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Sojung Seo

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**PARENTS' SELECTION OF  
CHILD CARE TYPE: AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

By

Sojung Seo

A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND CHILD ECOLOGY

2000

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Parents' Selection of Child Care Type: an Ecological Perspective**

**By**

**Sojung Seo**

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics that may be related to parents' selection of child care type in both suburban and urban communities in the Mid- West. Specifically, this study investigated the differences in child care selection between parents using center-based care and parents using family day care settings as a function of each of the variables in this study. Variables included in this study were: child care program characteristics (e.g., program location, cost, and availability); family characteristics (e.g., parents' education and income); parental perceptions of program (e.g., parents' accessibility to written child care resources such as brochure, flyers, or parent handbooks and referrals available from the community and recommendations of others such as friends, relatives, coworkers, or neighbors). Results of t-tests of means showed that parents using center care identified their access to child care resources and referrals as being significantly more influential to child care selection than parents using family or group home care settings. There were no significant differences between parents' selection of child care type as a function of other program characteristics (location, cost, and availability), family characteristics (family income and education), or parental perceptions of program (e.g., recommendations of others).

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most important decision parents make is to choose an appropriate child care program outside the home while they work (Hammer & Turner, 1990; Atkinson, 1994; Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996; Lerner, 1996; Long, 1996; Singer, Fuller, Keiley, Wolf, 1998; Scrivo, 1998; Children's Defense Fund, 1999). Scrivo (1998) asserts that the biggest problem among working parents is finding good quality care or simply finding child care at all. As the supply of high quality day care does not keep pace with the rapidly rising demand of parents, dual career parents face difficult decisions in choosing care for their children (Scrivo, 1998; Children's Defense Fund, 1999).

In recent years many researchers (Payne, 1994; Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996; Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996; Lerner, 1996; Long, 1996; Cryer et al., 1997; Curtis, 1997; Ispa, Thornburg, Venter-Barkley, 1998; Singer, Fuller, Keiley, Wolf, 1998; Scrivo, 1998) have focused on parents' selection of center-based care and examined the ways in which working parents choose center-based child care program for their young children. Initial research on the determinants of selection of child care type has focused on the following variables: maternal employment status (e.g., Leibowitz, Klerman, & Waite, 1991; Glass & Estes, 1997), family income (e.g., Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992), and child care program fee (e.g., Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992). The attributes most frequently cited as influencing parents' choices of child care type for their infants and toddlers are based on child care program characteristics such

as location, cost, and hours as opposed to its quality of care (Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996). Accordingly, most research has focused on the influence of variables such as program characteristics (e.g., program fee, location, and availability) (e.g., Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992; Johansen, et al., 1996) and family characteristics (e.g., parents' education, income, and age) on parental child care selection (Long, 1996; Scrivo, 1998). Also, research has found the following reasons, in general, to be considered as important to parents in choosing a center-based child care over other types of child care arrangements for infants and toddlers: cleanliness of the center (Hammer & Turner, 1990; Galinsky, Howes, & Kontos, 1994; Cryer et al., 1997; Ispa et al., 1998), staff-child interactions (Hammer & Turner, 1990; Cryer et al., 1997; Ispa et al., 1998), program curriculum (Hammer & Turner, 1990; Cryer et al., 1997), hours of operation, location, and space available (Johansen et al., 1996).

### Statement of the Problem

Overall purposes of this study were to identify characteristics parents consider when choosing types of child care (center or family day care) and to identify how influential the characteristics are to parents' choices of child care type. In addition, this study investigated differences in parents' choices of child care type as a function of variables including child care program characteristics (program location, cost, and availability), family characteristics (parents' income and education), and parental perceptions of program (parents' accessibility to child care resources and referrals in the community and recommendations of others such as friends, relatives, coworkers, or neighbors).

### Significance of the Study

First, this study offers an ecological framework to research to understand how parents make their choices of type of child care. Understanding parents' values regarding types of child care choices is also useful to caregivers serving children and families in marketing their services to meet individual parents' needs in finding child care by making efforts to inform parents of their program beliefs or philosophy. Finally, this study is useful to professionals to help parents improve their child care consumer skills by offering parent education and providing guidelines regarding characteristics of high quality care.

### Human Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model offers a useful context from which to study influences on parents' choices of types of child care. Bronfenbrenner (1989) provides insight into the study of human development within a family and the environment which surrounds and interacts with it. In investigating why working parents choose a particular type of child care, it is important to look at dynamic interactions between the family system and the surrounding environments. Using an ecological model, a conceptual framework illustrating characteristics that may influence parents' choice of types of child care arrangements was developed in this study (Figure 1). Next, possible paths that may characterize parents' choices of child care type were also developed (Figure 2).

Bronfenbrenner's (1989) model of the ecology of human development can be conceptualized as a series of concentric circles with four levels progressing outward

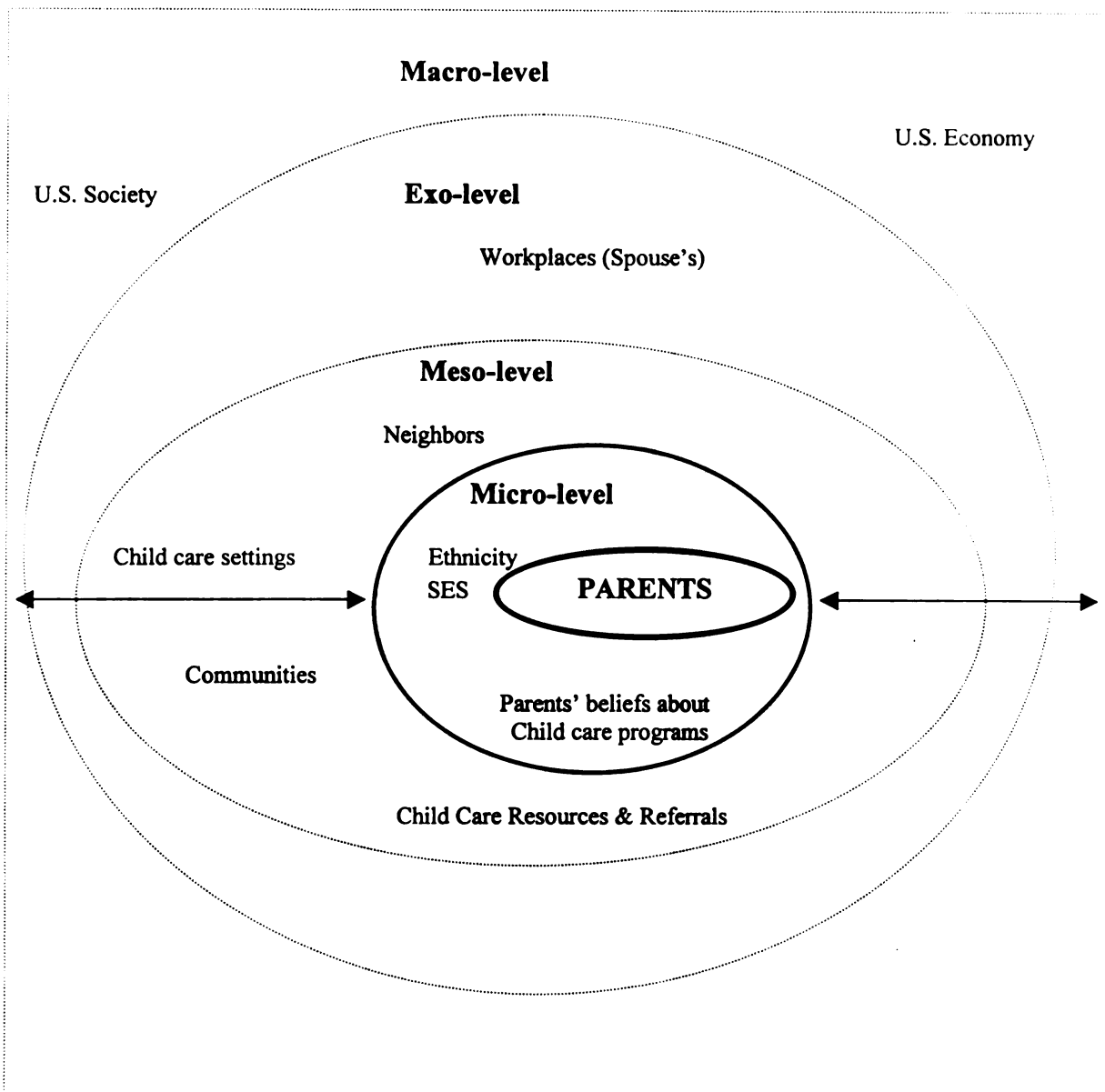
from the center of the target. In this study the parental unit represents the centric target, with the four levels progressing outward.

