

Parents' Attitudes towards On-Site Child Care

Crystal Okerglicke

Undergraduate Student, Human Development and Family Studies

Katy Stangl

Undergraduate Student, Human Development and Family Studies

Abstract

There is a large body of research analyzing parents' participation in the labor force and the type of child care used in the United States, but very little is known about a trend in organizations that provides a different child care option for parents: on-site child care (Connelly, Degraff, & Willis, 2002). This nonrandom pilot study examined the attitudes of parents towards on-site child care by surveying 19 parents using an on-site facility at a small, Midwestern university. It was predicted that work/academic performance would be positively impacted because of using on-site child care and that the dependability of the on-site child care would positively impact parental satisfaction. Survey data was statistically analyzed and results indicate support for the first hypothesis. Implications for future research consist of using a larger and random sample to generalize findings. Implications for practitioners include considering adding on-site child care to their facility to decrease absenteeism and increase worker performance.

Keywords: on-site child care, employer-sponsored child care, child care

Today, whether by choice or circumstance, many parents in the United States work. With child care being one of the primary functions of a family, this leaves a lot of parents looking for care for their children. In 2009, 44% of all families included children (sons, daughters, step-children, and adopted children) under the age of 18 (U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS],

2009). Within this group, 87.8% had an employed parent. In 58.9% of families consisting of married couples with children, both the mother and father were employed. Child care is a necessity for many of these working parents. When looking for child care Poms, Botsford, Kaplan, Buffardi, and O'Brien (2009) stated that parents are most satisfied with child care when there is a high level of communication between the child care facility and the parent and when the care is dependable. The cost of quality child care creates another concern for families, especially those with a low income for which the increasing cost of child care is likely unbearable. Most parents make an effort to choose a safe and nurturing environment for their children; however, child care in the United States is expensive. There is a large quantity of research analyzing parents participating in the labor force and the type of child care used in the United States, but very little is known about a new trend in organizations that provides a different child care option for parents called on-site child care (Connelly, Degraff, & Willis, 2002). On-site child care consists of child care programs that occur in facilities where parents are on the premises (Child Care Aware, 2006). Connelly, Degraff, and Willis (2004) declared that employers who offer child care benefits reported child care programs positively impact their workers' performance. This included a decrease in turnover, absenteeism, and recruitment costs. In addition to this, savings in wage costs made up a large percentage of employer benefits. The current study investigated parents' attitudes towards on-site child care at a facility located on the campus of a small, Midwestern university.

Literature Review

A review of the literature was conducted to determine the impact of on-site (employer-sponsored) child care on employees. Articles were retrieved from search engines EBSCOhost, JSTOR, and Project MUSE. The research studies unanimously identified the struggle between work and family when the employees have children (Connelly et al., 2002; Connelly et al., 2004; Goff, Mount, & Jamison, 1990; Morrissey & Warner, 2009; Poms et al., 2009).

Morrissey and Warner (2009) explored child care arrangements and the parents' experience with the employer's child care

voucher program. The sample was taken from a large university; employees with children completed questionnaires in order to gather information about their child care arrangements and their experience with the employer's child care voucher program. Results showed that non-recipients of the child care voucher program, those whose children were not in formal care but with other caregivers, reported greater satisfaction with child care arrangements than the voucher recipients. Although this study did not directly relate to on-site child care, it addressed relevant issues surrounding the use of employer-sponsored child care programs.

Poms et al. (2009) discussed the relationship between work-family conflict and child care satisfaction. In this study, data from two independent samples was collected through self-report surveys. Both samples consisted of employed mothers working 30 hours per week or more outside of the home, with one or more children in day care. Four factors of child care satisfaction were measured: caregiver attentiveness, communication, dependability, and child care-related financial considerations. Results showed that financial considerations predicted child care satisfaction to a greater extent than caregiver attentiveness, communication, and dependability.

