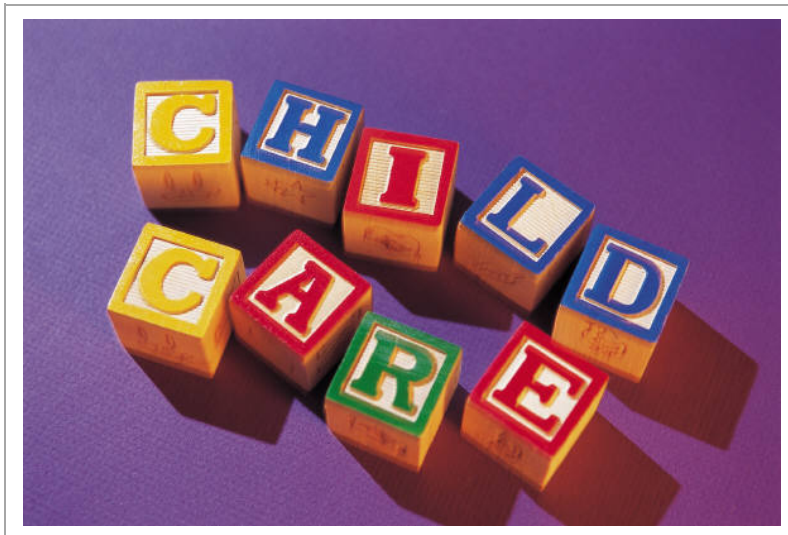


Child Care for Low-Income Families



WELLESLEY CENTERS FOR WOMEN

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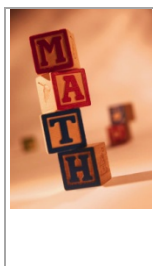
Child Care Needs of Low-Income Families

Poverty is one of the most powerful forces in the lives of children and families.



Low-income working families need stable, reliable, affordable child care that is available during their work hours to support their ability to obtain and maintain employment and achieve self-sufficiency. Research has shown that when single mothers receive assistance in paying for child care, they are better able to keep working, are less likely to need Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and more likely to earn higher incomes.

High-quality early child care and education programs are positively related to children's cognitive and school outcomes, especially for children from low-income families.



High-quality early child care and education programs have been found to produce lasting gains on language and math abilities, achievement tests, and reduced rates of grade retention or placement in special education services, and are associated with young children's social and emotional development, especially for children from low-income families.

Higher quality early care and education is associated with young children's social and emotional development, especially for children from low-income families.



The early years are crucial years for the development of social skills – the ability to make friends, to get along well with others, to cooperate in group activities, to understand others' perspectives – skills that are necessary to the development of self-esteem and social relationships, and to later school success. While some research has found that long hours in child care have negative effects on children's social and emotional development, for low-income children in high-quality programs, longer hours are associated with fewer behavior problems.

The Massachusetts Child Care Subsidy Study

What the study included

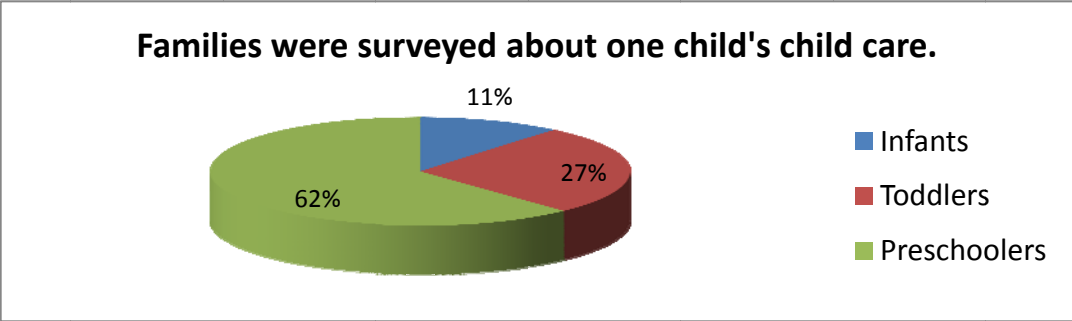
We conducted surveys with 508 Massachusetts families using centers, Head Start programs, family child care homes, or public school prekindergarten, and with 157 families on the child care subsidy waitlist. We interviewed 57 of these families. The surveys and interviews were conducted between 2007-2009.

