



Neighborhood context and center-based child care use: Does immigrant status matter?☆

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ABSTRACT

This study examined associations between individual families' use of center-based child care and neighborhood structure (concentrated poverty and concentrated affluence, as measured with Census data), processes, and resources (child-centered collective efficacy, presence of friends/kin, and availability of services for children, as measured in a survey of neighborhood residents). The potential moderating role of family immigrant status also was investigated. Data were obtained from the 3-year-old cohort of the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods ($N = 999$; 42% immigrant). Multilevel models accounting for background factors at the individual level revealed that greater neighborhood concentrated affluence was associated with families' higher likelihood of using center-based child care, whereas greater neighborhood child-centered collective efficacy was associated with their lower likelihood of using this type of care. In addition, among immigrant families only, as the size of neighborhood friends/kin networks increased, the likelihood of participating in center-based child care programs was higher. Findings are discussed in terms of the potential for improving immigrant families' access to center-based child care by reducing neighborhood structural barriers and fostering neighborhood networks.

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1. Introduction

Immigration to the United States is expected to continue increasing in the coming decades, but already 24% of children three years of age and younger are from immigrant families, that is, families with at least one parent born outside the United States (U.S. Census Bureau Population Division, 2014; Urban Institute, 2015). These young immigrant children are less likely to participate in center-based child care than their nonimmigrant peers (Crosnoe, 2007; Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2011; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). This difference in early experiences may have significant ramifications for the two groups: On average, immigrant children in the United States begin kindergarten at an academic disadvantage relative to their nonimmigrant peers (Han, 2008; Magnuson, Lahaie, & Waldfogel, 2006). Given the importance of early education opportunities in setting children on a positive academic trajectory

in elementary school, understanding the differential enrollment of immigrant and nonimmigrant children in center-based child care is essential. This information can assist practitioners and policy-makers in identifying strategies that maximize the school readiness of the large and growing population of immigrant young children (Marks, Ejese, & García Coll, 2014; Perreira & Ornelas, 2011; Pong & Landale, 2012).

Neighborhoods are a key context that may help explain variation in children's participation in center-based child care as a function of immigrant status (García Coll & Szalacha, 2004; Miller, Votruba-Drzal, Coley, & Koury, 2014; Portes & Rumbaut, 1996). Despite the fact that neighborhoods are often hypothesized to be important for immigrant families, few studies examine the specific aspects of neighborhoods that may matter for immigrant families with young children, notably the neighborhood circumstances that might promote or inhibit use of center-based child care (Leventhal & Shuey, 2014; White, Burlinson, Pasco, & Nair, 2016). Increasing residential segregation between immigrants and nonimmigrants is likely to exacerbate many of the differences between communities that historically are home to one group or the other (Cutler, Glaeser, & Vigdor, 2008; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), raising the imperative of illuminating how neighborhood conditions may matter for families.

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The goal of this study is to address whether neighborhood conditions are associated with families' use of center-based child care and whether these associations are moderated by immigrant status. Consistent with the majority of research on immigrant young children, we consider children who have at least one foreign-born parent to be "immigrants" and children with only U.S.-born parents to be "nonimmigrants" (see [Crosnoe & Fuligni, 2012](#); [Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011](#)). We expand on past theoretical and empirical literature on immigrant families' use of center-based child care by examining multiple aspects of neighborhood structure (e.g., concentrated poverty and concentrated affluence) and processes and resources (e.g., child-centered collective efficacy, presence of friends/kin, and services for children).

1.1. Conceptual background

The conceptual framework for this study is rooted in the bioecological model ([Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006](#)), recognizing that neighborhoods, child care, and individual family characteristics are dynamic and interactive parts of the developmental system. In addition, the study framework draws heavily from the integrative model of development for minority children proposed by [García Coll et al. \(1996\)](#) and [García Coll and Szalacha \(2004\)](#). This model situates children within a stratified society, emphasizing the roles of social position and segregation in setting minority and immigrant children apart from nonimmigrant European American children, with special attention to how these types of stratification occur in schools and neighborhoods. In addition, we rely on a broad definition of neighborhoods as distinct geographic areas that provide "a proximal social context in which children and families engage... with individuals and institutions that control access to opportunities and resources" ([Leventhal, Dupéré, & Shuey, 2015, p. 494](#)).

