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**Are Boys and Girls Treated Differently?
Parental Choice of Child Care Arrangements for Preschoolers in the U.S.**

Jutta M. Joesch, Ph.D., University of Washington

Bridget G. Hiedemann, Ph.D., Seattle University

Elaina Rose, Ph.D., University of Washington

Authors' Mailing Address:

Jutta M. Joesch
University of Washington
Box 357660
Seattle WA 98195-7660 email: joesch@u.washington.edu voice: 206-783-7049 fax:
206-543-3964

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we explore whether parents use different child care arrangements for boys and girls during the preschool years. Specifically, we address whether the use of any nonrelative child care varies with the child's sex, and whether sex differences in the use of child care vary with the age of the child and the race and ethnicity of the mother. The analysis is based on data from the 1990 National Child Care Survey. We find that whether nonrelative child care is used depends on the child's sex. Additionally, we find that the results differ by the mother's race/ethnicity and the child's age.

Key Words: Child Care, Child's Sex

Are Boys and Girls Treated Differently? Parental Choice of Child Care Arrangements for Preschoolers in the U.S.

Gender equality is far from a reality in the U.S. For example, women's full-time earnings are still only about 75% of men's, despite considerable changes in recent years. About half of this gender gap in earnings has been attributed to differences in human capital between women and men (Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 1997). A possible reason for the gender differences in human capital is that parents provide family resources differently to boys and girls as the children grow up (Behrman, 1997), as "the amount of family resources allocated to children, the nature of these resources, and the timing of their distribution influence the attainments of children" (Haveman & Wolfe, 1995, p.1832). It is well accepted that parents' decisions about how to care for their children contribute to achievements in life by shaping cognitive maps, social behavior and personal expectations.

Child care provided by somebody other than the parents is one way in which parents can choose to invest into their offspring. As increasing numbers of mothers with young children have joined the work force and have begun to rely on others to care for their children, researchers have turned their attention to examining the effects of nonmaternal care on child development. Understanding the impact of child care requires knowledge of both the developmental effects of nonparental care and the extent to which children are in the care of others. While it has been acknowledged that an infant's temperament may affect the age at which nonmaternal care begins and the amount and type of care they receive, little is known about the role of a child's sex in parents' child care decisions (Lamb, 1996; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1996).

In this paper we explore whether parents use different child care arrangements for boys and

girls during the preschool years. Specifically, we address whether the use of any nonrelative child care varies with the child's sex, and whether sex differences in the use of child care vary with the age of the child and the race and ethnicity of the mother. The analysis is based on data from the 1990 National Child Care Survey. We find that the use of nonparental, nonrelative care is related to the child's sex. Additionally, we find that the results differ by the race/ethnicity of the mother and the age of the child.

RELATED LITERATURE

For certain parts of the developing world, there is strong evidence that parents invest differently in boys than in girls. In much of South Asia, for example, girls have been found to receive less nutritious foods and less education and health care (Behrman 1992). In contrast, for the U.S., there is limited evidence that parents purchase goods and services related to human-capital formation according to their child's sex (Taubman, 1991).

There is, however, some indication that the quantity and quality of time parents spend with their children differ by the child's sex. Several studies report that in families with boys, fathers spend more time interacting with their children (Bryant & Zick, 1996; Crouter & Crowley, 1990; Harris & Morgan, 1991; Lamb, 1981; Marsiglio, 1991). Beginning with the child's birth, fathers tend to play, discipline and supervise the activities of their sons more, and this involvement increases as their sons get older (Baruch & Barnett, 1986; Lamb, 1981; Lamb, Pleck, & Levine, 1987; Morgan, Lye, & Condran, 1988). In contrast, mothers were found to share less household work time with sons (Bryant & Zick, 1996); and mothers who are full-time homemakers were found to engage more often in activities with their daughters than with their sons (Montemayor,

1984).

The child care literature so far does not seem to have investigated systematically whether there is a relationship between a child's sex and the child care arrangements parents choose. One study reports that at six months of age, the child's sex was not significantly related to hours spent in nonmaternal care (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1996), but Howes (1990) found that parents tended to choose lower quality child care for preschool-age boys than girls.

METHOD

Sample

We obtain information on child care arrangements from the main parent study and the low-income substudy of the 1990 National Child Care Survey (NCCS). The interviews for the main parent study were conducted between November 1989 and May 1990, while the interviews for the low-income substudy were conducted between February and July 1990. The former is a nationally representative sample of 4,392 households with children under the age of 13, while the latter is a nationally representative sample of 430 households with children under the age of 13 and with total annual incomes below \$15,000 (\$1990). The NCCS contains comprehensive data on child care arrangements for the youngest child in the household.

