

Staffed support networks and quality in family child care: The family child care network impact study ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full report PDF ^[2]

Overview

As many research studies have suggested, the quality of care young children receive in early care and education settings is crucial to their later development and school success (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Child care research to date has primarily focused on quality in child care centers. Yet a majority of young children from low income families spend some time in home-based child care settings while their parents work. Family child care providers have the potential to make a significant impact on the well being of children, families, and communities.

Aside from offering a developmental support to young children, family child care providers also have the potential to support low-income working parents and communities (Bromer & Henly, in press; 2004). Many parents choose family child care because of its convenience and flexibility regarding location, hours, and fees. Moreover, family child care homes are small businesses that have the potential to serve as assets to communities both economically (Gilman, 2001) and socially (Bromer, 2006).

Yet, a growing body of evidence also suggests a crisis in the quality of child care young children receive, with family child care settings rated as adequate to poor (Morrissey, 2007; Kontos, Howes, Shinn, & Galinsky, 1995). Family child care providers serving mostly subsidized, low-income children have been found to offer lower quality care than their middle income counterparts (Kontos et al., 1995; Raikes, Raikes, & Wilcox, 2005; Marshall, et al., 2003), pointing to the need for more research on how to improve quality in family child care settings, especially those serving predominantly low-income families and communities.

Networks or organizations that offer ongoing support and training to family child care providers are one strategy for quality improvement in family child care. In their landmark study of quality in family child care, Kontos et al. (1995) found that support group affiliation was a significant predictor of higher quality care. Yet no studies to date have looked systematically at the particular characteristics of support networks that are related to quality child care. According to a 2005 survey of states that invest in networks, only one state—Virginia—has implemented quality standards for family child care networks (Hershfield, Moeller, Cohen & the Mills Consulting Group, 2005).

Various funding and policy initiatives in the city of Chicago over the last decade have resulted in a range of staffed networks for family child care providers. Yet, few standards or regulations exist in Chicago concerning the quality or nature of support/oversight that staffed networks supply to affiliated providers, thus resulting in great variation among staffed networks in the frequency, type, and quality of provider services actually delivered.

The current study examines the relationship between affiliation with a family child care staffed network and quality of family child care as well as a comparison of staffed networks and provider led associations. We use the term “staffed networks” to refer to programs that have at least one paid staff person who provides ongoing oversight and support to family child care providers in the network. See the glossary in this report for definitions of the terms “network” and “association.” Clarity about the meaning of these terms as used in the report is critical to understanding the substance of this research.

Region: United States ^[3]

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