

INTRODUCTION

With the increase of women participating in the labor force and the concomitant rise in number of children with employed mothers in the past few decades, child care has become a crucial means of balancing the roles of being a mother and a labor force participant (Peth-Pierce, 1998). While increased female employment has motivated research on effects of parental employment and nonparental caregiving on child development, understanding the relationship is complicated for several reasons. First, decisions concerning child care may be influenced by preexisting maternal, child, and familial demographic characteristics before child care begins (NICHD, 1997). Secondly, researchers have previously focused on child care provided in centers or by home day care providers; however nonparental care also includes informal, relative-based child care (NICHD, 1997). All types of care must be examined and information regarding preexisting demographic conditions must be considered to fully understand how child care decisions are made and how child care affects children's well-being and development.

BACKGROUND

Previous research has shown that maternal employment is the primary, although not the only, reason that children receive nonparental child care (NICHD, 1997). More educated mothers are more likely than less educated mothers to select non-relative care over relative and center care (Hofferth, 1992). There are mixed findings as to whether certain ethnic groups are more likely to use relative care. Some studies show that mothers of color are more likely to use relative care than their white counterparts, while others reveal less use. Other studies find that mothers of different racial backgrounds are more similar than different in their use of relative care (Uttal, 1999). Maternal marital status has been shown to be associated with child care decisions. While a study by Hofferth has shown that single mothers are more likely to use nonmaternal care than are two parent families, there has been little research on effects of cohabiting status (NICHD, 1997). The relationship between mother's nativity and child care decisions is also poorly understood. Thus, further research is needed to elucidate associations between demographic factors and child care decisions and inform child care policy and welfare reform.

METHODS

This paper examines how neighborhood (service planning area, neighborhood poverty level), familial (maternal education, race, nativity, marital/cohabiting status, work status, teen mother status), and individual (child's age and gender) demographic characteristics affect mothers' child care decisions for children ages 0-5 years and not yet in school. Specifically, we address four main questions relating to use of child care: 1) What is the relation between demographic factors and regular use of nonparental care? 2) How are demographic factors associated with primary type of child care used? 3) What is the relation between demographic factors and hours of child care used per week? 4) What is the relation between demographic factors and the number of arrangements used?

This study uses Wave 1 of the Los Angeles Family and Neighborhood Survey (L.A. FANS), a longitudinal survey of families in Los Angeles County and the neighborhoods in which they live. L.A. FANS is based on a stratified random sample of 65 census tracts in Los Angeles. Data collection of Wave 1, which included a household and neighborhood survey, began in April 2000 and ended in mid-January 2002. This study analyzes information about child care gathered from

interviews with mothers of a randomly selected sample of 1060 children ages 0-5 years and not yet in school.

In addition to bivariate tabulations, analysis includes two binomial logistic regression models that predict odds of regularly using child care and using more than one child care arrangement. Interval regression is applied to estimate effects of predictor variables on hours of child care used per week, and is left-censored at 0 hours of child care and right-censored at more than 60 hours per week. A multinomial logistic regression with the categories of no nonparental care, relative care, non-relative care, and center care is conducted.

RESULTS

Preliminary results indicate that maternal marital/cohabiting status has a substantial effect on regular use of child care and hours of care used per week. Specifically, the odds of single, non-cohabiting mothers regularly using child care were 2.24 times that of married mothers. In addition, single, non-cohabiting mothers used 15 more hours of care per week than married mothers. Single non-cohabiting mothers may have more limited financial resources, greater need for child care, and smaller social networks than married mothers and single, cohabiting mothers. Single, cohabiting mothers did not differ significantly from married mothers, suggesting that having a partner in the household regardless of marital status decreases reliance on nonparental child care.

Maternal work status was another strong predictor of regular use of nonparental child care and hours of care used per week. The odds of mothers working part-time and full-time using regular child care were 8 and 11 times the odds of mothers not working, respectively. Mothers working part-time used 30 more hours of care per week than mothers not working, and mothers working full-time used 44 more hours. These results illustrate the use of child care by mothers to balance childrearing and working.

Mother's educational attainment had significant effects on type of child care used and hours of child care used per week. A significantly greater percentage of mothers who had education beyond college tended to use non-relative care (50%) more than other forms of care. Having education beyond college increased the odds of using non-relative care over relative care by 8 times. Moreover, for mothers with education beyond college, the odds of using no nonparental child care over relative care were 4.9 times that of mothers with less than high school education. Highly educated mothers may be more likely to have higher paying jobs that enable them to pay for non-relative forms of care, or have sufficient family income that allows them to stay at home to care for children.

A significantly larger percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers used relative care as primary type of care (58%) in comparison to other groups (29% white, 42% Latino, 17% black). The odds of Asian/Pacific Islander mothers choosing relative care over non-relative care were 4.8 times that of white mothers. For black mothers, the odds of using center care versus no nonparental care (3.6 times) and relative care (6.8 times) were significantly greater than that of white mothers. There were no significant differences in choice of child care type between Hispanic and white mothers.

Mother's nativity was significantly associated with hours of child care used per week; Mothers born in the U.S. used 8.5 more hours of child care per week than mothers not born in the U.S, controlling for other variables. Native-born mothers may be more familiar with available child care resources and have easier access to care.

Finally, child's age was a significant predictor of regular use of child care, with more mothers relying on regular child care after children have reached 1 year of age (40%) in comparison to mothers of children less than 1 year old (22%). The odds of mothers of children ages 1-2 years and 3-5 years regularly using child care were 3.5 times and 2.6 times that of mothers with children less than one year of age, respectively. Mothers may opt to care for infants themselves because younger children require more attention. As children get older, mothers may choose to return to work and rely more on nonparental care. With regards to primary type of child care, 56% of mothers with children less than one year of age used relative care in comparison to 44% of mothers of 1-2 year olds and 32% of mothers of 3-5 year olds. Mothers of children aged 3-5 years were more likely to use center care (49%) in comparison to mothers of 1-2 year olds (34%) and children less than one year old (15%). Having children aged 3-5 years old versus increased the odds of using center care over no nonparental care by 6.6 times, over relative care by 10 times, and over non-relative care by 6.4 times. These findings illustrate the trend of mothers using more individual-based child care and familiar resources (relatives) when children are younger and shifting to child care in group settings as children get older.

Child care decisions vary markedly by maternal employment status, marital/cohabiting status, education, nativity, race/ethnicity, and child's age. The social mechanisms behind these differences and additional factors such as cost of child care, geographical distance to care, family income, and quality of care warrant further investigation.

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