For this study, we restrict the sample to households in which the youngest child is six years of age or younger and not in school,¹ the mother is the survey respondent, and the mother identifies herself as non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, or Hispanic. After excluding observations

¹ If, on average, boys begin kindergarten at a different age than girls, the sample may suffer from selection bias. When we restricted the sample to children under five years of age, the qualitative results did not change.

with missing values for variables used in the analysis, the sample consists of 1,968 observations.

Definition of Child Care

In the National Child Care Survey, the term child care refers to regularly scheduled care arrangements that parents make for their children when parents are not available and/or to provide an enriching experience for the child. Regular arrangements are defined as care that was used at least once a week for the two weeks prior to the survey (Hofferth et al., 1991).

Respondents were asked to provide information for up to four arrangements per child. All reported arrangements were considered in the analysis. We define child care as nonparental, nonrelative care, that is, care provided in a day care center, nursery or head start program or care by a nonrelative in the provider's or the child's home.

Empirical Models

To examine sex differences in the type of child care preschoolers attend, we present bivariate descriptive statistics for the proportion of children in nonrelative care by sex and two specifications of a logistic regression. The specifications of the logistic regression differ by the number of covariates. The dependent variable for the logistic regressions indicates whether the child receives any care provided by nonrelatives.

In addition, we estimate the two specifications of the logistic regressions separately depending on whether the child is under three or between three and six years old. Previous research has found that parents' child care decisions vary by the child's age (Joesch, 1998; Joesch & Hiedemann, 1998; Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996; Leibowitz, Klerman, & Waite, 1992; Leibowitz, Waite, & Witsberger, 1988). We also stratify the sample depending on whether the mother is non-Hispanic White, non-Hispanic Black, or Hispanic. Some earlier

studies have shown differences in the use of child care by race and ethnicity, even after controlling for parents' financial background and family structure (Folk & Beller, 1993; Joesch, 1998; Joesch & Hiedemann, 1998; Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996; Robins & Spiegelman, 1978; Yoon & Waite, 1994). Differences in the use of child care have been partially attributed to attitudes on child rearing, beliefs about the effects of maternal employment on children, and the availability of child care arrangements (Jayakody, Chatters, Taylor, 1993; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1996). In the absence of information on parental attitudes and beliefs and on access to child care, race and ethnicity are used as proxies.

For each of the six subsamples, a parsimonious specification includes two explanatory variables, namely the child's sex and his or her age. Since the child's sex is essentially a random event in the U.S., confounding of the effect of sex is only a concern if parental behavior relevant for the child care decision differs by the child's sex. An example of such a behavior is the mother's employment status, if mothers are more or less likely to work if their youngest child is a son.²

In addition to the child's sex and age, the more extensive model includes maternal and household characteristics to control for socioeconomic differences by race and ethnicity. The variables are the mother's age, educational attainment and employment status, whether a father is present, the number of siblings in several age groups, and household income excluding mother's earnings. A definition of the variables and corresponding descriptive statistics can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

² Given concerns about the endogeneity of this variable, the full specification was also estimated without mother's employment status. The results for the child's sex are robust to the exclusion of this variable.

[Tables 1 & 2 about here]

RESULTS

Table 3 reports bivariate descriptive statistics on the use of child care by sex and mother's race/ethnicity and p-values for tests of independence between the child's sex and child care attendance. As indicated in the table, child care attendance is not independent of sex in the subsamples of White mothers with children over three years (p-value=.01), Hispanic mothers with children over three years (p-value=.05), and Black mothers with children under three years (p-value=.08). In particular, boys three and over are less likely to be in child care in White households, but more likely in Hispanic households. Among Black children under three years of age, boys have a higher probability of being in care. The result for White mothers with children under three years approaches significance. It suggests that boys are less likely to attend child care.

