

Public Abstract

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Title:Falling Through the Cracks: Child Care Decision-Making Among the Working Poor

The aim of this study was to discover how barriers influence working poor parents' child care selection criteria, satisfaction with child care choice, and continuity of care for their young children. In order to empower working poor families to make the best child care decisions for their young children, the barriers facing parents when choosing care must be better understood. Factors which may act as barriers include: lack of work, family and caregiver flexibility; transportation and affordability challenges; and lack of social support and financial assistance with child care.

Data were collected from parents by survey distribution at local community agencies in one Mid-Missouri county. Data from 154 surveys were analyzed using logistic regression and study hypotheses were supported: Parents with more barriers were more likely to report imperfect satisfaction and continuity of care, as well as a discrepancy in the importance of quality and logistical characteristics when choosing care in an ideal versus real world setting. The two barriers that most predicted negative outcomes were lack of social support and financial assistance. Implications for social work practice and policy include improving access to financial assistance with child care and social support networks for working poor families. Future research could pursue further development of a child care social support measure, more exploration of how child care subsidy experiences influence family outcomes, and understanding how well connected early childhood systems can produce better outcomes for children and families.