The first and smallest circle represents the microsystem. Bronfenbrenner states that the microsystem is "a pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief" (1989, p.227). In this study, the parents' system, or the parents, is the major microsystem being examined as it relates to choice of child care arrangement for their children. The mesosystem constitutes the second circle and comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p.227). The linkages between parents and child care settings, neighbors, and community resources can be included in this mesosystemic level with regard to their choices of types of child care arrangements. Parents' social networking, as related to their child care decision, is one of the important parts of the mesosystem. The mesosystem interactions between parents and child care arrangements were the primary focus of this research. Exosystems are settings that have a bearing on the developing persons (parents), but in which those parents do not play a direct role. A spouse's work environment including flexible work schedules and family- friendly policies represents the exosystem. In this study, parents' employment status was examined at this level, but the scope of this study was limited to only a full-time dual career families' child care choices. Thus, the focus was just at the mesosystemic level.

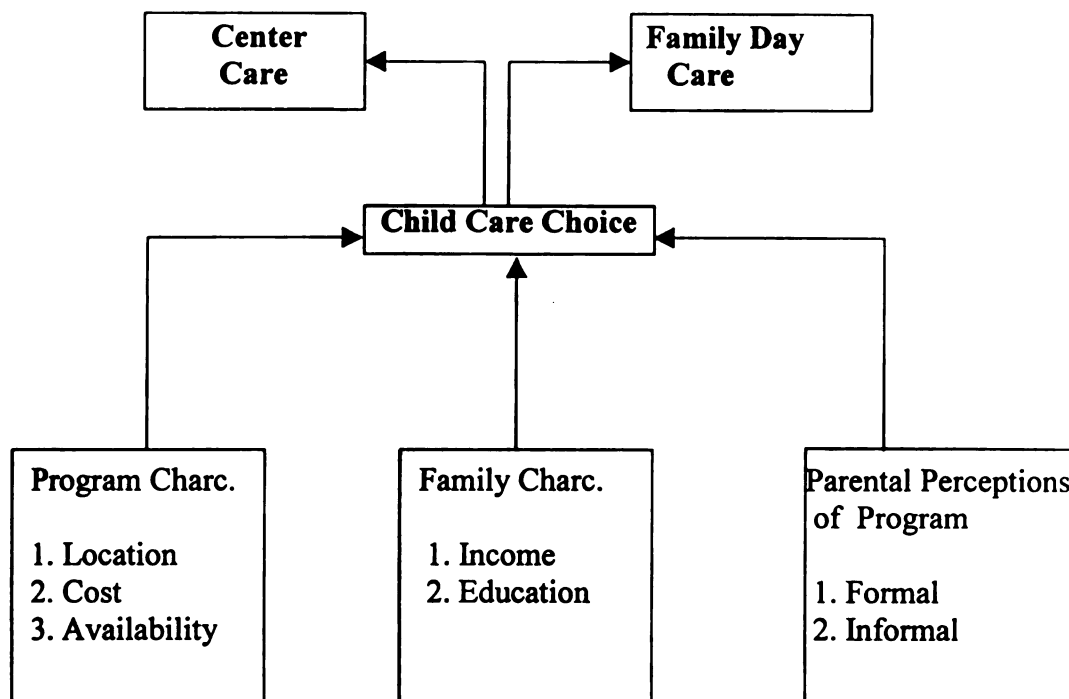
Macrosystems are set within the broad ideological, demographic, and institutional patterns of a particular culture or subculture that indicated how children

should be or should not be treated by parents, and which environments parents should provide for their children. These values differ from culture to culture and all of the experiences parents have for their children in home, child care settings, community, and all other contexts directly or indirectly influence parents and children. Thus, macrosystems are composed of societal environments in the U.S. In addition, the U.S. economy in relation to child care market represents the macrosystem. There is a disparity between the demands of quality child care and its supply in the child care market of the U.S. economy (Johansen et al., 1996). This situation might indirectly affect parents' decision making regarding child care arrangements, though quality exists both in some center-based care and in some family or group home care settings.

The primary focus will be on the mesosystemic linkages between the system of parents and that of child care arrangement chosen by parents. Thus, the level of analysis was at the mesosystem.



**Figure 1.** Characteristics Potentially Influencing Parents' Child Care Choices From an Ecological Perspective



**\* Parental Perceptions of Program**

1. Perceptions of Formal Program = parents' access to written child care resources & referrals from the community
2. Perceptions of Informal Program = recommendations of others

**Figure 2. Potential child care, family, and parental perceptions of program characteristics contributing to parents' selection of child care type.**

Families differ along such dimensions as parents' level of income and education. This may influence parents' choices of child care type. Other constructs such as child care program characteristics which include program location, cost, and availability/ hours of operation and parental perceptions of program including parents' access to written child care resources and referrals from the community (formal) and recommendations of others (informal) may influence parents' selection of child care type.

### Conceptual and Operational Definitions

**Child care selection** is conceptually defined as the choice to provide a child with non-parental care at a particular site when there are alternative sites available to the parents.

**Child care selection** is operationally defined as actual usage or child enrollment by parents in a type of child care arrangements as identified by parents on the Parent Survey Questionnaire (See the front page of the survey question in a box).

Spedding (1995) gives the following descriptions that are intended to offer brief overviews of two child care options in the United States:

**Day Care Center** provides group care for children in a non-residential setting for all or part of a day. Most centers enroll three to five year olds, but a growing number of centers also offer care for infants, toddlers, and school-age children. Most day care centers in the U.S. operate year round. Day care centers in the U.S. are primarily private businesses and can be either “for profit” or “not-for-profit” centers. In either case, they are usually subject to the regulatory system of their particular state. From the perspective of convenience for adults, centers have reliable, albeit rigid, schedules. Their predictability is welcomed by working parents whose hours coincide with a center’s (p.540).

**Family Day care** which is provided in a caregiver’s home for all or part of a day has practical advantages for many parents. Family day care is more likely than center-based care to accept children under one year of age. Care is usually year round, five days per week, early morning to early evening, with somewhat more flexible hours than day care centers. Most family day care providers are private entrepreneurs working under private arrangements made with parents, often outside any governmental regulatory system (p.541). **Group Family Day care** which is provided in a caregiver’s home for all or part of the day by at least two adults and for larger groups of children (6-12) than regular family day care. Care is usually year round, five days per week, early morning to early evening, with local variations. Most group family day care homes accept children from infancy through school age (p.541).

**Child care program variables** are conceptually defined as the following child care setting characteristics: fee, location, and availability (convenience of hours of operation).

**Child care program variables** are operationally defined as measures of parents' responses to the following question on the Parent Survey Questionnaire (Question #A1): I chose this type of child care for my child for the following reasons (Check all that apply)

This information is obtained through the following possible Parent Survey Questionnaire items:

1) Location was convenient; 2) cost was reasonable; 3) the hours that the program was open fit our needs.

**Family variables** are conceptually defined both as family descriptive characteristics including parents' age, parents' education, income, and size of the family and parents' beliefs about optimal child care settings. Parents beliefs about optimal child care settings are conceptually defined as parental perceptions of what a program is and of what it should offer to their children.

**Family variables** are operationally defined as information about parents' demographics (parents' age, education, income, gender, ethnicity, and size of the family) and beliefs (e.g., parents' beliefs about types of program) as reported on questions found on the Parent Survey Questionnaire:

I am the mother or father (Question #C1); Your age (Question #C2); What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Question #C3); What is your total household income? (Question #C4); What is your ethnicity? (Question #C5).

Parents' beliefs about types of child care are operationally defined as the responses to the following Parent Survey Questionnaire items:

If you use a center-based care, please specify the reasons why you chose this type of care over family/home care? (Question #B8); If you use a family day care why you chose this type of care over another? (Question #B9); If you use both center-based and family day care for your child why you combine two types of child care?(Question #B10).

This information is obtained through the following items:

1) Family day care was expected to provide an intimate and secure environment to my child; 2) Center-based care was expected to provide an educational environment to my child; 3) These types of child care settings provide both an intimate and educational environment to my child.

**Parental perceptions of formal program** are conceptually defined as parental identification of and perception of influences of written resources (e.g., checklists, brochures, Parent Orientation Packet for Parents, or flyers), referrals within community agencies on their child care selection.

**Parental perceptions of formal program** are operationally defined as parental identification of and ranking of the level of influences of written resources (e.g., checklists, brochures, Orientation Packet for Parents, or flyers) and referrals from community agencies on their child care selection. Information about whether parents were given written resources and how they perceive the influences of formal program on their child care selection are obtained through the following Parent Survey Questionnaire items:

The corresponding questions to these above items are:

When I was trying to find child care, I was given printed information that was available from a community agency (e.g., child care resources and referrals), workplace, or child care program setting (Question #B5).

1) Yes; 2) No.

