Title: Childcare Hardship in Iowa

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

Applicant Information:
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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?

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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Timeline for Proposed Project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residency (June 15-26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-residency (June 29-August 31)</td>
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CURRICULUM VITAE
MEGAN RONNENBERG

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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

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<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Details</th>
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| 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


### Publications In Progress

PRESENTATIONS

National


State


SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND EMPLOYMENT

January 2017-Practicum Student, Johnson County Social Services
May 2017 Iowa City, Iowa

March 2013 - Director of Volunteers and Community Involvement, Orchard Place
June 2015 Des Moines, Iowa

August 2012 - Field Organizer, League of Conservation Voters
November 2012 Denver, Colorado

June 2007 - Lead Teacher, Children’s Corner Childcare Center
February 2014 Cedar Rapids, Iowa

May 2008 - Field Organizer, Iowa Democratic Party
November 2008 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