Who's Minding *Their* Kids?
U.S. Child Care Workers' Child Care Arrangements: An Assessment Using the SIPP.

In recent years, many U.S. researchers have studied non-parental, or "substitute", child care. Two areas of study, in particular, have received considerable attention. One is the paid child care workforce itself (Blau 1992; Howes et al forthcoming, Kontos et al 1996, Mocan and Tekin 2000, Walker 1992, Whitebook and Sakai 2003, Whitebook 1999). The other concerns the placement of America's children; the overarching question in this second literature is – as it is often phrased – "who's minding the kids?" (Blau and Currie 2004, U.S. Census Bureau 2010).

Remarkably, there is little scholarship that links these two areas of inquiry. As a result, we know almost nothing about who is minding the children of paid child care workers. Using data from the Survey on Income and Program Participation (SIPP), this study will begin to close that gap.

The Child Care Workforce

Many scholars – mainly labor economists, sociologists, and child development scholars – have assessed the child care workforce. According to Howes et al (forthcoming)[1], this workforce comprises about 1 percent of all workers. These workers fall into three groups: center-based workers (about two-thirds of total), family day care workers (about one quarter) and nannies (about 10 percent).

Some researchers have studied the factors that draw workers into child care jobs (Armenia 2009, Connelly 1992, Walker 1992) and/or those that influence turnover (Whitebook and Sakai 2003, Whitebook et al 2004). Others have studied child care workers' remuneration, estimating and/or decomposing gaps between the wages and benefits of workers in child care versus those in other occupations (Blau 1992, Howes et al forthcoming, Whitebook 1999). Still others have assessed the effects of worker characteristics, such as training and experience, on child care cost and/or quality (Kontos et al 1996, Whitebook et al 2004).

It is widely recognized that child care workers face multiple challenges. The child care workforce is highly feminized, and, in general, is characterized by low pay, limited benefits and few advancement opportunities. Howes et al (forthcoming) report that child care workers are 97 percent female, compared to 47 percent of all workers. Child care workers report a median hourly wage of $9.10, just over half the median among all workers. Only 2 percent are unionized, compared to 12 percent among the workforce as a whole. In addition, 29 percent of child care workers lack health insurance, compared to 19 percent of the workforce overall. And child care workers are more than twice as likely (23 percent) than workers overall (10 percent) to be self-employed, which means that they are substantially less likely to be covered by public social insurance programs, such as those that provide unemployment and temporary disability benefits. Additionally, there is evidence of further disparities between groups of child care workers, i.e. family day care workers, day care center workers and nannies (those who work in private homes).

[1] This analysis will be published as Chapter 4, "Paid Care Work," in *For Love And Money: Care Provision in the US*, edited by Nancy Folbre (forthcoming, Spring 2012). Author Smith is a co-author of this chapter, and authors Braslow, Gornick and Folbre are authors of other chapters in this collaboratively-written volume, the first product of the Russell Sage Foundation Working Group on Care Work in the United States.

At the same time, despite these challenges, there is ample evidence that a large share of child care workers specifically seek out child care work, either because of the opportunity to care for their own children while working, or simply out of a desire to work with children. While family day care workers typically have the opportunity to care for their own children while earning income (Nelson 1990, Tuominen 2003, Armenia 2009), workers in child care centers (the largest share of the child care workforce) and nannies typically do not (Blau 1992, Connelly 1992). In addition to – or in many cases rather than - being motivated by these pragmatic considerations, Armenia reports that 80 percent of family day workers cite their desire to work with children as a "big reason" for entering the child care field (Armenia 2009), regardless of whether or not they have their own young children to care for. Cameron et al (2002) found similar results for day care center workers. Some scholars argue that the pleasure that workers derive from child care work (which Howes et al refer to as "psychic income") may, in fact, contribute to driving down their pay. This claim, that child care workers' lower pay is explained by so-called compensating differentials, remains a contentious one in the child care literature.

Finally, in considering the child care arrangements of child care workers and the possible relationships between their work and the care of their own children, it is important to note that child care workers are substantially more likely to have children than other workers. And, given that child care workers are overwhelmingly women and that women provide the majority of child care within the family, the relationship between paid child care work and the ability to care for one's own children is critical for child care workers and for their children. Moreover, child care workers are significantly more likely to be single mothers than other types of workers. According to Howes et al (forthcoming), half of all child care workers have children under 18, and 20 percent are single mothers. This is significantly higher than other interactive care workers (41 percent have children under 18, 10 percent are single mothers), low-wage workers (36 percent have children under 18, 16 percent are single mothers), and the workforce overall (37 percent have children under 18, 10 percent are single mothers). These rates are even higher among center-based child care workers and family day care workers than among nannies.

The Child Care Arrangements of Child Care Workers

The large and growing literature on the child care workforce has revealed a great deal about child care workers' individual, family, and job characteristics, but we know little about how they manage their own child care needs. Simultaneously, many scholars have analyzed disparities among children in their care arrangements, especially with respect to their enrollment in formal – and presumably higher-quality – care (U.S. Census 2010; for a review see Meyers et al 2004). Yet, while much is known about child care disparities associated with family demography, household income, and multiple aspects of parents' (mainly mothers') employment, there has been little research on differences associated with parents' occupation – including their employment in child care itself.[2] Clearly, if child care workers report unique patterns of child care utilization, the underlying causality is likely to be complex and multidirectional. This is what we intend to explore in this study.