Connelly et al. (2004) completed a study on employer-sponsored child care due to its attempt to reduce work-family conflict. Data was collected from three firms, two of which had on-site child care and one of which did not. A closed-ended qualitative format was used as a way to reduce responses that may be biased. Qualitative evidence proposed that as a result of on-site child care, worker performance improved, benefitting both the employees and firms.

An earlier study by Connelly et al. (2002) investigated on-site child care at three related firms, two of which offered an on-site child care facility. This study focused primarily on the factors for use of employer-based on-site child care. The data they collected through employee interviews indicated that many parents chose on-site care when available. In this study, the location, convenience, and reliability of the on-site care facility were factors for parents choosing the care. These findings also indicated that parents with two or more preschool-aged children

preferred to have their children at the same center, and the child's age was not a significant factor for choosing a facility.

Goff et al. (1990) completed a study in 1990 which is still referenced in current literature because it focused specifically on on-site child care. The research was conducted at a large firm which had an on-site child care facility. They surveyed employees at the firm who were parents of children ages five and under. They received 62 surveys from parents who used the on-site center and 191 surveys from parents who did not. This facility cost employees about 80% of the market value of child care. Eight variables were studied: absenteeism, work/family conflict, primary responsibility for child care, availability of care for sick children, satisfaction with child care arrangements, supervisor support, number of children under the age of five, and use of a child care center at work. The results concluded that on-site child care was not shown to reduce absenteeism. The study also determined that two variables were related to child care concerns: satisfaction with care and supervisor support.

Research is limited that specifically addresses the benefits of on-site child care in the United States. Findings in the current literature included when and why parents would choose on-site child care (Connelly et al., 2002; Connelly et al., 2004; Goff et al., 1990), if parents valued the on-site care (Connelly et al., 2004), factors of child care satisfaction (Poms et al., 2009), and how a child care voucher program was used by employees (Morrissey & Warner, 2009). This current study aimed to contribute to the current body of literature in the United States. It specifically addresses student and worker performance, an extremely important aspect of on-site child care.

Theoretical Framework

The theory used to inform this study was the family ecology theory (Strong, DeVault, & Cohen, 2005). This theory assumes that families both impact and are impacted by their environment. The family ecology theory identifies four different environmental levels that impact the family. These include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Included in the microsystem are the immediate settings and people that an individual is influenced by on a daily basis. Interactions between microsystems create the mesosystem. For example, an ill

child that needs care can cause a parent to miss work. The exosystem includes environments that influence the development of an individual, although the individual is not actively a part of those environments. An example of this is a spouse's employment situation which could limit the hours of parent-child interaction, negatively affecting the child. The societal and cultural laws, attitudes, beliefs, norms, and traditions make up the macrosystem. An example of this is that a family's cultural values may expect the mother to stay home and care for the children.

As applied to our study, this theory would predict that a parents' attitude towards child care would be impacted by many factors including the location and convenience of the child care facility. Parental attitudes would be affected by factors relating to on-site child care because according to this theory, child care and employment would both be in the mesosystem for the parent(s), and they would interact together to influence the parent(s).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was first, to examine the attitudes of parents towards on-site child care; second, to develop a reliable survey instrument which measures those attitudes; and third, to increase the awareness of child care providers, employers, and universities of the potential impact of having an on-site child care center on their premises.

The research question investigated was "What are parents' attitudes towards on-site child care?" We predicted that the results would indicate that the use of on-site child care would positively impact the parents' academic/work performance. Further, we predicted that the dependability of the on-site care would positively impact parental satisfaction with the care. These hypotheses are based on evidence from different literature articles, as well as insight from theory.