Please indicate how influential these following sources of information you received were to your choice in child care type? (Question #B7)

1) Written information (e.g., brochures, checklists, Orientation Packet for Parents, or flyers) that was available from community, child care settings, or workplaces; 2) Discussion with the personnel in child care resources and referral agencies; 3) Discussion with the child care center director and/or caregivers.

**Parental perceptions of informal program** are conceptually defined as parental identification of and perception of the influences of the program reputation according to relatives, friends, coworkers, and neighbors.

**Parental perceptions of informal program** are operationally defined as parental identification of and ranking of the influences of recommendations of others (e.g., relatives, co-workers, friends, and neighbors) on parental selection of types of child care. This information is obtained through the following Parent Survey Questionnaire items:

The corresponding questions to these above items are:

Please check each item that accurately reflects factors you considered in choosing your child care (Question #A1)

Please indicate how influential these following sources of information you received were to your choice in child care type? (Question #B7)

1) Discussion with friends, coworkers, or other parents who had used the services; 2) Recommendations of friends, coworkers, relatives, or other parents who had not used the service but believed the day care was a good place for children

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Need and Child Care Usage

The 1994 Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor reported that working mothers in two-parent families with young children make up over 60% of the labor force (cited in Brofenbrenner, McClelland, Wethington, Moen, & Ceci, 1996). Further, the fastest-growing segment of employed mothers represent mothers with infants between 3 weeks and 3 months of age (Scrivo, 1997). The State of America's Children Yearbook of 1999 reported 57% of the women with children younger than three were in the workplace (Children's Defense Fund, 1999). In fact, about 58.8% of all new mothers return to work before their babies are 1 year old (Leibowitz, Klerman & Waite, 1996; Mueller, & Orimoto, 1997; Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999). Thus, many of mothers of infants are working and need non-maternal care for their young children.

The U.S. National Household Education Survey (1995) reported that infants under the age of one were more likely to be cared for in their homes either by a relative or a non-relative than in a center-based setting (National Center for Education Statistics, 1997). Six million infants and toddlers spend part of their day being cared by someone other than their parents, and fifty one percent of those children are cared for by center-based care and/or family day care (Scrivo, 1998; Children's Defense Fund, 1999). Leibowitz, Klerman, and Waite (1991) reported that 14% of infants and 17% of toddlers, not cared for by their mothers, were cared for in organized child care centers, and the remaining received care from other types of care, such as family day care care.

The National Child Care Survey (1990) found that only 14 % of children under one year age whose mothers were employed were in center-based care, while a much larger portion of the children received child care in non-center based care including family day care (Hofferth, Brayfield, Deich, & Holcomb, 1991; Galinsky, 1994; Kagan & Cohen, 1996). Therefore, many parents of children under three were reported to be more likely to select child care in family day care settings over center-based care settings.

### **Characteristics Influencing Parents' Selection of Child Care Type**

The following section addresses characteristics influencing parents' child care selection including child care program characteristics (program location, cost, and availability), family characteristics (parents' education and income), and parental perceptions of program variables (program reputation via the availability of child care resources and referrals in the community and parents' social networking) (Payne, 1994).

#### **Child Care Program Characteristics**

Several studies have focused on the child care program characteristics including program location, cost, and availability as related to parents' selection between center-based care settings (Long, 1983, 1996; Kagan & Neville, 1992; Payne, 1994; Fuller et al., 1996; Curtis, 1997). Length of day (full-day service or a half day service), cost, and location were reported as being influential to parents' choices of center-based care (Payne, 1994). Kagan and Neville (1992) also reported that variables such as the location of child care and flexibility on parents' time scheduling were influential in their selection of one center care over another. Location and cost were reported as the most common reasons for choosing one center care over another ( Fuller et al., 1996).

In terms of the type of care (center vs. family day care) selected by parents, Hammer & Turnner (1990) reported that the existence of family day care by non-parents (e.g., caregivers including both relatives and non-relatives) is difficult to document and regulate because this kind of care is transient and informal. Despite the challenges in identifying family day care, some data suggest that family day care has been chosen by parents over center-based care due to several reasons (Hammer & Turner, 1990; Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992; Atkinson, 1994; Larner, 1996). Family day care providers are more likely than centers to take children who needed care early and late in the day (Siegel & Loman, 1991; Atkinson, 1994; Larner, 1996). Location is also reported as important factor to parents' family day care selection over center-based care because centers may not be conveniently located, especially in rural areas (Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, & Shinn, 1994; Johansen et al., 1996; Larner, 1996). Family day care is usually located in parents' neighborhoods (Larner, 1996). Galinsky's (1994) study of parents who used family day care (provided by non relative caregivers and relatives) for their infants showed that parents rated variables related to adult needs, like cost, location, and convenience, as being important to their child care choices.

#### Family Characteristics

Several studies have examined the influences of family income on parents' selection of child care type. Hofferth and Wissoker's (1992) study, in which 971 mothers (from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth) of children under the age of 6 were interviewed, found that higher income was associated with a higher probability of choosing center care over other types of care (sitter care, relative care or father care). In contrast, Leibowitz et al. (1991), also using data from the National Longitudinal

Survey of Youth, did not find a relationship between family income and care type selected, but they did not include relative care in their equations. In addition, sitter care in these studies (Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992; Leibowitz et al., 1991) referred to nonrelative care in the child's or caregiver's home considering in-home care and family day care homes as one group in these two studies. Erdwins and Buffardi's (1994) study (in Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999) examined in home care (sitter care) and family day care separately and found that income did not differentiate center and family day care users. However, Johansen et al. (1996) found differing results; parents who are high level professionals (e.g., medicine and law) and earn higher wages are more likely to choose family day care for their children younger than three years old because of the flexibility of extendible hours associated with family day care. Although more research is needed regarding the influences of family income on parents' selection of child care type, both family day care and center care appear to be related to higher income and lower income is associated with use of relative care (Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999).

The literature to date has shown inconsistent findings in the relationship between parental education and type of care selected. Better-educated mothers (with a college degree or an advanced degree) tend to select child care centers, whereas less-educated mothers are more likely to use family day care (including care by sitters, relatives, or non-relatives at child's home or someone else's home) for their infants or toddlers (Hammer & Turner, 1990; Fuller et al., 1996). Thronburg and Venter-Barkely (1998) also reported that better-educated mothers tend to prefer to center-based care for children under 3 years old over family day care (including care by sitters, relatives or non-relatives at child's home or someone else's home) because they perceived center-

based care as having a strong educational program than family day care. However, these two studies (Hammer & Turner, 1990; Fuller et al., 1996; Thronburg & Venter-Barkely, 1998) did not differentiate between home care (by sitters or relatives at child's home) and family day care (by non relatives at someone else's home). In contrast, Johansen and colleagues (Johansen et al., 1996) distinguished among three types of care according to location: care at home, which includes care by both relatives and nonrelatives; care in someone else's home, including relatives as well as non relatives; and care in a day care center. Better educated parents of children under three years old tend to select family day care (non relative care in some else's home) over center-based care because parental concern with the educational component of care only increased with the age of the child (Johansen et al., 1996). This result is also consistent with the evidence from the 1997 National Center for Education Statistics which reported highly educated parents favored family day care (non relative care at some else's home) for their children younger than three years old because they considered their child's education at a later age (older than three). However, Erdwins and Buffardi's (1994) study (in Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999) found that parental education was associated with an increased likelihood of selected a type of paid care such as family day care or center-based care, and center care and family day care parents did not significantly differ on this variable.

Research has supported that the age of the child influences the types of care parents select because very young children (infants) are least likely to receive care in day care centers (Hofferth et al., 1991; Hofferth & Wisoker, 1992; Johansen et al., 1996; Larner, 1996). The National Survey, conducted by Hofferth, Brayfield, Deich,

and Holcomb (1991), found that only 14 percent of children under one year of age, whose mothers were employed, were in center-based care while the remainder received other types of care including family day care by relatives or non relatives (Hofferth, Brayfield, Deich, & Holcomb, 1991; Lerner, 1996). These findings are consistent with those reported in 1997 by the National Center for Education Statistics. According to this organization, approximately 29.2% of these infants were not in child care (21.6% were care for by their fathers and 7.6% were cared for by their mothers while their mothers worked). A total of 31.3% of these infants were cared for by a family members (11.4\$ in the child's home and 19.9% in the relative's home); the majority of these infants (23% of all infants of working mothers) were cared for by a grandparent. Approximately, 20.5% of the infants were placed in family day care settings, while 11.5% of the infants were enrolled in center care settings.

