Cover Sheet

Title: Childcare Hardship in Iowa

Dates: June 15-25 and June 29-August 31, 2020

Applicant Information:

1) Megan Ronnenberg, Doctoral Student, Social Work, 308 North Hall, megan-ronnenberg@uiowa.edu

Abstract:

The 2018 State Innovation Model (SIM) Household Survey shows that approximately 21% of Iowa households with children experienced at least one *childcare hardship*, or constrained childcare choices due to availability or cost of childcare. Childcare hardship describes the impact of cost and availability on the childcare decisions of caregivers. However, we do not know which Iowans are most likely to experience childcare hardship, or whether there are differences among demographic groups. This is problematic because childcare hardship may have negative consequences for parental employment and subsequent financial outcomes. Using data from the 2018 State Innovation Model (SIM) Household Survey, I propose to 1) describe the prevalence of childcare hardship among Iowans, 2) identify groups at higher risk for childcare hardship, and 3) create a disseminate a policy brief and peer-reviewed journal article based on results.

Childcare Hardship in Iowa

What do you propose to do? The purpose of our research is to describe the prevalence of childcare hardship across the State of Iowa. *Childcare hardship* occurs when a caregiver's choice of childcare is constrained by availability or cost of childcare in their community. Initial analysis of the 2018 State Innovation Model (SIM) Household Survey data shows that approximately 21% of Iowa households with children experienced at least one childcare hardship related to cost or availability, however we do not know which Iowans are most at risk for childcare hardship, or whether there are differences in childcare hardship across demographic groups. Using data from the 2018 SIM, I propose to 1) describe the prevalence of childcare hardship among Iowans, 2) identify groups at higher risk for childcare hardship, and 3) create a disseminate a policy brief and peer-reviewed journal article based on results. The proposed project contributes to the literature on childcare affordability and availability by describing the prevalence of childcare hardship among all genders, ages, incomes, racial groups, education levels, and employment categories. Previous studies have focused primarily on childcare use among mothers, low-income households, and families of a non-white racial status (Abrassart & Bonoli, 2015; Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; Tekin, 2007).

Why is it important and policy-relevant? Caregivers who have difficulty accessing childcare may experience negative consequences related to employment and subsequently may have difficulty paying for food, healthcare, and other essential goods and services. We already know that there is a shortage of childcare in Iowa. In 2018, approximately 23% of Iowans lived in a *childcare desert*, or an area where the number of young children exceeds the number of licensed childcare spaces by 3 to 1 (Malik et al., 2018). Childcare deserts are widespread across the United States, but have been documented at higher prevalence in communities with high proportions of low-income, rural, and non-white residents. While it is important for us to know where childcare shortages exist, this information does not tell us how caregivers experience childcare hardship, or how childcare hardship impacts their childcare decisions. In response, the SIM measures of childcare hardship account for how often respondents' childcare choices were influenced by cost and/or availability of care in the previous 12 months.

Although 21% of households with children in Iowa experienced childcare hardship in 2018, few Iowans are eligible for financial support programs. Childcare assistance (CCA) grants pay for childcare costs during time spent working or in school, however, eligibility is determined by income and family size. In order to know whether this is problematic, we need to know how Iowans experience childcare hardship across income groups. Even those who receive CCA may experience childcare hardship as many childcare programs struggle to hold spots for CCA recipients due to low reimbursement rates. For example, the average weekly cost of infant care in a licensed center in Iowa is $208.81 (or $41.76 per day), but the maximum reimbursement from the state of Iowa to licensed centers is $21.90 per day for an infant with basic needs (CCR&R, 2019; IDHS, 2018). If childcare hardship is more prevalent among specific demographic groups in Iowa, it may have important policy implications for CCA funding. Because Iowa is a rural state, SIM data provides a unique opportunity to document the prevalence of childcare hardship in both rural and metro areas. This project may have implications for other midwestern states or states with large rural populations.

