

Using policy-relevant administrative data in mixed methods: A study of employment instability and parents' use of child care subsidies ^[1]

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ABSTRACT

In the United States, government subsidies help low-income families pay for child care when parents are working, yet policies that tie subsidy eligibility closely to employment may result in frequent disruptions in program participation for families. This paper uses a mixed methods research design that links administrative records on families and children to data collected through surveys and in-depth interviews to examine employment instability and job characteristics of parents using child care subsidies. The results suggest that parents experience substantial employment instability (employment loss and unpredictable schedules) and that exiting the subsidy program is frequently related to employment-related eligibility factors. Overall, the use of administrative data integrated with other methods provides substantial opportunities for researchers to explore complex social phenomenon and provide insights in the evaluation of social programs.

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