#### Parents' beliefs about the type of care.

Parents' goals and beliefs about appropriate early childhood education influence their enrollment decisions (Stipek, Milburn, Calluzzo, & Daniels, 1992; Payne, 1994). As Payne (1994) pointed out, parents' perceptions of a program are influenced by their beliefs of what it ought to be, reflective of the values, social comparisons, and philosophical orientation of the parents. Parents who considered the influence of the child's relationship with the caregivers as important were more likely to choose family day care rather than a day care center for infants and toddlers (Atkinson, 1994; Johansen, Leibowtz, & Waite, 1996; Lerner, 1996;). On the contrary, parents who chose center-based care over another type of family day care were more likely to

emphasize developmental outcomes in their children (Johansen et al., 1996; Lerner, 1996).

#### Parental Perceptions of Program

Parents' selection of child care type may be influenced by parents' social networks/social relationships. The following is addressed to examine how program reputation via the parents' access to written child care resources and referrals from the community (formal) and their social networks such as recommendations of others (informal) influence parents' selection of child care type.

Several research has examined the influences of parents' accessibility to written information such as brochures, checklists, flyers, or Orientation Packet for Parents about child care as well as referrals from community agencies, workplaces, or child care settings) on parents' selection of center-based care (Long, 1983, 1996; Atkinson, 1994; Lechner & Creedon, 1994; Payne, 1994; Zinzeleta & Little, 1997). However, little research has examined the differences in parents' child care type as a function of these variables between parents using family day care and parents using center-based care settings. Long (1996) noted that one of the primary functions of child care resources is to link parents with child care by providing referrals to centers and day care homes suited to the parents' and child's needs. Lechner and Creedon (1994) reported that child care resources and referrals helped working parents decide what child care options are right for them (e.g., family care, child care centers) and how to judge the quality of the care provided in either type of center-based or family day care. Child care resource and referral services were reported to be helpful to parents who are trying to locate the best possible and most affordable center-based care among oftentimes limited choices

(Lecher & Creedon, 1994; Payne, 1994). Families new to communities may be more likely to use child care resources and referral services available from the community (Atkinson, 1994). Long (1983, 1996) reported that parents who had fewer friendships were more likely to rely on the formal child care resources and referral services in locating child care.

Zinzeleta and Little (1997) investigated how parents used available resources such as brochures or checklists (e.g., a description of characteristics associated with high quality as defined by the NAEYC) from a child care resource and referral agency in making their decisions about choosing a center-based care setting. Contrary to expectations that educational resources and checklists might play an important role in parental selection of a type of care, checklists and other educational resources within the community were not tools parents used in selecting child care (Zinzeleta & Little, 1997). Reasons included believing that the checklists were irrelevant, having parental own perceptions or values, misplacing the checklist, not having the time to complete checklists, and relying on personal perceptions or values instead of checklists to make child care decision (Bogat & Genseheimer 1986; Zinzeleta & Little, 1997). In another study done by Atkinson (1994), parents reported that they did not use educational resources and referral services when choosing child care for their young children (infants and toddlers).

Influences of recommendations of friends, coworkers, relatives, and neighbors on parental selection of types of child care (center care or family day care by non relatives or relatives) have been examined in several studies (Long, 1983; Hofferth, Brayfield, Deich, & Holcomb, 1991; Atkinson, 1994; Larner, 1996; Singer et al., 1998).

Parents may rely on informal sources of information from relatives, friends, neighbors, and co-workers in choosing types of child care (Larner, 1996). A National survey (1990) indicated that 66% of parents who arranged child care outside the family relied on such informal sources of information about child care, whereas 13% used advertisements, and 9% turned to resource and referral agencies (Hofferth, Brayfield, Deich, & Holcomb, 1991; Larner, 1996). Parents depended first on their informal network (e.g., relatives, neighbors) to locate child care, and they turned to formal services only if that network was limited or unable to help (Long, 1983; Long, 1996).

### Summary

The empirical data support that working parents' child care decisions are influenced by many variables including family demographic characteristics (e.g., parents' levels of income, education, and age of child), program characteristics (e.g., program location, cost, and availability), and parents' perception of program variables (e.g., parents' accessibility to child care resources and referrals, and recommendations). Research has shown that child care program characteristics (e.g., location, cost, and availability) are more influential to parents' selection of child care type (center care vs. family day care). For family demographic characteristics (e.g., parents' education, income, and child age), research to date has shown inconsistent findings with regard to the influences of family income and maternal education on their types of child care. The parents with higher education are reported that they do not emphasize the educational programs of child care for their children under age 3 years when choosing their child care.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

In order to carry out the research objectives most effectively, a non-experimental survey research design was undertaken. The unit of analysis in this study was individual parent's indication of child care selection of either center-based or family day care. Self-report questionnaires were sent to parents affiliated with center-based and family day care facilities in both urban and suburban communities in the Mid-west area.

#### Research Subjects

The subjects for this study were 47 dual career parents, employed full-time, with young children, aged birth to 36 months, who were enrolled either in center care or family day care settings. Approximately 21% of the parents responding to the survey were males; most (78.7%) of the parents responding to the survey were females. The age the respondents ranged from 18 to 49 years, with a mean of 30.68 years ( $\underline{SD}$ =.96). Parents in this sample were highly educated with most parents (77%) holding at least a bachelor's degree ( $\underline{M}$ =4.34,  $\underline{SD}$ =1.16). Annual family income ranged from less than \$20,000 to over \$120,000. The average family income was \$ 21,100 ( $\underline{SD}$ =1.36). A summary of demographic characteristics of the sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Family Demographic Characteristics (N=47).

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<b>Parent's Age</b>	
18-25 years	11%
26-33 years	57%
34-41 years	23%
42-29 years	4.2%
50+ years	4.2%
<b>Parent's Education</b>	
high school/GED	8%
2 yrs. College	15%
4yrs. College	26%
Masters	36%
Ph.D.	15%
<b>Family Income</b>	
<\$20,000	49%
20-\$40,000	17%
40-\$60,000	9%
60-\$80,000	21%
>\$80,000	4%
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Caucasian	51%
African-American	40%
Hispanic-American	6.4%
Other (Arab-American)	5.5%
<b>Family Size (including adults)</b>	
3	2%
4	98%
<b>Years Living in the Community</b>	
1-5yrs.	47%
6-10yrs.	32%
11-15yrs.	2%
16-20yrs.	2%
21-25yrs.	4%
26-30yrs.	2%
>30yrs.	11%

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### Sampling Procedures and Data Collection

A list of all licensed centers, family child care, and group day care home facilities serving infants and toddlers was provided by a local child care referral agency in a suburban community in the Midwest. Though this study specified two types of family or group home care settings: a licensed family child care for 6 children, a licensed group day care home for 12 children, it treated family or group home care settings as one type of family day care setting. A minimum of 50 families was expected in this study. Family day care settings were expected to have a lower number of participating subjects than day care centers because family day care home facilities typically enrolled far fewer families at a time. In order to ensure equivalent sample sizes from center and family day care facilities, 20 directors of licensed centers and 40 directors of family day care facilities were contacted by the investigator by mail, with follow-up phone calls made shortly after. Ten out of 20 center-based and 16 out of 40 family day care settings ( $n=6$  for family child care and  $n=10$  for group home settings) agreed to participate in this study.

All directors who agreed to participate in this study were asked to distribute Parent Survey packets, containing a letter describing the study, a consent form, and a survey questionnaire, to all parents who met the qualifications (a two parent full-time working family with children, aged birth-36 months). All participants provided written consent of their participation. Stamped, addressed envelopes were included so the Parent Survey Questionnaire and the consent form could be returned directly to the investigator. Each survey was identified by a code number. Therefore, all survey responses were confidential. Forty seven surveys out of the 100 surveys distributed

were returned to the investigator: 18 from parents using center-based care, 20 from parents using family day care, and 9 from parents using a combination of both center based care and family day care.

### Research Questions and Hypotheses

In this study, six research questions and seven hypotheses were developed.

Research Question 1: Does parental selection of child care differ as a function of family income?

H1: Parents who earn higher wages will choose a family day care over center-based care (Johansen et al., 1996)

Research Question 2: Does parental selection of child care differ as a function of parental educational level?

H2: More educated parents will choose a family day care over center-based care (Johansen et al., 1996; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997).

Research Question 3: Are family demographic variables related to each other?

H3: There are correlations among demographic variables (e.g., parents' income, education, family size, years living in the community) of parents in this sample.

Research Question 4: What are the variables identified by parents of this study when choosing child care?

Research Question 5: How influential do parents perceive child care program characteristics (location, cost, and availability) to be in their child care choices?

H4: Parents using family day care will rank child care program characteristics (location, cost, and availability) as being more influential to child care choices

than parents using center-based care (Long, 1983; Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996; Lerner, 1996).

**Research Question 6:** How influential do parents perceive formal program (child care resources and referrals from the community and recommendations of others) to be in their child care choices?

H5: Parents using center-based care will report that they had been given more access to formal program image variables (written child care resources and referrals available from the community) in their child care selection than parents using family day care settings.