In addition to policy, this project has implications for community partnerships across the state. Since 2018, a number of statewide agencies have partnered with community leaders across Iowa to create the Building Community Child Care Solutions Collaborative (BCCSC). The goal of the BCCSC is to expand access to affordable childcare in Iowa by building new centers, expanding existing programs, and supporting the childcare workforce (IWF, 2019). Because the availability of childcare is directly related to caregivers' ability to work, the BCCSC has engaged businesses around the state to garner employer support for childcare. The proposed project, particularly the policy brief deliverable, would support their work by highlighting the experience of Iowans with childcare hardship. Once we know who experiences childcare hardship in Iowa, groups like BCCSC may be able to better advocate for more robust supports for those at risk.

What earlier work has been done on the project and related areas?

As a doctoral student from the School of Social Work, my research interest is in the provision of childcare, particularly in underserved communities. I have worked with Dr. Aislinn Conrad on a number of research projects related to material and childcare hardship. Through my work with Dr. Conrad, I was involved in developing new survey items for the 2018 SIM and contributed the childcare hardship questions. As a predoctoral research fellow at the PPC, I was also heavily involved in data analysis and writing for the SIM Summative Evaluation Report (AY2-4) (Heeren, Spinarski, Momany, Conrad, Ronnenberg, & Damiano, 2019).

What will be achieved by the end of the grant period?

Table 1. Timeline for Proposed Project

Phases	**Tasks**	**Deliverables**
Residency (June 15-26)	1. Run descriptive statistics on variables of interest 2. Review literature on childcare hardship and prepare research questions, operationalize study variables 3. Construct study variables, clean and recode data 4. Run analysis **5.** Write initial findings for dissemination	1. Study results 2. Policy brief
Post-residency (June 29-August 31)	1. Identify venues for policy brief dissemination 2. Identify an appropriate peer-reviewed journal for manuscript submission 3. Prepare manuscript for publication 4. Submit manuscript **5.** Plan next steps for childcare hardship	1. Lunch and learn presentation 2. Peer-reviewed manuscript

CURRICULUM VITAE

MEGAN RONNENBERG

Business Address:	University of Iowa School of Social Work 20 W Davenport Street 308 North Hall Iowa City, Iowa 52242
Phone:	319-533-2972
Email:	megan-ronnenberg@uiowa.edu

EDUCATION

2018-Present	PhD, Social Work, University of Iowa **Projected Graduation:** May 2022
2018	M.S.W., Social Work, University of Iowa **Concentration:** Integrated Practice **Degree Conferred:** August 2018, M.S.W.
2011	B.A., Communication Studies, University of Northern Iowa **Degree Conferred:** May 2011

AREAS OF INTEREST

Social work research, early childhood care and education, organizational culture and processes, education policy, program or project evaluation.

TEACHING

August 2019- December 2019	**Instructor,** University of Iowa School of Social Work MSW Computer Laboratory
August 2019- Present	**Teaching Assistant,** University of Iowa School of Social Work MSW Research Practice II *Supervisor:* Dr. Megan Gilster
January 2019- May 2019	**Teaching Practicum**, University of Iowa School of Social Work MSW Research Practice II *Supervisor:* Dr. Christopher Veeh *Responsibilities:* Planned all SPSS activities and assignments for the complementary computer lab course, graded assignments, lectured and facilitated class discussion on hypothesis testing, met individually with students to discuss classroom conduct and professional behaviors, worked with students to address questions related to course materials and assignments.
August 2018- May 2019	**Teaching Assistant,** University of Iowa School of Social Work MSW Research Practice I & II Supervisor: Dr. Christopher Veeh
August 2018- December 2018	**Instructor,** University of Iowa School of Social Work MSW Computer Laboratory

RESEARCH

June 2018-Present
Research Assistant, University of Iowa School of Social Work
Supervisor: Dr. Aislinn Conrad
Responsibilities: Assists with funding search and grant proposals, co-author papers, write and submit conference abstracts, conduct literature searches.

April 2019-December 2019
Predoctoral Research Fellow, University of Iowa Public Policy Center Health Policy Team
Supervisor: Dr. Aislinn Conrad
Responsibilities: Cleaned and managed a large data set, planned and conducted quantitative analyses, interpreted findings and wrote final report, created visual representations of data including tables and graphs, assisted in writing policy briefs.