Method

Participants

This study was conducted at a university in Northwestern Wisconsin. The participants were 19 parents utilizing the on-site child care facility; within this group, three of the parents were community members, nine were faculty/staff, and seven were students. Of our 19 participants, 16 were female, 2 were male, and one did not identify gender. One

individual was age 20-24 years old, six individuals were ages 25-30, and 12 individuals were over age 30. Participants were then asked how many children they had under the age of five in order to see how many children were not “school-aged” in the home, assuming that most children over the age of five would be in school instead of a child care facility. Eleven participants had one child under the age of five, five participants had two children under the age of five, two participants had three children under the age of five, and one participant had zero children under the age of five. Participants were also asked how many miles away from the facility they resided. Fifteen participants lived less than 15 miles away, three participants lived 15-29 miles away, and one lived more than 30 miles away.

Research Design

This non-random pilot study used a cross-sectional design in order to capture attitudes of parents at one point in time. Self-administered questionnaires were used for data collection. The rationale for using this method was that self-administered questionnaires are convenient, have a low cost and quick return of the data, and are best suited for gathering data within a university setting due to time constraints for data collection to complete the study within one semester.

The population for this study was parents who utilize on-site child care facilities in Northwestern Wisconsin. The sample used was the students and employees of the university who have their children enrolled at the on-site child care facility. The responses from community members were not used as the child care facility would not be considered on-site for them. The ethical protection of human subjects was provided through the completion of the Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) human subjects training.

Data Collection Instrument

The survey was designed in order to investigate the attitudes that parents have towards on-site child care. The survey included a brief description of the study, definition of any terms not commonly known, risks and benefits, time commitment, confidentiality, voluntary participation, contact information of the researchers and supervisor, and instructions for completing the survey.

The survey consisted of five demographic questions regarding the participants' gender, age, student, employee, or community member status, number of children under the age of five, and distance from campus. It included 12 closed-ended statements based on a 5-point Likert scale used to measure the intensity of the participants' attitudes ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree). In addition to this, there were six open-ended questions that related specifically to the agency surveyed, along with an area for additional comments. Statements and questions were informed by the literature, family ecology theory, and feedback from the director and employees of the on-site child care facility.

The survey demonstrated face validity since most of the statements were inspired by literature addressing the attitudes of parents towards on-site child care. The criteria for content validity are met in that the instrument statements addressed the breadth of concepts within the literature having to do with on-site child care. The survey was piloted to the director of the child care facility surveyed and also to the staff at the facility to determine if they believed the survey would be clear to the parents who use their facility. The director and staff made suggestions to improve the clarity of the survey. They also made suggestions as to how the agency-specific questions could better fit the needs of the specific facility.

Procedure

We initiated contact with the director of the child care center by email, included information regarding our research topic, and asked for her collaboration. We met with the director to discuss the objectives of the research and specific information that would benefit the facility. Later, one of us met with the staff of the child care center to introduce the research, determine if there were any concerns, and to get ideas for statements/questions to be used on the survey. The survey was adjusted as appropriate according to the feedback.

A letter introducing the researchers and stressing the importance of reading the implied consent was attached to the printed surveys along with a sealable envelope. We met with the director of the child care center again to read through the implied consent and determine the best method of survey distribution. Approximately two weeks later, 74 surveys were distributed to the children's mailboxes and a sealed box

was left near the check-in area of the child care center for completed surveys. The box containing the 19 completed surveys was picked up four days later and locked at one of our homes until data analysis.

Data Analysis Plan

First, the data was “cleaned” and checked for any missing responses. The surveys were then “coded” using acronyms for each variable. All demographic questions were given a three letter acronym: *Gender of the respondents* (GEN); *Age of the respondents* (AGE); *Student, faculty, or community member status* (STS); *Number of children under age five* (CHD); *Distance from residence to campus* (DIS). Each survey statement was also given a three letter acronym: *It is important for me to have my child on-site while I am at school or work* (IMP); *I am satisfied with the overall quality of care my child receives* (QUA); *The fees charged for on-site child care are reasonable* (FEE); *Having on-site child care available is convenient* (CNV); *I chose on-site child care because it is convenient* (CHO); *I chose on-site child care because it is high quality care and education* (EDU); *My on-site child care facility is dependable* (DEP); *I have other dependable options for child care* (OPT); *The hours of my on-site child care facility meet my needs* (HRS); *My child receives an adequate amount of attention from caregivers* (ATN); *My work and/or academic performance is positively impacted by having child care available on-site* (PER); *I am absent from work or school less frequently because I use on-site child care* (ABS).