H6: Parents using center-based care settings will rank formal program (written child care resources and referrals from the community) as being more influential in child care choices than parents using family day care settings.

H7: Parents using family day care settings will rank informal program (e.g., recommendations of others such as friends, neighbors, relatives, or coworkers) as being more influential in child care choices than parents using center-based care settings.

**Decision Rule:** A decision rule with a chance probability of  $p \leq .05$  will be used.

### Research Instrument

A revised version of the Parent Survey Questionnaire, designed by Payne (1994), was utilized to examine family demographics and contextual factors as potential variables in the selection of child care settings. For the purposes of the current study, the Parent Survey Questionnaire was adapted for use with parents whose children were enrolled in center-based or family day care settings. The following variables of this study were measured by the Parent Questionnaire: 1) Child Care Program Variables which included location, cost, and availability; 2) Family Variables which included parents' income, education, and beliefs about types of programs; 3) Parental perceptions of program which included parental perception of formal program (parents' accessibility to child care resources and referrals from the community), informal program (recommendations of others), and Family Demographic Variables which included parents' income, education, family size, ethnicity, and years living in the community. Additionally, a series of open-ended questions were developed to ascertain parental beliefs about types of programs and rationales for selecting one type of care over another.

A five point likert scale was included in the Parent Survey Questionnaire on which respondents were asked to indicate how (not important/not influential to most important/most influential) each of the variables was to their selection of the program. Scores were derived from the following questions (Question # A2, #B6, and #B8) on the Parent Survey Questionnaire that asked parents to:

Please indicate how important each of the factors was to your decision making in choosing this type of care (Question #A2); Please indicate how influential any printed information that you received was to the decision making on choosing a type of child care (Question #B6); Please indicate how influential these following sources of information you received were to your beliefs about the type of child care you chose (Question # B8).

For purposes of data analyses, these scales were dichotomized into “very influential/ important and “less influential/important”. Scores of these likert scales were computed by using t-tests of means to test hypotheses.

### Data Analyses

#### Quantitative Analysis

Data were coded and entered according to the type of child care (center vs. family day care). The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analyses were conducted for the two groups of parents, those using center-based care settings and those family day care settings. Four statistical methods were employed for data description and analysis: Descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, t-test of means, and correlation analyses.

First, descriptive analysis was used to describe the demographic characteristics (e.g., parents’ income, education, age, family size, ethnicity, years living in the community) of the sample in this study. Second, cross tabulation tables were prepared to examine frequencies and percentages of responses that were calculated for each survey item on the Parent Questionnaire Survey. Third, t-tests of means were used to test research hypotheses (Hypothesis 1-Hypothesis6). Finally, Pearson correlations were used to examine the relations among family demographic variables of the parents in this study.

Pearson Correlations were used to examine the relations among the predictor variables that were scored on a continuous scale such as parents' age, income, education, and years living in the community.

### Qualitative Analysis

On the survey, two sets of questions were developed to ascertain parental beliefs about the type of child care program they chose: parental involvement in program observation prior to enrolling in it and parents' rationales for choosing one type of the program over others. The following questions were used to collect some qualitative data on the Parent Survey Questionnaire:

- If you use a center-based care for your child, please specify the reasons why you chose this type of care over family/home care? (Question # B8)
- If you use a family day care, please specify the reasons why you chose this type of care over a center-base care? (Question # B9)
- If you use both center-base and family day care for your child why you combine two types of child care? (Question #B10).

The qualitative data were not analyzed statistically, but were examined carefully using data from the actual parental responses to these questions on the survey to identify their reasons or rationales in choosing one type of care over another.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

Demographic data were collected about the gender and ethnicity of each parent, the income level of the family, the level of education of the respondent and spouse, family size, and years living in the community. There were no significant differences in these family demographic variables between parents using family day care and parents using center-based care.

Research Question 1: Does parental selection of child care differ as a function of family income?

Hypothesis 1: Parents who earn higher wages will choose a family day care over center-based care (Johansen et al., 1996).

This hypothesis was not supported using an independent t-test of means. Parents using family day care settings ( $M=1.80$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ) did not report that they earned higher wages than parents using a center-based care ( $M=2.38$ ,  $SD=1.33$ ),  $t(36)=1.43$ ,  $p=.16$ . Income levels did not vary by types of child care settings.

Research Question 2: Does parental selection of child care differ as a function of parental educational level?

Hypothesis 2: More educated parents will choose a family day care over center based care (Johansen et al., 1996; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997).

T-test of means showed that parents using family day care settings ( $M=4.10$ ,  $SD=1.33$ ) did not report that they had higher levels of education than parents using center-based care settings ( $M=4.33$ ,  $SD=.97$ ),  $t(36)=.611$ ,  $p=.545$ .

**Research Question 3: Are family demographic variables related to each other?**

**Hypothesis 3: There are relationships among demographic variables (e.g., parents' income, education, family size, years living in the community) of parents in this sample.**

Pearson Correlations were used to examine the relations among the predictor variables that were scored on a continuous scale such as parents' age, income, education, family size and years living in the community. There was a strong association between parents' education and their spouses' education. The relationship between years living in the community and parents' education was statistically significant in the negative direction. Parents who were less educated reported that they lived much longer in the community than their counterparts did. Table 2 presents these finding

Table 2. Correlations among Family Demographic Variables.

Overall Sample (N=47)

	Respond- ents' Education	Respon- dents' Age	Family Income	Family Size	Years in Living	Spouses' Age	Spouses' Education
Parents' Education	1.00						
Parents' Age	.24	1.00					
Family Income	-.08	-.02	1.00				
Family Size	.17	-.10	.01	1.00			
Years in Living	-.47**	.28	-.19	.09	1.00		
Spouses' Age	.03	.66**	.07	-.06	.19	1.00	
Spouses' Education	.65**	-.09	.25	.04	-.55**	-.16	1.00

Note: \*\*p&lt;.01 (2-tailed)

**Research Question 4:** What are the characteristics identified by parents of this study in their child care selection?

On the survey (Q#A1), parents were asked to select as many items from a list as they considered a factor to their child care decision without ranking them. Ninety four percent of the total sample selected location as a factor to their child care selection. Next, more than half of the total respondents (65.2%) selected program cost as a factor in their child care decision. Sixty two percent of the parents in this sample chose program availability as a factor to child care choices. No significant differences were

found in parents' identification of these program characteristics as a function of child care selection (family day care or center-based care).

Sixty nine percent of the parents in the total sample selected an informal factor (e.g., recommendations of others such as neighbors, friends, relatives, or coworkers) to their child care choices. For the formal factor (e.g., written child care resources and referrals from the agency in the community or workplaces), twenty four percent of the parents of this study selected as a factor to their child care selection. T-tests of means showed indicated no significant differences in parents' identifications of both formal and informal program variables as a function of child care selection (family day care or center-based care).

**Research Question 5:** How influential did parents perceive child care program characteristics (e.g., program location, cost, and availability) to be in their child care choices?

On the survey (Q#A2), parents were asked to rank how influential these items were to their child care decision. Each item was scored on a 5 point likert scale ranging from "1(not influential)" to "5(most influential)". For analyses, these scales were dichotomized into "very influential" and "less influential". Forty four percent ( $\underline{n}=21$ ) of the total parents ranked program location as being very influential to child care choices, while 56% ( $\underline{n}=27$ ) of the parents in this sample ranked this as being less influential. Program cost was ranked as being very influential by 51% ( $\underline{n}=20$ ) of the total sample. In addition, 66 % ( $\underline{n}=42$ ) of the total parents sample ranked program availability as being very influential. All available choices made by the parents in this study are found in Appendix I.

**Hypothesis 4:** Parents using family day care will rank child care program characteristics (e.g., program location, cost, availability) as being more influential to child care choices than parents using center-based care settings.

This hypothesis was not supported in this study. T-tests of means showed that parents using family day care settings ( $M=3.45$ ,  $SD=.88$ ) did not report program location as being more influential to their child care choices than parents using center-based care settings ( $M=3.44$ ,  $SD=.70$ ),  $t(36) = -.021$ ,  $p=.983$ . In terms of program cost, the mean scores for parents using center-based care settings ( $M=3.52$ ,  $SD=1.12$ ) did not significantly differ from those of parents using family day care settings ( $M=3.43$ ,  $SD=1.15$ ),  $t(36) = .232$ ,  $p=.818$ . For program availability, results of t-tests of means showed that parents using family day care settings ( $M=3.89$ ,  $SD=.65$ ) did not significantly differ from the parents using center-based care settings ( $M=3.76$ ,  $SD=.90$ ) in identifying program availability as being influential to their child choices,  $t(36) = -.497$ ,  $p=.622$ .

**Research Question 6:** How influential did parents perceive formal program variables (written child care resources and referrals from the community and recommendations of others) to be in their child care choices?

