
CHILD CARE USE IN PUBLIC ASSISTANCE HOUSEHOLDS

Because more than half of all mothers nationwide who have children under age 18 now work outside the home, child care has become a work-related issue. It is also an important issue for public assistance policy. This paper uses Family Income Study data to examine child care use among public assistance households and a comparison group of households at risk of receiving assistance in 1988. To illustrate more current child care patterns, we describe child care use of those households from the original 1988 public assistance sample that also received public assistance in 1991. These three analysis groups are described in more detail in the Appendix.

Findings

- **Despite significant differences in household characteristics between the public assistance and at-risk groups in 1988, their child care use patterns were very similar.**
- **Most public assistance households used informal child care.** In 1988, 73 percent used informal care for their children 0-5 years old. More recently, 65 percent of the original public assistance sample who were on assistance in 1991 used informal care. Informal care is given by a relative, a non-relative (such as a neighbor), or a parent who works at home or cares for the child at work.
- **There was a shift toward more use of formal child care among public assistance households between 1988 and 1991.** In 1988, 22 percent used formal child care for their children 0-5 years old. In 1991, 35 percent of the public assistance households used formal care. Formal care takes place in a licensed family home, a preschool, or a child care center.
- **In 1988, 78 percent of public assistance households were satisfied with their child care arrangement.** Households using informal or formal care reported the same level of satisfaction.