The computer program *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (SPSS) was used to analyze the data after it was collected, with the individual as the level of analysis. The data analysis included frequencies, mean comparisons, correlations, and a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability analysis.

Results

The variables were subjected to statistical analyses including frequency distribution, correlations, and a reliability analysis. Support was found for our first hypothesis: Work and/or academic performance is positively impacted by having child care available on-site. Support was not found for our second hypothesis that the dependability of the on-site child care will positively impact parental satisfaction, as variables DEP and QUA were essentially measuring the same concept.

Support for the first hypothesis is demonstrated by 87.5% of respondents agreeing with the statement *My work and/or academic performance is positively impacted by having child care available on-site*. This is also supported by the literature. According to Connelly et al. (2004), on-site child care resulted in improvement of worker performance which benefits both the employees and the firm.

The frequency distribution showed no missing data. The distribution showed that the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all 12 following variables: *Important for me to have child on-site; Satisfied with overall care received; Fees charged are reasonable; Having on-site care is convenient; Chose because it's convenient; Chose because of high quality care and education; Facility is dependable; Other dependable child care options; Hours meet my needs; Child receives adequate amount of attention; Work/academic performance is positively impacted; and Absent from work or school less frequently.*

Although the number of participants for this study was below 50, for experimental reasons given that this is a pilot study, correlations were run on all 12 variables. Correlations between many variables showed large significant relationships.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	IMP	QUA	FEE	CHO	EDU	DEP	OPT	HRS
CNV			0.816**					
DEP		1.000**						
HRS		0.618*			0.618*	0.618*		
ATN		0.683**			0.683**	0.683**		0.524*
PER	0.861**			0.642**				
ABS							-0.676**	

Note. IMP=It is important for me to have my child on-site while I am at school or work; QUA=I am satisfied with the overall quality of care my child receives; FEE=The fees charged for on-site child care are reasonable; CNV=Having on-site child care available is convenient; CHO=I chose on-site child care because it is convenient; EDU=I chose on-site child care because it is high quality care and education; DEP=My on-site child care facility is dependable; OPT=I have other dependable options for child care; HRS=The hours of my on-site child care facility meet my needs; ATN=My child receives an adequate amount of attention from caregivers; PER=My work and/or academic performance is positively impacted by having child care available on-site; ABS=I am absent from work or school less frequently because I use on-site child care.

-N=19; **Correlation is significant at the p<0.01 (two-tailed), *Correlation is significant at the p<0.05 (two tailed)

A reliability analysis was also run in order to indicate whether or not all 12 variables were a reliable index to measure the main concept: Parents' attitudes towards on-site child care. The Cronbach's Alpha measure of reliability in this analysis was 0.468. If variable OPT would have been eliminated from the survey, the reliability would have increased to 0.677; the survey would have been moderately reliable.

Discussion

The results from our study supported one of our hypotheses: Work/academic performance is positively impacted by having child care available on-site. We did not find support for our second hypothesis: The dependability of the on-site child care will positively impact parental satisfaction. Multiple variables resulted in statistically significant correlations which will be discussed later in this section. The focus of variable analysis will be on the frequency distribution, as these are true reflections of the results in this non-random pilot study.