On the survey, a specific question (Question #B5) was developed to examine whether the parents of this study had been given access to written child care resources and referrals from the community. Accordingly, a consecutive question (Question #B6) was developed to ascertain how parents who reported that they had been given the access perceived the influences of this information on their child care decision making. The responses of the parents in the total samples were scored on a 5 point likert scale

ranging from 1(not influential) to 5(most influential). For analyses, these scores were dichotomized into “very influential” and “less influential”.

On the survey (Question #B5), parents were asked to indicate whether they had been given printed child care resources from a community agency (e.g., child care resources and referrals) or workplaces in choosing child care settings. Eighty three percent of ( $n=39$ ) of the total parents in this study reported that they had been given printed child care information from a community agency (e.g., child care resources and referrals) or workplaces in choosing their child care settings.

**Hypothesis 5:** Parents using center-based care setting will report that they had been given more access to formal program variables (written child care resources and referrals from the community) in their child care selection than parents using family day care settings.

The hypothesis was supported. There were significant differences in parents' accessibility to written child care resources between the parents using center-based care settings and parents using family day care settings. This finding is presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. T-Test for Differences in Two Groups of Parents' Child Care Choices as a Function of Parents' Accessibility to Printed Child Care Resources.**

	Type of Care		t-value	df	P value.
	Center ( $n=18$ ) <u>M</u>	Family Day Care ( $n=20$ ) <u>M</u>			
Accessibility to Child Care Resources	.88 (.32)	.55 (.51)	2.41	36	.02*

Note: \* $p<.05$

Parents ( $n=39$ ) who responded to the Q#B6 (“Please indicate how influential any printed information that you received was to your decision making in choosing child care”) ranked printed information as being very influential (38.3%,  $n=18$ ), while approximately 62% ( $n=21$ ) of the total parents ranked this as being less influential to their child care choices. According to the question #B7 (“Please indicate how influential these following sources of information you received were to your choice in child care type?”), approximately 33% ( $n=15$ ) of the parents in the total sample ranked child care referrals (e.g., discussion with the personnel in child care resources and referrals agencies) as being very influential. Sixty seven percent ( $n=33$ ) of the parents in this sample reported this as being less influential to their child care choices.

Hypothesis 6: Parents using center-based care settings will perceive formal program variables (written child care resources and referrals) as being more influential to child care choices than parents using family day care settings.

Parents using center-based care settings reported their access to written child care resources as being significantly more influential in their child care decision making than parents using family day care settings. In addition, parents using center care settings ranked child care referrals (e.g. discussion of the personnel in child care resources and referrals agencies) as being significantly more influential to their selection of center care than parents using family day care settings. These findings are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4. T-Test for Differences between Groups of Parents' in the Identification of the Influences of Written Child Care Resources and Referrals on Child Care Choices.**

	Type of Care		t-value	df	p value
	Center ( <u>n</u> =18) <u>M</u>	Family or Group Home Care ( <u>n</u> =20) <u>M</u>			
Written Child Care Resources	3.55 (.78)	2.5 (.88)	3.86	36	.00*
Child Care Referrals	3.94 (.72)	2.3 (1.38)	4.52	36	.00*

Note: \* $p < .05$

On the survey (Q#B7), three types of parental perceptions of informal program variables (recommendations of others) were included: discussion with the personnel in child care settings; discussion with others who had used the program before; discussion with others who had not used the program, but believed the service was good for children. Parents in this study asked to identify how influential they perceive these informal program variables were to their child care choices using a five- point likert scale. For analyses, these scores were dichotomized into “ very influential” and “ less influential”.

Approximately 51% (n=24) of the total parents reported the discussion with the personnel (e.g., directors, caregivers) in child care settings as being very influential to their child care choices. For the discussion with others who had used the program, this category was ranked as being very influential, reported by approximately 45% (n=21),

while 55% ( $n=27$ ) of the total parents ranked this as less influential. Compared with other two categories, sixteen percent ( $n=6$ ) of the parents in the total sample reported the discussion with others (e.g., friends, relatives, coworkers, neighbors) who had not used the program, but believed it was good for children as being very influential to their child care choices.

Hypothesis 7: Parents using family day care settings will be more likely to perceive informal program variables (e.g., recommendations of others who had used the program before and recommendations of others who had not used the program) as being influential to child care selection than parents using center-based care settings.

T-tests of means showed that there were no significant differences between parents using family day care ( $M=2.93$ ,  $SD=1.43$ ) and parents using center-based care settings ( $M=3.06$ ,  $SD=1.38$ ) in the ranking of informal program image variables (recommendations of others who had used the program before),  $t(36)=.25$ ,  $p=.80$ . Also, no significant differences between these two types of parents in the ranking of recommendations of others who had not used the program as being influential to their child care choices ( $M=2.53$ ,  $SD=1.18$  for family day care vs.  $M=2.54$ ,  $SD=1.21$  for center care),  $t(29)=-1.42$ ,  $p=.17$ .

### Qualitative Data

On the survey, two sets of questions were developed to ascertain parental beliefs about the type of child care they chose. The first set of questions with regard to parental observation was developed quantitatively, but is discussed with the qualitative data because it gave additional information regarding parental rationales or reasons for choosing one type of child care over another. A complete copy of the questions is found in Appendix A.

Parental observation. First, the questions (#B1-#B4) were given to the parents in this sample to identify whether parents had spent time observing the program they chose prior to enrolling in it. Then, parents were asked to identify as many items as they considered reasons for program observation they chose. Parents ( $n=36$ ) in this sample who had observed the program they chose prior to the enrollment responded to the following categories as to why they observed: observation of adult-child interaction ( $n=33$ ); observation of toys and materials available ( $n=31$ ); observation at the suggestion of director/staff ( $n=11$ ); observation at the suggestion of friends of family ( $n=14$ ); observation of safety and cleanliness ( $n=9$ ).

Open-ended questions. On the survey, parents were asked to address their reasons for choosing the type of child care program over another on a series of open-ended questions (Question #C8-#C10). Thirty parents from the total sample ( $n=48$ ) in this study gave their responses. Some common themes or patterns in the groups of parents' responses were revealed. The following phrases are parents' direct responses to these open ended questions. "Close and intimate interactions of caregivers with children", "family-oriented atmospheres", "more flexible program schedules", and "good

reputation” were revealed by parents as their main reasons for choosing family or group home care settings over center-based care. For parents using center-based care settings, the issues of “sanitation”, “safety”, and “diversity” as well as the dimensions of “educational/structural program” and “professional staff” were found as main reasons for the type of selection. Among the parents who combined two types of child care programs, the type of center care was their primary choice during weekdays while they were using the family or group home care on special occasions (e.g., holidays, weekends). Ensuring structural/educational programs for children, providing a family-like environment for children, and fitting their working schedules were found as main reasons for combining the two types of child care selection. For example, one parent combining the two types of child care said, “I chose this type of care because it can provide both educational program and family-like environment for my child.”

### Summary of Results

This study was designed to examine factors influencing parents’ types of child care settings. This study sought to explore demographic, child care program, and parental perceptions of program characteristics which might be related to parents’ choices of child care selection for their infants and toddlers. Statistically significant results found were that parents using center-based care settings reported access to written child care resources as being more influential to their child care decision than parents using family day care settings. Also, parents using center-based care settings ranked child care referrals (e.g., discussion of the personnel in child care resources and referral agencies) as being significantly more influential in their selection of center-based care than parents using family day care settings. However, no other significant

differences were found in comparison of how differently two groups of parents using family day care and parents using center-based care settings perceived the influences of both family demographic characteristics (family income and education) and child care program characteristics (program location, cost, and availability) on their child care choices. Also, recommendations of others who had either used the program before or who had not used the program, but believed it was good for children, were also found as being important to both parents using family/group home care or parents using center-based care settings. However, no significant differences were found between parents using family day care settings and parents using center-based care settings in the identification of the influence of this variable on their child care choices. Qualitative explanations of parents' beliefs about child care settings revealed that parents who stressed the importance of close/loving environments for their children reflected this in their child care decision and chose family day care settings, while parents who emphasized the significance of safety and sanitation as well as educational programs for their children selected center-based care settings.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study, the parents system, the major microsystem was examined as it related to choices of types of child care arrangements. Six research questions and seven hypotheses were tested. First, contrary to the findings from other studies (e.g., Atkinson, 1994; Johansen et al., 1996), parents' selection of child care type (Hypothesis 1-2) did not vary as a function of family income and education. In closer examination of family income and education in this study, almost 50% of the total sample reported an annual family income of less than \$20,000, but 77% of the total sample attained at least a four year college degree. This finding is surprising since higher education is typically associated with higher income. How can families with income under \$20,000 afford to pay for care in either center or family day care for their young children? The federal child care (FCC) tax credit may influence a parent's choice of care if parents are eligible (e.g., mother is working or has a working spouse) for claiming the credit (Johansen et al., 1996). This was supported by Hofferth and Wissoker's (1992) study which found that family income appeared unrelated to parents' child care decisions and many low income and working poor families received subsidies (e.g., federal child care tax credit). Also not all types of care are eligible for this tax credit because payments to in-house caretakers (e.g., care by relatives or father) often are not reported to the IRS (Johansen et al., 1996).

