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**Adolescents Assuming Adult Roles:
Factors Associated with Teens Providing Child Care for Siblings in Low-Income Families**

by

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Extended Abstract for the
2004 Population Association of American Annual Meeting,
April 1-3, Sheraton Boston Hotel, Boston, MA.

I. Introduction

Recent research has found evidence of negative effects of work-promoting policies on the adolescent children of welfare recipients, particularly those with younger siblings. In a synthesis of research on how welfare and work policies affect adolescents, Gennetian et al. (2002) find that parents who are subject to work-promoting policies are more likely than parents not subject to such policies to report that their adolescents perform below average in school, have repeated a grade, and use special educational services. Moreover, adolescents with younger siblings suffer worse outcomes. These adolescents are even more likely to perform below average in school and to use special education services and, in addition, are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school and less likely to be engaged in out-of-school activities.

One hypothesis concerning why work-promoting policies would negatively affect adolescent children involves the fact that the increased parental employment resulting from such policies may force adolescents to take on more household responsibilities, most notably child care for younger siblings. These responsibilities may cause the adolescent frustration and anxiety and occupy time that could be spent working on homework, engaging in sports, or participating in other enrichment activities.

Such findings raise a number of important questions about the potential factors that influence a family's choice to use adolescents as child care providers. This paper will attempt to answer some basic questions concerning the use of adolescent caregiving nationally. Specifically:

- How prevalent is the use of adolescent caregiving among low-income families nationally? Is it often the sole primary form of care for families, or is it used in conjunction with other forms of care?
- How intense is this caregiving? How many hours per week do adolescents in low-income families spend caring for their younger siblings?

- What are state welfare and child care policies and family characteristics associated with a family's likelihood of using adolescents to care for their younger siblings?
- Among those families that use adolescents to care for younger siblings, what characteristics are associated with the hours per week that they provide this care?

The answers to these questions will provide important information on the demographics of adolescent caregiving nationally and the factors associated with the use of such care. Moreover, this research will be the first step in understanding the more complex relationships between parental employment, the choice to use an adolescent child to provide care for a younger sibling, and adolescent outcomes.

II. Theoretical Model

The child care choice literature provides a conceptual framework from which to approach modeling the decision to have an adolescent care for younger siblings. In general, researchers attempting to model child care choice have incorporated variables that capture four broad overlapping areas of the family situation: (1) the need for non-parental care; (2) family resources; (3) preferences for certain types of care; and (4) the child care options available to the family.

Hypotheses Concerning the Use of Adolescent Caregiving Derived from Past Research

While the variables described above are not used specifically to predict the use of adolescent care giving, they are useful in forming hypotheses about those factors that may be associated with the use of such care. From this research we have derived the following hypotheses about the use of adolescent child care:

- (1) Those families with the greatest need for non-parental care and the scarcest resources to pay for care are most likely to use adolescents as caregivers for younger siblings.*
- (2) The likelihood of a family using an adolescent to care for a younger sibling will increase as both the age of the child in need of care and the age of the adolescent child increases. However, as maternal education increases, the likelihood of using adolescent care will decrease.*
- (3) Families exposed to welfare policies that increase employment and child care policies that reduce the supply of child care or reduce the availability of child care subsidies will be more likely to use adolescents to care for younger siblings.*

III. Analytical Approach

In addition to basic descriptive statistics that will paint a portrait of adolescent caregiving in the United States, I will use a series of logistic and OLS regression models to test the hypotheses discussed above. I will first look at the simple dichotomous choice to use adolescent care or not among those families at risk of using such care (i.e., those with an adolescent and a child that would require child care). A fundamental concern with these models is the inherent endogeneity of the variables describing employment, child care subsidy use, and welfare receipt. Therefore, we will begin by estimating a reduced-form model that only includes demographic variables and welfare and child care policies that are exogenous to the choice of using adolescent caregiving.

This model will take on a logit specification:

$$P(Y) = 1/(1+ e^{-Z})$$

where $Y= 1$ if the family uses an adolescent to care for a younger sibling and 0 if it does not.

$$Z = \alpha_1 + \beta^D Demo + \beta^P Policy + \beta^C Control + \varepsilon_1.$$

In this model, $\alpha_1, \beta^D, \beta^P,$ and β^C are parameters to be estimated and ε represents unobserved factors affecting child care choice. The vector *Demo* represents variables measuring a family's demographic characteristics. The vector *Policy* represents a series of policy variables that may influence the choice to use adolescent caregiving by increasing employment or making other forms of child care less plentiful or less attractive (from a cost perspective). Variables will also be added to control for other contextual factors that may affect employment and child care decisions such as county female unemployment rate and per capita income.¹

¹ Of course, we would also like to include variables that measure the average price of different child care options in the family's surrounding area and the supply of different forms of care, but data are limited. Nonetheless, we will explore the possibility of capturing such measures.

Next, we will estimate a path model that includes the variables discussed above as well as a number of endogenous variables including the employment patterns of the parents and adolescents in the household (hours of employment and work schedule), family income, child care subsidy use, and welfare receipt, to see how these variables influence the likelihood of using adolescents to care for children. Given the likely endogeneity of these variables, findings from this model will not be interpreted as causal, but instead viewed as providing descriptive associations between these variables and the use of adolescent caregiving. Future work will use more sophisticated methods to estimate the potential causal impacts of these variables.

IV. Data

The analysis will use data from wave 10 of the 1996 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), fielded between April and July of 1999.

V. Anticipated Results

This framework present above will allow us to determine the relative importance of the different variables that increase or decrease the likelihood of adolescent care. The results of the paper will provide a better understanding of the association of such factors as welfare and child care policies, parental employment, income, the age of the adolescent child, child care subsidy use, and welfare receipt with the likelihood that adolescent care is used.

VI. References

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