*“I **need** to get out there to work and make the money and my baby needs to be in school. It’s a ‘Catch-22’. I don’t know what I would do if I didn’t have a voucher.”*

The Families

The study included families from all walks of life:

- 88% have a high school diploma or more
- 53% are single parents
- 36% speak a language other than English at home
- 37% had a family income less than \$20,000
- 28% received a child care subsidy



Study Results

Child care subsidies make child care more affordable.



Among families paying anything for child care, families with child care subsidies paid a significantly lower proportion of their monthly income for child care (16%) than did families on the waitlist (29%) or low-income families without subsidies (26%). In fact, with the subsidy, their payments were not significantly different from those of middle-income families.

Low-income families have reduced access to quality child care programs.

On average, families were equally satisfied with centers, Head Start programs, family child care homes, and public school prekindergarten. However, among families using centers, low-income children were in centers of lower quality than were middle-income children, based on family ratings. Families using relatives or neighbors for child care were less satisfied with that care than were families using more formal child care.

“It’s like a needle in a haystack to find a good day care.”

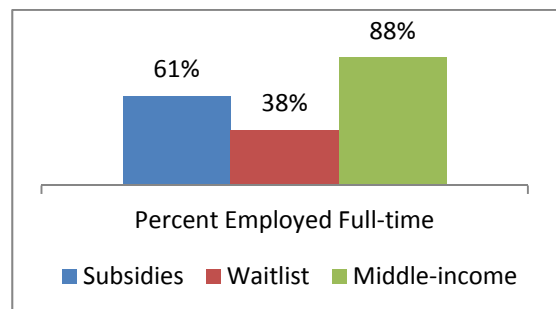
Subsidies make a difference in access to quality child care.



Families receiving child care subsidies reported higher overall quality, and greater satisfaction with the ability of their child’s care to prepare their child for the future, than did families on the subsidy waitlist. Families receiving subsidies also reported that they had more choices for child care than did families on the subsidy waitlist or middle-income families.

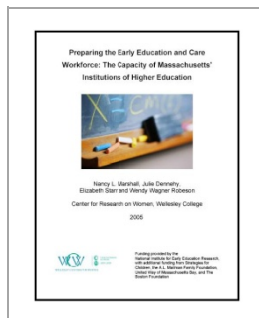
Subsidies support women’s employment.

Women with subsidies were more likely to be employed full-time (61%) than were women on the subsidy waitlist (38%). However, subsidies are not enough to bring their rate of full-time employment up to the level of middle-income women in this study (88%).



Other Resources

Work, Families and Children Publications



Marshall, N. L. (2009). The quality of early child care and children's development. In L.S. Liben (ed.), *Current directions in developmental psychology*, (144-150). Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

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Ryan, R.M., Johnson, A., Rigby, E., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (2011). The impact of child care subsidy use on child care quality. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 26, 320-331.

Schulman, K., & Blank, H. (2011). *State child care assistance policies 2011: Reduced support for families in challenging times*. Washington, DC: National Women's Law Center.



Who We Are

This study was conducted by the Work, Families and Children Research Group of the Wellesley Centers for Women. For more than 20 years, researchers on the Work, Families and Children team have studied the lives of children and adults, and the workplaces, early care and education programs and families in which they live, work and grow. For more about our work, visit: www.wcwonline.org/WorkFamiliesChildren.

This research was supported in part by a grant from the Administration for Children and Families, to Nancy L. Marshall, PI, Award No. 90YE097.

Preferred citation: Marshall, N.L., Robeson, W.W., Roberts, J.R. & Dennehy, J. (2013). *Child Care for Low-Income Families*. Wellesley Centers for Women.

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