Next, for child care program characteristics (Research Question 4), program location, cost, and availability were selected by the parents across the sample as being "very influential", reported by 44%, 51%, and 66% respectively. Given the

percentages (44%, 51%, and 66%) among these characteristics (location, cost, and availability), it supports the findings of previous studies (Galinsky, 1994; Fuller, et al., 1996; Johansen et al., 1996; Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999) that adults' needs (such as hours of operation, cost, and location) were rated as influential in parents' child care choices. However, parents using family day care or center care did not differ significantly in their ranking of these child program characteristics. This finding is not consistent with those of other studies (e.g., Long, 1983; Johansen et al., 1996; Lerner, 1996) which reported parents using family day care rated their child care program characteristics as being more influential than parents using center-based care because of the flexibility of extendible hours, relatively low cost, and convenient location associated with family or group home care for their infants or toddlers. One possible explanation is that these two types of care do not differ substantially in practice. Center-based care settings included in this study may also offer the flexibility of extendible hours, relatively low cost, or convenient location that were usually expected to be related with care at family or group home care. Another explanation is that this study only included licensed care settings (center and family day care) by a non-relative caregiver outside the child's home, unlike other studies (Atkinson, 1994; Fuller et al., 1996) which included other alternative forms of care (e.g., care by relatives or baby-sitters) and reported parents' types of child care varied according to these child care program characteristics.

With regard to parental identifications of and perceptions of the influences of formal program (e.g., written child care resources such as flyers, brochures, parent information handbook, or referrals) on their child care decision making (hypothesis 5-

6), 38% of parents in the total sample ranked the written child care information as very influential. This finding confirms the findings from previous studies (e.g., Long, 1983; Atkinson, 1994; Zinzeleta & Little, 1997) which reported many parents did not rate these types of resources and referrals as being influential to their child care decision. Previous research (e.g., Zinzeleta & Little, 1997) showed that parents' attitudes toward these types of resources were not positive, and they were more likely to rely on their own beliefs and values than these resources (e.g., flyers, brochures, or parent information handbook) and referrals when choosing their child care. Further, parents using center-based care reported that they had more access to written child care resources and referrals available from the community than parents using family or group home care and ranked this access as being more influential to their child care choices than their counterparts did. This information implies that these resources may be more available in center settings than in more informal family day care settings when parents may rely more on recommendations of others, although this was not supported in this study.

The results of this study suggest parents' child care choices were influenced by the word of mouth from their relatives, coworkers, friends, or neighbors, though no significant differences were found between the two groups of parents' perceptions of these influences on their child care choices. However, parental perceptions of influences of these variables on their child care decision using retrospective data should be examined carefully. Retrospective data can not determine the process of how factors/variables (studied in this study) were considered in relation to one another when parents made their child care choices. In other words, it cannot explain how parents

actually consider each variable while they are searching for care, how the importance of variables might change during the process of searching for care, and how other factors may be related to this change. Other studies using retrospective data also found (Hofferth et al., 1990; Atkinson, 1994; Fuller, 1996) that parents are very likely to consult friends and relatives for advice when they search for child care, but they did not examine parents' selection of child care type (center vs. family day care) as a function of this variable (recommendations of others). This evidence brings up the issue that parents without social networks may need assistance in finding their child care. How do parents who are new to a community or who do not have a social network obtain information in choosing their child care? More research is needed to specify parents' selection of child care type including other alternative types of care (e.g., in-home care by babysitters or relatives) as a function of these variables using a larger sample.

Both groups of parents who responded to the qualitative question, whether they were using family day care or center-based care, seemed that they had their own rationales or reasons for choosing one type of care over another. The evidence on the qualitative data of this study supported this, but it limits in generalizing because very few parents responded to the question. Parents who placed high values on close interactions with the caregivers chose family day care, while parents who stressed structural (e.g., ratio of child to caregiver) /educational (e.g., curriculum) and safety aspects of child care selected center-based care. Information obtained through these qualitative data implies that parents do not perceive all of these elements as being found in one place. For examples, a certain parents' belief (elicited from the actual parents' response such as "a home-like environment is important") was shown to be a parent's

preference of a certain type of care over another (e.g., family day care). However, parental beliefs as a causal effect on their behaviors of child care decision should be examined carefully with retrospective data. Examining the direction of causality between parental beliefs about type of care and child care decision behaviors remains unclear using retrospective data in this study. As Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (1999) pointed out, parents may choose a child care program first and then construct beliefs in order to self-rationalize their child care decision. It may be possible that parents would reported different beliefs before they made a child care choice, but later their beliefs were changed to confirm their child care decision. In addition, Lerner (1994) pointed out (in Ispa et al., 1998) that parents are likely to be particularly concerned about child care characteristics (e.g., safety, cleanliness, or educational curriculum) they perceive to be problematic. Parents may think a clean and safe environment is all infants/toddlers needs. At the same time, extra efforts are needed to educate parents to consider all of the facets of the early childhood education as being equally important to their types of child care selection. The development of literature for parents' brochures in knowing what good care looks like is also needed. There is much information available, but perhaps parents do not know where to find the information. Though this study did not address the quality issue of the early childhood program, disseminating information especially developed for parents to help them determine whether or not the child care environment available to them meet their needs as well as acceptable standards of quality is imperative. All of the elements (e.g., safety, cleanliness, staff-child close interaction, and educational/structural curriculum) that were stressed by parents of this study should be in place in every type of child care setting. In summary, results of this

study addressed the importance of parents' social network (e.g., access to child care resources and referrals available from the community and recommendations of others) as related to parents' selection of child care type. Like other studies, child care program characteristics such as program location, cost, and availability were still influential to parents' child care choices, but it did not differentiate parents' selection of child care type. Qualitative data show that parents did not perceive all of the facets of the early childhood education as being equally important in every type of child care setting. Parent education as well as the development of and dissemination of child care information are needed.

### Limitations

The primary purpose of this exploratory study was to collect information about the contextual factors of the mesosystemic connection between the family system and the system of day care as related to parental selection of types of child care. Due to the small sample size and purposive sampling in nature, the researcher is limited in generalizing the findings in this study. Another limitation of the study is the use of the research instrument. This study collected self-reported data through the Survey Questionnaire. How these self-reports reflect actual parents' child care decision making is unknown. As addressed earlier, retrospective data cannot determine how parents actually consider each characteristic while they are searching for care. Explaining how the importance of various characteristics might change during the process of searching for care and how other factors may be related to this change is unclear. Further, using retrospective data is unclear to explain the stability of parents' beliefs about the type of care (e.g., "a home-like environment") and influences (e.g., age of the child) on this

stability. Finally, this study excluded other alternative types of care such as a non-paid care (by relatives or fathers) which represents significant parties of care for infants and toddlers. It limits the generalizability of our results pertaining to parents' types of child care choices for infants or toddlers.

### Implications for Future Research

Given the results of this study, these are several recommendations for extensions of this research. First, in order to extend the generalizability of the study findings, future research needs to be extended to a larger population. Next, the present study included only two parent full time working families and how they chose child care for their infants or toddlers. Future research is needed to fully understand how the marital status and age of child influence parental child care selection. The present study utilized only self-report retrospective measures to examine variables related to parental child care choices. Employing a prospective design may provide different data. Thus, more research is needed to clarify parents' beliefs in seeking a certain type of care using both prospective and retrospective data. Accordingly, open-ended interviews may provide better assessments of parental beliefs on non-parental types of care than surveys. In keeping with the ecological perspective, future research should address the effect of type of community (rural vs. urban or suburban areas) and parents' childrearing beliefs varying among and within ethnic groups on child care decision making. For example, informal types of care such as in-home care by relatives may be much more common in rural areas (center care may be less available) than in urban or suburban area. Also, parents' values and expectations regarding non-maternal types of

child care vary by cultures that may have important implications for selection of child care type.

## CONSENT FORM

My name is Sojung Seo, and I am a graduate student at Michigan State University. I am conducting a survey on how parents choose child care. I am interested in what factors influenced your choice in selecting child care for your infant or toddler.

If you choose to participate in this study, the Parent Survey Questionnaire should take 10-15 minutes to complete. There are no right and wrong answers. This is the only form that you will be asked to complete in this study.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to answer certain questions or discontinue the survey at any time without penalty of any kind to you and your child. All responses will be treated as confidential, and you will remain anonymous in any report of research findings. You do not need to write your name on the Parent Survey Questionnaire.