January 2019-May 2019
Research Practicum, University of Iowa School of Social Work
Supervisor: Dr. Aislinn Conrad
Responsibilities: Conducted literature search and wrote literature review sections for three projects, completed weekly readings on research and data analysis methods, discussed and addressed ethical concerns regarding research projects, analyzed quantitative and qualitative data.

June 2017-December 2018
Project Director, University of Iowa School of Social Work
Exploring social networks and resources of families at risk for adverse childhood experiences
Supervisor: Dr. Aislinn Conrad
Responsibilities: Organized research team meetings and agenda, led data analysis, developed timeline and outline for publication, wrote annotated bibliography and literature review, wrote results section, prepared and submitted final manuscript.

SCHOLARSHIP

Refereed

Gilster, M. E., Kleinschmit, J. L., Cummings, S. P., & **Ronnenberg, M. M**. (2020). Teaching Note—Pick Your Platform: Social Media Advocacy Skill Building. *Journal of Social Work Education*, *56*(1), 170-178.

Ronnenberg, M., Conrad, A., Wojciak, A., & Menninga, E. (2020). The link between adverse childhood experiences, social networks, and mental health services. *Child & Family Social Work.*

Conrad, A., Gamboni, C., Johnson, V., Wojciak, A., & **Ronnenberg, M**. (Accepted). Has the U.S. child welfare system become an informal income maintenance programme?: A literature review. *Child Abuse Review*.

Publications In Progress

2020 Conrad, A., Butcher, B., Oral, R., **Ronnenberg, M.**, & Peek-Asa, C. (Under review). Trends in shaken baby syndrome diagnoses among young children hospitalized for abuse. *Injury Epidemiology.*

PRESENTATIONS

National

2020 Conrad, A., **Ronnenberg, M.,** Butcher, B., Peek-Asa, C. *Shaken Baby Syndrome: Trends in Diagnosed Versus Suspected Incidences Among Children Hospitalized for Treatment*. Annual Conference of the Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR). Washington, D.C.

2019 Conrad, A., & **Ronnenberg, M.** *More Than Therapy: Adverse Childhood Experiences, Social Support, and Access to Mental Health Services.* Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA) Annual Conference. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

2018 Cummings, S. P. *Pick Your Platform: Social Media Skill Building for Social Work Advocacy*. Additional research contribution from Kleinschmit, J. L., Gilster, M. E., & **Ronnenberg, M. M**. Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) Annual Program Meeting. Orlando, Florida.

2018 Kleinschmit, J. L., Gilster, M. E., Cummings, S. P., & **Ronnenberg, M. M.** *Pick Your Platform: Social Media Skill Building for Social Work Advocacy*. Annual Meeting of Social Work Distance Education (SWDE) Conference. San Antonio, Texas.

State

2019 Conrad, A., & **Ronnenberg, M.** (January 26, 2019). *The Link Between Adverse Childhood Experiences, Social Networks, and Mental Health Services.* Mind of a Child, Hawkeye Area Community Action Program (HACAP). Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

2017 **Ronnenberg, M.** *Ending Punitive Practices for our Most Vulnerable Children*. National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Iowa Symposium. Des Moines, Iowa.

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND EMPLOYMENT

January 2017- May 2017	**Practicum Student,** Johnson County Social Services Iowa City, Iowa
March 2013 - June 2015	**Director of Volunteers and Community Involvement,** Orchard Place Des Moines, Iowa
August 2012- November 2012	**Field Organizer,** League of Conservation Voters Denver, Colorado
June 2007 - February 2014	**Lead Teacher,** Children's Corner Childcare Center Cedar Rapids, Iowa
May 2008 - November 2008	**Field Organizer,** Iowa Democratic Party Cedar Rapids, Iowa

MEMBERSHIP

Child Care Solutions Coalition, Iowa City, Iowa
Business and Child Care Partnership Team Leader
2019-Present

Professional Organization Member, National Association of Social Workers
2016-Present

President, Graduate Social Work Student Association
2016-2018