

Decisions & distance: The relationship between child care access and child care travel ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Abstract

Child care is essential infrastructure. Without child care—or without adequate access to child care—parents and household caregivers are unable to work or conduct other critical activities, which can adversely affect their outcomes. In the U.S., child care supply has long fallen short of demand, with variations across neighborhoods that differ by income, race, and ethnicity. Yet there is relatively little research on child care access, use, and travel. In this study, we test the relationship between formal child care supply and households' use of formal care and home-to-child-care travel distances in California. Using a two-step floating catchment area method, we develop a time-weighted spatial measure of child care access and apply this measure in statistical models to predict two outcome measures: the likelihood of making a home-to-child-care trip and travel distance to the child care center, controlling for other factors. We find that child care access is associated with an increased likelihood of using formal child care—and among households that use such care, access is associated with shorter travel distances. Our analysis underscores the importance of policies to address spatial barriers to child care, particularly in neighborhoods—low-income, Latinx, non-urban—where child care supply is limited.

Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: access ^[4]

child care deserts ^[5]

informal ^[6]

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