[2] Some early research found that blue-collar and service workers tend to utilize more care by relatives and less institutional care, while professional and managerial workers use more paid care and more care by non-relatives (see, e.g., Floge 1985).

Analytic Approach and Methods

Using microdata from the 2008 Panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)[3] Core and Wave 5 Topical Modules,[4] we will pursue an exploratory study of a set of intertwined and diverse individual and job characteristics on the child care arrangements of paid child care workers. First, the paper describes the child care arrangements of child care workers, including:

- In what settings are the children of paid child care workers being cared for? Are their arrangements stable or unstable, formal or informal? To what extent do paid care workers care for their own children while also caring for others? To what extent do paid care workers rely on paid care vs. unpaid care?
- Are there significant differences in child care utilization *among* child care workers – comparing center workers, with family day care workers, with nannies?
- What is the relationship between work schedules and child care arrangements for different groups of care workers? How do work schedules relate to the ability to care for one's own children at work, or not?
- Are the patterns of child care usage, by child care workers, different from those of other workers? In particular, are they different from those of other care workers, and/or from those in non-care jobs? (This analysis will disaggregate workers by earnings levels – in order to assess low-wage workers compared to more highly paid workers).

Second, we will move from description to analysis, developing models to help us explore any unique patterns of child care usage reported by child care workers. The goal of this analysis is to use the data available to identify and understand the factors that shape the link between holding a child care job and placing one's children in specific care arrangements. These factors are certainly quite varied, and operate in diverse and intertwined ways. The table below provides a rough schematic of possible links between worker and job characteristics and child care arrangements, some of which are not causal (but are due to selection) as well as those that may have a causal component. Note that only Cell IV assumes that one's child care job actually "causes" the pattern of child care usage.

- Cell I: Parent/worker characteristics not specific to child care work
- Cell II: Parent/worker characteristics specific to child care work
- Cell III: Child care job characteristics not specific to child care work
- Cell IV: Child care job characteristics specific to child care work

Cell I contains factors – not specific to child care – that could shape persons' selection into child care work as well as their decisions about their own child care arrangements. Some individual characteristics (e.g., education, family structure, household income) might influence workers' decisions to become child care workers, as well as decisions about where to place their children.

[3] Given the small sample sizes of each SIPP panel, when attempting to analyze relatively small occupational categories it may be necessary to blend multiple periods of data to improve sample size. The relevant questions are relatively consistent across the 1996, 2000, 2004 and 2008 SIPP panels, enabling the authors to blend in prior periods as necessary to assure adequate sample size for the analysis of the detailed occupational categories described.
[4] Wave 5 topical modules include Child Care and Work Schedules, two critical components of understanding the child care processes we are exploring in this paper.

Cell II contains factors – that *are* specific to child care – that might shape persons' selection into child care work as well as their decisions about child care arrangements. It might be that persons' (prior) understanding of child care, or their preferences/beliefs about child care, could both motivate them to choose child care work and also shape the decisions that they make about their own children's care.

Cell III contains factors that capture characteristics of child care *jobs* that may influence workers' own child care decisions, but which are not specific to child care. These include, e.g., the job's work hours or schedule, the level of pay, or the work site location.

Cell IV contains factors that capture job characteristics that *are* directly related to the child care aspect of the job. Some child care workers' jobs offer the option to enroll one's own child. It also may be that some child care workers, because of the jobs that they occupy, have access to information and/or referrals that they would not otherwise have. These kinds of resources are likely to influence the child care arrangements that they make for their own children.

Schematic of Factors that May Underlie Associations between Holding a Child Care Job and One's Child Care Arrangements

	Characteristics of the parent/worker	**Characteristics of the child care job**
Not specific to child care	I. ● Education * ● Family structure * ● Household income *	III. ● Work schedules * ● Wages / earnings * ● Proximity to home
Specific to child care	II. ● Prior knowledge about child care / child care arrangements ● Prior preferences / beliefs about child care arrangements	IV. ● Option to enroll a child in the child care arrangement where the parent works ("take the child to work") * ● Knowledge gained at work shapes child care workers' preferences / beliefs about child care arrangements (tenure in occupation) ** ● Access to information about child care arrangements and/or child care funding options, social networks (tenure in occupation) **

* Variable(s) directly available in the SIPP data (Core or Wave 5 Topical Modules)
** Related variable(s) available in the SIPP data (Core or Wave 5 Topical Modules)

Discussion and Conclusions

As described above, this study will be the first to systematically describe the child care arrangements of paid child care workers. Further, we will describe and explore a wide range of factors to better understand the diverse and intertwined relationships between paid child care and care for one's own children. As such, we hope to contribute to prevailing understandings about paid child care workers and their families, and to the literature on child care, work and family more broadly.

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