Your participation is really important in completing my academic program in child development. Please take your time to complete the survey. Your responses will provide valuable information about parents' concerns in choosing child care for their children. Stamped, addressed envelopes are included so your survey package, including this consent form, can be returned to me or you can return it directly to the director of your program.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your participation in the study, you may telephone Dr. Holly Brophy-Herb at Michigan State University at 517-353-1664 or the researcher, Sojung Seo, at 517-333-4319.

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

---

I agree to participate in this project by completing this consent form and the attached survey.

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Your Name

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Child Care Program

---

Your Signature

---

Date

Program Code #: \_\_\_\_\_

## **PARENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Instructions**

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire. This survey is to identify factors influencing parents' choice of child care arrangements for their infants and toddlers.

Some parents choose a center-based program and other parents choose a family/home day care program for their children. It seems likely that there is no one best kind of program for every parent. I would like you to help me prove if this is true.

The following questions have no right or wrong answers. Your responses will be confidential. I greatly appreciate your willingness to provide candid answers and share your opinions about your decision in selecting this child care setting.

Program Code #: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Measurement of Factors influencing Dual career parents' Choice of Types of Child care Arrangements**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your Child's Age: \_\_\_\_\_  
(please specify in months)

Family day care is broadly defined to include care in the home of a non-relative (called a caregiver), and has recently been taken more seriously by professionals.

Center-based care (either or profit or not-for profit) is defined to include group care for children in a non-resident setting for all or part of a day. It is either for profit or not-for profit centers.

**Please check out the type of care you are using for your child now.**

- ☐ **We are using center-based care for my children.**
- ☐ **We are using family day care for my children.**
- ☐ **We are using both type of center-based and family day care for my children.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Please specify)

## **Section A**

This section is designed to address the factors that influenced your choice in choosing a certain type of child care arrangement.

When you made a decision on choosing a certain type of child care for your children, what were the factors that influenced your decision? Please check each item that accurately reflects factors you considered in choosing your child care. Please feel free to add additional explanations, if any.

A1. I chose child care for my child for the following reasons:

(Check all that apply)

- ☐ The location was convenient.
- ☐ The cost or fee of the program was reasonable or affordable
- ☐ The hours that the program was open fit my needs.
- ☐ I had previous experience using this program for another child.
- ☐ Neighbors, friends, or relatives also used this program for their children.
- ☐ Recommendations of neighbors, coworkers, other parents, or relatives who had not used this program.
- ☐ An agency (e.g., child care resources and referrals) in the community or workplace recommended it to us.
- ☐ Other: (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

A2. What were the most influential factors in your selection of child care (center based or family/home care)?

Please indicate how significant each of the factors was to your decision making in choosing this type of care.

For the following questions indicate 1 - 5 as it applies to you

Not influential	Less influential	Influential	Very influential	Most influential
1	2	3	4	5

- ☐ The location was convenient.
- ☐ The cost or fee of the program was reasonable.
- ☐ The hours that the day care was open fit my needs.
- ☐ I had the previous experience using this program for another child.
- ☐ Neighbors, friends, or relatives also used this program for their children.
- ☐ Recommendations of neighbors, coworkers, other parents, or relatives who had not used this program.
- ☐ An agency (e.g., child care resources and referrals in the community or workplaces) recommended it to us.
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

(Please specify)

**Section B**

The following questions focus on how you gathered information about your child care program.

B1. Did you spend time observing this program before choosing it?

☐ Yes

☐ No

B2. Please estimate the amount of time you observed the child care prior to enrolling your child in this setting.

☐ I did not observe it (Go to #B4 question)

☐ Less than a half hour

☐ A half hour - an hour

☐ More than an hour

B3. Why did you observe the program?

(Check all that apply)

☐ I wanted to see how adults interacted with children

☐ I wanted to see what kinds of materials were available.

☐ Friends or family suggested I observe the program.

☐ The program director /staff suggested I observe the program

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

(Please specify)

B4. If you did not observe the program, please describe why?

(Check all that apply)

☐ It did not seem important.

☐ I did not think of it/ no one suggested it.

☐ I did not have the time/ my work schedule would not allow time off.

☐ The program director/staff did not seem to support parent observation.

☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

(Please specify)

**B5. When I was trying to find child care, I was given printed information that was available from a community agency (e.g., child care resources and referrals), workplace, or child care program setting.**

\_\_\_\_ Yes (Go to # B6 question )

\_\_\_\_ No (Go to # B8 question)

**B6. Please indicate how influential any printed information (e.g., program brochure, flyers, or parent handbook) that you received was to your decision making in choosing child care: \_\_\_\_\_**

1	2	3	4	5
Not influential	Less influential	Influential	Very influential	Most influential

**B7. Please indicate how influential these following sources of information you received were to your choice in child care type?**

1	2	3	4	5
Not influential	Less influential	Influential	Very influential	Most influential

- \_\_\_\_ Discussion with the personnel in child care resources and referrals agencies.
- \_\_\_\_ Discussion with friends, coworkers, or other parents who had used the service
- \_\_\_\_ Recommendations of friends, coworkers, relatives, or other parents who had not used the service but believed the day care was a good place for children.
- \_\_\_\_ Reading an Orientation Packet for Parents
- \_\_\_\_ Reading written information that was available to community resources (e.g., flyers or newsletters)
- \_\_\_\_ Observing the program
- \_\_\_\_ Previous experience with the program
- \_\_\_\_ Discussion with the child care center director and/ or caregivers

- B8. If you use a center-based child care program, please specify the reasons why you chose this type of care over family/home care?**

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- B9. If you use a family/home care, please specify the reasons why you chose this type of care over a center-based care?**

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- B10. If you use both center care and family/home care for your child why do you combine two types of child care?**

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**Section C**

Please tell me a little about your family.

For each question, please check the one response most appropriate for you.

C1. I am the            1[ ] mother  
                             2[ ] father

C2. Your age:  
       1[ ] 18-25 years old                            4[ ] 42-49 years old  
       2[ ] 26-33 years old                           5[ ] 50-57 years old  
       3[ ] 34-41 years old                           6[ ] 58+ years old

C3. What is the highest level of education you have completed?  
       1[ ] 8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> grade                            4[ ] bachelors degree  
       2[ ] high school diploma or GED           5[ ] masters degree  
       3[ ] associates degree                        6[ ] doctoral degree

C4. Total household income:  
                              1[ ] less than \$20,000                    5[ ] \$80,000 - 100,000  
                              2[ ] \$20,000 - 40,000                       6[ ] \$100,000 - 120,000  
                              3[ ] \$40,000 - 60,000                       7[ ] \$120,000 +  
                              4[ ] \$60,000 - 80,000

C5. What is your ethnicity?  
       ——— Caucasian  
       ——— African-American  
       ——— Hispanic- American  
       ——— Asian-American  
       Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

C6. How many children live in your household?

C7. How many adults live in your household including biological parents?

C8. How long have you lived in this community?

**Questions C9-11 are asking information about your spouse/ partner.**

**C9. Your spouse/partner's age is:**

1[ ] 18-25 years old

4[ ] 42-49 years old

2[ ] 26-33 years old

5[ ] 50-57 years old

3[ ] 34-41 years old

6[ ] 58+ years old

**C10. What is the highest level of education your spouse/partner has completed?**

1[ ] 8<sup>th</sup> - 11<sup>th</sup> grade

4[ ] bachelors degree

2[ ] high school diploma or GED

5[ ] masters degree

3[ ] associates degree

6[ ] doctoral degree

**C11. What is your spouse/partner's ethnicity?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian

\_\_\_\_\_ African-American

\_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic- American

\_\_\_\_\_ Asian-American

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!**

**MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

April 23, 1999

TO Dr Holly BRCPHY-HERB  
203 F Human Ecology

RE IRB# 99143 CATEGORY: 1-C

APPROVAL DATE: April 12, 1999

TITLE: FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTS' CHOICE OF TYPES OF CHILD CARE  
ARRANGEMENTS: AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete and I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS approved this project.

**RENEWALS:** UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Projects continuing beyond one year must be renewed with the green renewal form. A maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for a complete review.

**REVISIONS:** UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB# and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

**PROBLEMS/CHANGES:** Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, notify UCRIHS promptly: 1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or 2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 517 355-2180 or via email: [UCRIHS@pilot.msu.edu](mailto:UCRIHS@pilot.msu.edu). Please note that all UCRIHS forms are located on the web: <http://www.msu.edu/univprgs/UCRIHS/>



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Sincerely,

David E. Wright, Ph.D.  
UCRIHS Chair

DEW: bd

cc: SoJung Seo

By Michigan State University  
Office of Research Involving  
Human Subjects

MSU is an affirmative action  
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