Using this framework, the study considers how contexts of development beyond the family (i.e., neighborhoods) are associated with families' use of center-based child care and the moderating role of immigrant status (see [Fig. 1](#)). [Fig. 1](#) depicts the complexity and interdependence of various child, family, and neighborhood characteristics, suggesting all play a role in determining families' use of center-based child care. [Fig. 1](#) also acknowledges that family characteristics are linked to neighborhood characteristics, due to families' varying constraints and choices that determine neighborhood residence. Given the mutual influence of neighborhood and family characteristics on one another, we do not attempt to address causality in this study. Rather, we consider family characteristics when examining neighborhood associations with use of center-based child care to mitigate selection bias associated with both neighborhood residence and use of center-based child care. Selection bias occurs because children from different family backgrounds are neither equally likely to live in comparable neighborhoods, nor are they equally likely to participate in center-based child care (see [Burchinal, Magnuson, Powell, & Hong, 2015](#); [Leventhal et al., 2015](#)). Thus, the conceptual model identifies specific family characteristics noted in past literature that are associated with families' differential access to residential neighborhoods and/or center-based child care use.

1.2. Neighborhoods and child care

Center-based child care options are less available in less-advantaged neighborhoods ([Burchinal, Nelson, Carlson, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008](#); [Hatfield, Lower, Cassidy, & Faldowski, 2015](#)), and families are more likely to use care that is locally available ([Coley, Votruba-Drzal, Collins, & Miller, 2014](#)). Nonetheless, [Ha and Ybarra \(2014\)](#) found that neighborhood poverty was more important in predicting families' use of center-based child care than the neigh-

borhood supply of child care. This finding from the Los Angeles Families and Neighborhoods Survey, a neighborhood-based study, raises the possibility that neighborhood conditions may matter for families' child care decisions even within a constrained market.

Neighborhood structural features, like poverty and associated conditions (e.g., unemployment and single-parenthood), are generally thought to give rise to neighborhood social dynamics that may affect families' child-rearing strategies more directly, including their decisions about child care ([Leventhal et al., 2015](#)). For instance, a study in North Carolina found that the quality of center-based child care programs was lower in neighborhoods with greater residential stability ([Hatfield et al., 2015](#)). Collective efficacy theory argues that social cohesion and social control (the components of collective efficacy) are likely to be higher in communities with greater residential stability and racial/ethnic homogeneity ([Sampson, 2009](#)). Consistent with this idea, [Hatfield et al. \(2015\)](#) suggest their findings may be due to parents in more stable communities having greater trust in neighbors as sources of child care, thereby lowering demand for high-quality regulated child care programs. Unfortunately, as is often the case due to the difficulty of measuring neighborhood social processes (see [Leventhal et al., 2015](#) for a thorough discussion of these challenges), this hypothesis could not be tested directly. The current study is an effort to address this limitation in the literature by including assessments of neighborhood social processes.

In the few studies that have looked beyond neighborhood structural conditions to include neighborhood social processes, results demonstrate that neighborhood social dynamics play a role in families' child care decisions ([Burchinal et al., 2008](#); [Chaudry et al., 2011](#); [Yoshikawa & Kholoptseva, 2013](#)). Findings from a study using the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN) reveal that larger neighborhood social networks were associated with families' lower likelihood of using family child care settings over parental care, but conversely, in neighborhoods with greater collective efficacy, families were more likely to use family child care settings than parental care ([Burchinal et al., 2008](#)). This pattern of findings suggests neighborhood social networks, comprising family and friends, and broader neighborhood social processes like collective efficacy may factor differently into families' child care choices; however, whether these neighborhood characteristics matter for use of center-based care remains unclear.

Although neighborhood research typically focuses on areas of concentrated poverty and related social disadvantage, neighborhood socioeconomic *advantage* also may be meaningful for families' use of local resources like center-based child care ([Dupéré, Leventhal, Crosnoe, & Dion, 2010](#); [Kohen, Leventhal, Dahinten, & McIntosh, 2008](#)). Further, quality child care (both center-based and family child care homes) is generally more prevalent in more advantaged neighborhoods ([Hatfield et al., 2015](#)), potentially making it more desirable for families to access than in neighborhoods where overall quality is lower. In contrast to neighborhood concentrated poverty, neighborhood advantage assesses the degree to which well-educated neighbors with higher status jobs and high incomes are concentrated in the neighborhood. Such neighbors may be motivated to advocate for high-quality institutions like center-based child care in the local area, both as a means of investing in their children and as an employment support for dual-income households ([Lareau, 2011](#)). In recent years, the concentration of advantage has grown more rapidly than the concentration of poverty within neighborhoods, contributing to increasing social stratification at the neighborhood level ([Reardon & Bischoff, 2011](#)).

Public resources often are targeted to impoverished neighborhoods, and private resources may be more plentiful in affluent neighborhoods, with more middle-income neighborhoods being at a particular disadvantage in regard to institutional resources such as child care ([Hatfield et al., 2015](#); [National Survey of Early Care](#)

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