Poms et al. (2009) and Connelly et al. (2004) group availability, reliability, and convenience together as important factors for parents when considering a child care facility. They each go further to state that high quality care and fees must be considered and combined with availability, reliability, and convenience to create a child care facility that is overall successful. We have multiple significant correlations between eight of our survey statements, which all indicate the connection between availability, reliability, convenience, high quality care, and fees as supported by the literature. Correlations between variables significant at the $p < 0.01$ level include *Fees charged are reasonable/Having on-site care is convenient*, *Chose because of high quality care and education/Child receives adequate amount of attention*, *Satisfied with overall care received/Child receives adequate amount of attention*, and *Child receives adequate amount of attention/Facility is dependable*. Correlations significant at the $p < 0.05$ level include: *Satisfied with overall care received/Hours meet my needs*, *Chose because of high quality care and education/Hours meet my needs*, *Child receives adequate amount of attention/Hours meet my needs*, and *Hours meet my needs/Facility is dependable*.

Supported with a correlation significant at the $p < 0.01$ level was the variable *My work and/or academic performance is positively impacted*

by having child care available on-site in conjunction with both *It is important for me to have my child on-site while I am at school or work* and *I chose on-site child care because it is convenient*. Although these specific correlations were not found in the literature, Connelly et al. (2004) collected qualitative data that indicated improvement of worker performance in the employees who participated in the employee-sponsored child care program available at the companies they studied. They attributed the overall increased work performance to a variety of factors working together which might include how parents value on-site child care and the convenience of the child care. In order to try to explain these connections further we consulted the family ecology theory (Strong et al., 2005). According to this theory, a parent's mesosystem would include both work life and family life. As the family ecology theory states, elements of an individual's mesosystem interact to directly affect the way a person feels and behaves in his or her everyday life. This could be extended to assume that when an individual feels that their family needs are being met, in this case by having the child on-site (because it is important to them) and by having a convenient place to send their child to receive care, their work performance is directly affected by this feeling of satisfaction with their familial needs being met. The correlations between these variables can be explained by this interaction.

The frequency distribution demonstrated that the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with all twelve variables. Six variables were supported in the literature: *Fees charged are reasonable* (FEE), *Having on-site care is convenient* (CNV), *Chose on-site care because it is convenient* (CHO), *Facility is dependable* (DEP), *Chose because of high quality care* (EDU), and *Hours of facility met my needs* (HRS). According to Connelly et al. (2004), in order for parents to be satisfied with on-site child care, high-quality care and moderate prices must also be associated with availability, reliability, and convenience. The factors CNV, CHO, EDU, and DEP were also supported by Connelly et al. (2002), who found that factors in parental choice of on-site child care include convenience, reliability, and the quality of care.

The majority of respondents agreed with variable QUA, *Satisfied with overall care received*, which was also supported in the literature. Parental satisfaction with the care one's child receives

can lessen the work/family conflict that a family deals with (Goff et al., 1990). In addition to this, support from the supervisor can also lessen the conflict a person has between work and family life.

Poms et al. (2009) discussed that caregiver attentiveness, caregiver communication, and caregiver dependability play a larger role in how parents feel about the child care used. This supports variable ATN, *Child receives adequate amount of attention*, and variable DEP, *Facility is dependable*.

It was difficult to find support in the literature for why it is important for parents to have their child on-site while at school or work (IMP), but the family ecology theory (Strong et al., 2005) offers a way to make sense of this finding. The theory assumes that each individual has a microsystem which consists of things that the individual experiences on a daily basis. For a working parent it would be likely that two of their microsystems would be their employer and their child's care provider. Therefore, it seems logical that a parent would find it important to have these two prominent parts of their life combined together. They create a mesosystem for the parent, each playing a vital role in the life of the parent both separately and in the ways that they interact with one another.

According to Connelly et al. (2004), employers offering on-site child care expected cost savings due to increased worker productivity, reduced turnover, and reduced absenteeism. This supports variable PER, *Work/academic performance is positively impacted*, and variable ABS, *Absent from work or school less frequently*. However, the study only expected these to result in cost savings. Whether or not on-site child care results in reduced turnover and reduced absenteeism are still important research questions (Connelly et al., 2004). This could explain why many parents indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed with variable ABS. The data seems to be inconclusive.

