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ABATRACT

Employing in-depth interview-based exploratory study, the project examined to understand low-income working mothers using relative care overall, and locate their distinctive perceptions on asking for childcare to relatives by race/ethnicity. The outcome draws recommendations to social workers in low-income rural areas who need to help increase the self-sufficiency of low-income and ethnic-minority families. At the same time, this study offers insight to policy-makers who are interested in improving childcare issues and job efficiency of low-income families in rural areas.

BACKGROUND

After-school childcare arrangements, both formal childcare arrangement (school and community settings) and informal childcare arrangements (relative care, parental care, neighborhood care), have a significant impact on the economic and social conditions of low-income families. However, most research on childcare availability, effectiveness, and choice has been conducted in urban settings, with the result that little is known about the impact of various childcare options on low-income families in rural/non-metropolitan areas. As a result, state and federal policy-makers seeking to promote the employability and economic viability of low-income working families in non-metropolitan areas have inadequate information on which to base funding decisions.

Knowing that more than half of American school-aged children are engaged in after-school care arrangements other than ASPs, additionally relative care (e.g., children are taken care of by their grandparents or relatives) has been an essential element for low-income mothers who transition from welfare to work since 1996, it is important to understand how the relative care affects children and their families. However, much is not known about the impact of relative care. Park (2016)’s dissertation found that relative care improved working hours for Hispanic/Latina working mothers and White mothers’ labor hours but not African-American working mothers. Given the high prevalence of relative care and the inadequacy of recent research on use of relative care, this study seeks to understand its impact on racially diverse low-income working families in non-metropolitan areas in the Midwest.

METHODOLOGIES

This study uses the extended case method and grounded theory to analyze in-depth interviews of one African American working mother who relies on relative care and one African American relative (grandmother) who provides childcare to her nephew.

Procedures:

The semi-structured interview questions were conducted with a purposive and snowball sampling. The two interviews were conducted at each participant’s house for their convenience. The each interview time spent was less than 30 minutes.

Sampling:

A 39 year old African American mother has two jobs — school and part-time job. She needs to work or go to school after her son’s return from school. She asks for relative care for her 5 year-old child with autism.

A 65 year old African American woman has taken care of her nephew since he was adopted to his mother.

RESULTS

The perspective of an African American mother:

The African American working mother responded that relative care is very important for her child because she can trust her relative more than other childcare settings or neighborhood care and will use the other options when relative care is not available.

“I rather relative because I know my child will be safe but I might have to use the regular ...daycare instead of family when family is not available.”

“that is my first preference...he has autism and I don’t trust too many people and so it’s hard for me to let him go with strangers.”

The African American mother also has been satisfied with the care that her relative has provided for her child

“They [relatives] are family and I trust them and they take very good care of him....I know he goes to the park they go out and do things they go to eat, color, whatever. They interact good with him while I’m gone.”

The perspective of an African American childcare giver:

The aunt of a child perceives that providing childcare is not only help a child but also a child’s mother’s well-being and self-sufficiency.

“It is important to take care of my nephew cause I just try to you know, pitch in wherever I can. ”

“I just help her out until she get her degree and stuff going to school.”

Also she doesn’t expect that she should be paid much but only try to assist her cousin (a child’s mother) to become an independent and capable person.

“Well considering the situation she “got low” so I just try to help her out that’s it.”

In addition, she believes that taking care of her cousin and her child turns in building more positive relationships.

“It just makes it stronger we just bond together like mother and daughter you know and my nephew also has good activities with other children at my home, which is good.”

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, we found that African American relative care not only provides “childcare” itself but also gives benefit to their working mothers who try to increase their self-sufficiency and independence. This is the first study which gathered knowledge from different perspectives from working mothers and childcare providers.

However, it should be noticeable that we only conducted interview with two participants living in one rural area. Therefore, the outcome cannot be widely generalizable and transferrable to other African American families in rural areas. However, our study gives a couple of implications that social workers in the rural community should help the physical and psychological well-being of African American relatives who make an effort to help their daughters (working mothers). In addition, they need to financially help low-income African American families who provide childcare services instead of asking for formal childcare settings through locating childcare subsidies for them.

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