

Study: Home-based child care worker unionization leads to better regulated, less available subsidized care ^[1]

Author: PRWeb

Source: PRWeb

Format: Article

Publication Date: 15 Jun 2015

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EXCERPTS

As the number of home-based childcare workers who form labor unions has increased, new research shows that an Illinois law allowing home-based child care workers to unionize led to an increase in better regulated, licensed care for toddlers and infants, but also less available subsidized child care for low-income families.

In 2005, Illinois became the first U.S. state to grant home-based child care providers the right to form a labor union to bargain collectively. The study, published this month in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, is the first to examine the impact of home-based child care provider unionization on the cost, type and availability of subsidized child care in Illinois. California is the latest state to consider a measure to allow home-based child care providers to unionize.

To conduct the study, researchers examined data from the Current Population Survey with Child care and Development Fund administrative records on U.S. infants and toddlers whose families received child care subsidies from 2002 to 2008. They found that unionization led to between a 6.2 and 7 percentage point increase in the percentage of subsidized infant and toddler care that was provided in licensed versus licensed-exempt settings. In addition, they found that child care unionization led, on average, to between 0.7 and 1.1 percentage points fewer Illinois infants and toddlers using subsidies to purchase child care.

Licensure represents a small first step toward the professionalization of child care workers envisioned by union leaders, and a weak, though consistent, indicator of the quality of child care settings, the researchers write.

"To make substantial progress towards the professionalization of child care, we must considerably improve child care worker financial compensation, accountability for program quality, professional development, and standards for entry to the field," said Dr. Todd Grindal, a researcher at Abt Associates and lead author of the study.

The researchers noted that while the findings are specific to Illinois, policymakers considering permitting child care workers to unionize should be careful to ensure that benefits to union members do not come at the expense of reduced access to subsidized child care for low-income families.

Study co-authors include Martin R. West and John B. Willett of Harvard University and Hirokazu Yoshikawa of New York University.

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