In addition to this, variable OPT, *I have other dependable options for child care*, was also addressed in the literature. According to Connelly et al. (2002), 22.4% of children not using on-site child care had regular secondary arrangements compared to 10.0% of children using on-site care. This suggests that on-site child care reduces the necessity of having back-up child care arrangements. This may explain why a large percentage of respondents indicated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

Limitations

A limitation to this study is the small sample size and the nonrandom design. There were also a number of participants who responded neither agree nor disagree which alludes to limitation of the 1-through-5 Likert scale. In addition to this, several 1.0 correlations were found between variables, indicating that those variables are very similar. To decrease repetitiveness, the survey statements could be analyzed, removing or rewording statements that appear to be similar.

Implications for Practitioners

This study offers employers and universities knowledge on parents' attitudes towards on-site child care. The data demonstrates that on-site child care positively impacts parents' work/academic performance. This finding indicates that providing on-site child care could potentially benefit employers, employees, students, and universities. Universities and employers could experience enhanced student/ worker productivity, and students/employees could benefit by having better grades and higher work satisfaction.

Implications for Future Research

It is strongly recommended that future research would include a larger and random sample in order for findings to be generalized nationwide. The use of a 1-through-7 Likert scale could be beneficial in order to increase variability across the scale. It is also suggested that qualitative interviews be conducted to gain deeper insights into parent perspectives of on-site child care. Additional research could be conducted on the variables in which large, significant correlations were found. The relationship between variables IMP (*Important for me to have my child on-site*) and PER (*Work/academic performance is positively impacted*) would be interesting to explore further because of the lack of information on this relationship in current literature. This research would help demonstrate what contributes to parents' attitudes towards their on-site child care and would also indicate what specific factors increase a parent's work or academic performance.

Conclusion

On-site child care is an option that could be of great value for parents. It is something that some employers have already implemented

and many others are considering. There is a vast amount of literature surrounding child care, but very little examining on-site child care (Connelly et al., 2002). This study provides a unique perspective by surveying the parent perspective about their on-site child care experience. Overall, this study suggests that parents appreciate the opportunity to use on-site child care. The investigated child care facility was seen as convenient, high quality, affordable, and dependable. It should be noted that this survey suggested parents were absent less often and had improved school/work performance because of this on-site care. This function of on-site childcare should be of interest to all employers.

References

- Child Care Aware. (2006). Child care glossary. Retrieved from <http://www.childcareaware.org>
- Connelly, R., Degraff, D.S., & Willis, R. A. (2002). If you build it, they will come: Parental use of on-site child care facilities. *Population Research and Policy Review*, 21(3), 241-273.
- Connelly, R., Degraff, D. S., & Willis, R. A. (2004). The value of employer-sponsored child care to employees. *Industrial Relations*, 43(4), 759-792. doi: 10.1111/j.0019-8676.2004.00361.x
- Goff, S.J., Mount, M. K., & Jamison, R. L. (1990). Employer-supported child care, work/family conflict, and absenteeism: A field study. *Personnel Psychology*, 43, 793-809.
- Morrissey, T. W., & Warner, M. E. (2009). Employer-supported child care: Who participates? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 71(5), 1340-1348.
- National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. (2010, July). Child care in America. Retrieved from <http://www.naccrra.org/>
- Poms, L. W., Botsford, W. E., Kaplan, S. A., Buffardi, L. C., & O'Brien, A. S. (2009). The economic impact of work and family issues: Child care satisfaction and financial considerations of employed mothers. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 14(4), 402-413. doi: 10.1037/a0017143
- Strong, B., DeVault, C., & Cohen, T. F. (2005). *The marriage and family experience: Intimate relationships in a changing society* (9th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Learning, Inc.