

Dynamic family networks and child care arrangements over time: An ethnographic perspective



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Background

- Increase in maternal employment (U.S. Department of HHS, 2002)
- Expanded need for child care
- Diversity and amount of care arrangements among low-income mothers (Chaudry, 2004; Nelson, 2006)
- Use of kin and kin care among low-income mothers (Chaudry, 2004; Nelson, 2006)
- Need for greater understanding of how changes in family resources and composition impact child care arrangements

Theoretical framework

- Kinwork perspective (Stack & Burton, 1993)
 - ▣ Intergenerational responsibilities
 - ▣ Reinforcement of shared values
- “Keeping families together” (DiLeonardo, 1987)
- Improve children’s life chances through personal connections with kin



Research questions

How do low-income mothers
utilize family and friends to
secure
child care?

How do changes in the lives
of
kinworkers - and shifting quality
of
their relationships with mothers
-
shape child care
arrangements?



Welfare, Children, and Families: A Three City Study

The Design

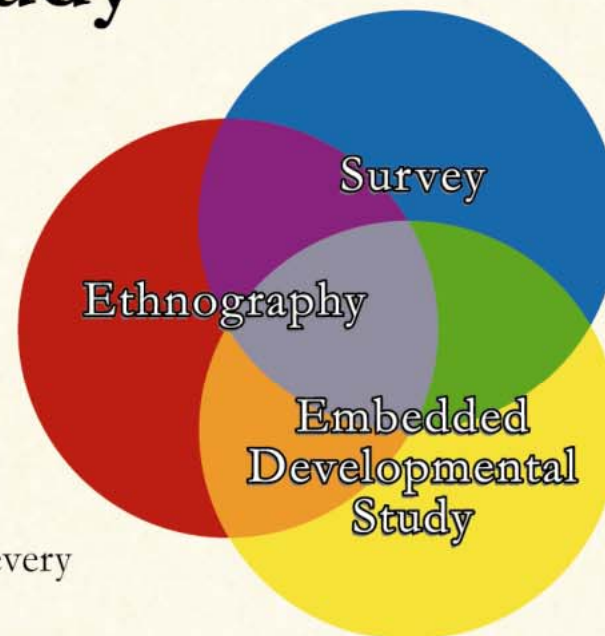
Ethnography

Family and Neighborhood

- 256 African American, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Non-Hispanic White Families, with target child age 2 to 4, interviewed 18 to 24 months
- Follow-up interviews will take place every 6 months until completion of study
- TANF and Non-TANF
- 45 Families with a child under 8 years old with a disability
- 29 Neighborhoods

Embedded Developmental Study

- Subsample of the families in the survey
- 700 young children age 2 to 4 and their caregivers
- Home observations and child care observations every 18 months



Survey

- 2,402 Families
- Estimated 40% on TANF
- Estimated 80% of families with current incomes below poverty; 20% between the poverty line and 200% of the poverty line
- Structured interviews every 18 months

Methods: Sample

- 170 families from Boston (n=60); Chicago (n=60); and San Antonio (n=50)
- Focal child, 18 months-4 years old
- Racial-ethnic diversity: African American (38%); Latino (42%); Non-Latino White (20%)
- Household incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line

Data collection & analyses

- Qualitative approach
 - Focus on meaning, process, and context
- Structured discovery
 - Ethnographers met with families monthly for 18 months, then once every 6 months for one year
 - In-depth interviews and observations of families in their daily routines
- Analyses
 - Development of child care timelines and profiles as analytic tools
 - Three levels of coding: open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)

Utilization of kin networks for care

- Kin care as convenient arrangement
- Flexible types of care
 - ▣ secondary care
 - ▣ bridge care in transition
- Kin as sources of information about care

You can't really trust people with your kids - especially not a newborn! If you don't have teenage kids like I got, then who's going to keep your baby and treat her right? (Michelle Chicago)



Changes in lives of kin careworkers

- Trust of kin and need for flexible, affordable child care
- Unexpected changes in the lives of kinworkers
 - ▣ Relocation and mobility
 - ▣ Kinworker employment
 - ▣ Health and well-being of kinworker

Strategies to stabilize care networks

- Establishment of normative reciprocity
- Linkage of care to family life
 - ▣ Obligations as grandparents, fathers, godparents, coresidential friends, or partners
- Timing and sequencing
 - ▣ Appeal as time-bound and limited to non-primary care



Discussion

- Links between mothers and kin careworkers are *dynamic*
- Need for care but also level of trust and comfort with family and friends
- Child care arrangements as “choices”?
 - ▣ Informal and unpredictable due to changes in kinworkers’ lives
- Survival strategies
 - ▣ Arrangements tailored to reciprocal exchange, timing, and sequencing

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