reached first grade. More recently, Forry and Hofferth (2011), and Usdansky and Wolf (2008) each employed data from the Fragile Family and Child Wellbeing (FFCW) study to explore circumstances in which mothers had to make special arrangements because their usual child care arrangements fell through.

None of the above studies, however, have examined whether the reasons that mothers had to quit a job, school, or training stemmed from problems in arranging child care or maintaining a child care arrangement. In addition, while studies have concentrated on mothers' individual and child care characteristics, relatively little research has

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examined neighborhood effects on child care-related maternal work exits. As suggested by the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), contextual factors, such as neighborhood socioeconomic and demographic characteristics, can also influence mothers' child care-related work performance in important ways; this theoretical perspective is used to frame the hypotheses and related analyses in this study.

As described by Bronfenbrenner (1994), ecological theory is grounded in a “person–process–context” paradigm in which both personal characteristics of the individual family members and broader process and contextual factors are viewed as important in understanding parental behaviors (i.e., maternal child care-related work exits). More generally, it provides interconnected, hierarchical constructs hypothesized to influence human behaviors, including: 1) the micro-system, which is the immediate environment in which individuals are embedded; 2) the meso-system, which refers to the interrelationships between the various settings of the micro-system; 3) the exo-system, which also refers to the linkages and processes between two or more settings, but in which at least one of the settings indirectly influences the individual; 4) the macro-system, which consists of “the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exo-systems characteristics of a given culture or subculture, with particular references to the belief systems, bodies of knowledge, material resources, customs, life-styles, and opportunity structures and life course options that are embedded in each of these broader systems”; and 5) the chrono-system, which includes change or consistency over time not only in the characteristics of the person but also in the environment in which that person lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Each of these systems shapes human development, and each system can impact the others. The general ecological model has been applied extensively to research in a number of fields to explain the development of a variety of behaviors, including individual's family and employment outcomes (Grzywacz & Butler, 2005; Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson, & Kacmar, 2007).

The ecological model is particularly well-suited to the study of child care-related work exits. The mother is embedded in the immediate social settings (micro-system, for example, mothers' race/education), which are directly affected by other settings in the community (exo-system, for example, child care factors). These two systems are in turn affected by broader economic and political structures, such as neighborhood socioeconomic characteristics, that influence how social institutions are organized in our society (macro-system).

In the following section, the ecological model is used to organize and integrate research findings on child care-related work exits, so that the relevant influences can be more specifically understood and research limitations can be identified. Although the selection and use of child care is a process that affects and is affected by the entire family, the primary focus of the review will be mothers' characteristics and environments. This decision to concentrate on mothers rather than on fathers is based on prior literature concerning child care choice behavior, which has found that mothers have the primary responsibility for arranging and maintaining nonparental care arrangements in most families (Atkinson, 1991; Hofferth, Shauman, Henke, & West, 1998).

This article applies the Bronfenbrenner's theoretical model to examine maternal child care-related work exits under the influence of a range of environmental context variables, child care characteristic, and mother's individual factors. Using recently available data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing (FFCW) study, we investigated how child care factors, mother's individual characteristics, and neighborhood characteristics shape mothers' experiences of child care-related work exits in a national sample of mothers of three-year old children. We begin with a literature review of the implication of child care factors, mother's individual characteristics, and neighborhood characteristics. Next, we use the FFCW study to conduct analyses of the risk of child care-related maternal work exits. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings to help mothers bridge the gap between reliable child care and gainful employment. While we recognize that many fathers play an active role in managing child

care, we focus on mothers because they handle a disproportionate share of this work (Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999).

2. Literature review

2.1. Child care characteristics

2.1.1. Type of care

The types of child care arrangements vary widely along a number of dimensions related to the reliability of care (Forry & Hofferth, 2011). Studies have shown that home-based providers were less reliable than center-based providers, and that the unavailability of small home-based providers was associated with mothers' work exits (Gordon, Kaestner, & Korenman, 2008; Knox, London, Scott, & Blank, 2003; Scott, London, & Hurst, 2005). Research also has found that mothers using informal care were more likely to miss work when their usual child care arrangements fell through than mothers who relied on center care (Boushey, 2003; Huston, Chang, & Gennetian, 2002; Usdansky & Wolf, 2008). Researchers indicated that this may be because child care centers employ multiple staff members, and thus can remain open when one employee falls ill or takes a vacation (Usdansky & Wolf, 2008). The licensure process for formal child care settings is also likely to foster a greater sense of professionalism and commitment than informal caregivers, who often perform child care to help out a relative (Anderson, Liu, & Liao, 2012; Henly & Lyons, 2000; Liu & Anderson, 2012).

On the other hand, the instability of informal care may be due to providers' own employment, illness, or temporary disability (Gordon et al., 2008). Scott et al. (2005) suggested that with relative child care providers, the instability was a product of changes in the lives of the care providers: they found other jobs, recovered from illnesses, had babies themselves, or experienced other life changes that made them unavailable to continue providing the care.

2.1.2. Child care stability

Previous studies have shown that child care instability affected mothers' ability to be employed, as well as their job stability (Adams & Rohacek, 2010; Bowen & Neenan, 1993; Hofferth & Collins, 2000; Mason & Kuhlthau, 1992; Presser & Baldwin, 1980). For example, Meyers (1994) found that mothers who had to give up their child care arrangements when they changed activities in California's GAIN program were more likely to drop out of the training program than those who did not have this discontinuity in child care. Hofferth and Collins (2000) also suggested that the stability of care was linked to the job stability of moderate- and high-wage mothers. Not all researchers agree, however, that child care disruptions are associated with job turnover. Miller (2005) found little evidence that child care instability causes employment instability, concluding instead that other underlying factors, such as low education and family instability, caused both child care and employment disruption. Usdansky and Wolf (2008) also suggested that changing providers was not related to the odds of work disruption or work absence.

2.1.3. Child care multiplicity

Research suggests that child care multiplicity affects the parent's ability to meet family and work obligations. Parents often make multiple arrangements to cover their children's care (Eichman & Hofferth, 1993; Folk & Yi, 1994). Formal center care can exhibit relatively high price elasticity; with family care, informal care, and unpaid relative care serving as substitutes as parents move between market and non-market forms of care (Kimmel, 2006). Some research has suggested that the frequent use of multiple arrangements may permit more flexibility and greater ability to adapt to unexpected events, increasing one's ability to continue working. For example, Hofferth and Collins (2000) found that the presence of more child care arrangements was associated with a significantly decreased risk of leaving the present job. However,

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