

Do child care characteristics influence continued childbearing in Sweden? ^[1]

An investigation of the quantity, quality, and price dimension

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The Swedish day-care system is widely considered as exemplary in terms of availability, quality, and price. However, although public responsibility for child care remained strong throughout the 1990s, decision-making power has been increasingly transferred from the state to the municipalities. This has led to a situation where child care, which once operated according to the same rules across the country, can vary substantially across municipalities. Thus, the question of regional differentials in supply, staff, and prices has gained some importance when one asks for the possible effect of child care on female labour supply and/or fertility decisions.

We link population register data to information on regional child care characteristics in order to estimate the influence of the latter on second and third birth intensities of Swedish couples in 1997-98. Our analysis allows us to distinguish interactions and specific effects of different dimensions of the local day-care infrastructure, namely the provision rate, the child-to-staff-ratio, and the costs of care to parents. However, our results reveal no clear effects of these child care characteristics on Swedish couples' continued childbearing. We interpret this absence of effects as a reflection of the generally very appropriate level of child care in Sweden, which is complemented by further supportive family policies. In such a context, moderate regional variations in the characteristics of day care may have no decisive impact on parents' propensity to have another child.

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