[Table 3 about here]

Parameter estimates, odds ratios, and t-statistics from multivariate logistic regressions are presented in Tables 4 and 5 by child's age and the mother's race/ethnicity. Table 6 reports marginal effects of the child's sex evaluated at the sample means.³ As indicated in Tables 4 and 5, the child's sex has a significant effect in three of the six subsamples. In households in which the mother is White and the youngest child is between three and six years of age, sons have approximately 0.6 times the odds of daughters of being in nonrelative care. In terms of probabilities, a daughter's probability of receiving child care, evaluated at the sample means,

³ The marginal effects are computed by taking the difference of the predicted probabilities conditional on each of the two categories of the dummy variable for sex.

exceeds that for a son by 0.12. The child's sex has the opposite effect in households in which the mother is Hispanic and the youngest child is between three and six years old. In such households, sons have roughly 3.7 times greater odds than daughters of attending child care. Evaluated at the sample means, the probability that a son in such a household is in child care exceeds the corresponding probability for a daughter by roughly 0.30. In households with White or Hispanic mothers and children under three years, the effect of the child's sex is not significantly different from zero. In contrast, the child's sex has a significant effect in households with Black mothers if the child is under three years. In such households, sons' odds of attending child care are more than double those of daughters'. Evaluated at the sample means, the chance that a son in such a household receives child care exceeds that for a daughter by 0.15.

[Tables 4-6 about here]

The results in Tables 4 and 5 also show that child care decisions for boys and girls differ by the mother's race/ethnicity and by the child's age. A comparison between White and Black mothers indicates that sex differences are significantly different in households in which the youngest child is under three years old. When White mothers are compared with Hispanic mothers, child care decisions vary by sex when the youngest child is between three and six years of age. A comparison of child care attendance for children under three and children who are at least three years of age shows differences for Hispanic mothers. One needs to keep in mind that the results for Black and Hispanic families are based on small samples, especially for children three and older.

DISCUSSION

This paper provides evidence that the sex of the youngest preschooler in a family is correlated with whether the child attends any child care provided by somebody other than the parents or relatives. If sex differences in child care arrangements stem from preferential treatment of sons or daughters, such differences could be partially responsible for human capital differences between men and women. If, as has been noted, “boys continue to be more valued in our society” (Katzev, Warner, Acock, 1994, p. 97) and child care is perceived to be beneficial for a child's development, one would expect to see a prevalence of boys in child care. The reverse would be observed if nonrelative care is perceived as inferior to care provided by persons related to the child.

Alternatively, if parents are primarily responding to their children's developmental needs, it may be in the best interest of both sons and daughters to provide them with different care arrangements. At any given chronological age, boys, on average, have been found to be developmentally less mature than girls (Mott, 1989) and may therefore be considered less ready for the care of somebody other than parents or relatives. There is also well-established evidence of differences in involvement in conflict and aggression among boys and girls (Coie & Dodge, 1997; Jacobson, 1994). Across all socioeconomic groups, boys have been found to engage in more conflict and in more forceful aggressive acts both physically and verbally. While the rate of aggressive behavior is not very different in infants and toddlers, it becomes striking by the time children interact in preschool groups (Coie & Dodge, 1997). Thus, as boys get older, it may become more difficult for them to fit into child care arrangements with larger groups of children.

Parents may also be responding to differences in the quality of child care. At 15 months of age boys received less responsive care than girls in child care homes and centers (NICHD Early

Child Care Research Network, 1996), but such differences were not observed with relatives. The researchers suggest that fathers and grandparents may be responding more sensitively to the unique characteristics of the children in their care, while care providers who are not relatives may be responding more stereotypically to boys and girls.

A number of studies have shown that adults have preconceived notions about sex differences and social abilities in children. In particular, “females are generally expected and believed to be more responsive, empathic and prosocial than are males” (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1997, p.752). Parents are also more likely to attribute girls’ prosocial actions to inborn factors and boys’ to environmental factors (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1997). These expectations may make it more likely to choose nonrelative child care arrangements for girls as these arrangements tend to have more children per group than do relatives. On the other hand, if child care is perceived to enhance a child’s social abilities, parents may tend to prefer nonrelative child care for boys.

Sex-specific selection of care arrangements matters if the type of care affects children. The current conclusion from the extensive literature on nonparental child care arrangements is inconclusive as to whether it has a negative or positive impact on the development of infants, toddlers and preschoolers; effects vary with the quality of the care and the child’s background (Lamb, 1996; Scarr & Eisenberg, 1993). However, many questions remain. In particular, it “appears likely that different children will be affected differently by various day care experiences, although we remain ignorant about most of the factors that modulate these differential effects” (Lamb, 1996, p. 339). One factor that has been considered infrequently is the child’s sex, although males have been found to have more developmental problems than females in many areas of psychology (Scarr & Eisenberg, 1993). Evidence from the few studies that have

investigated nonmaternal child care and sex is mixed. Some report that boys are more vulnerable to child care than girls with respect to mother-infant attachment, social competence and cognitive development; others found no sex differences (Scarr & Eisenberg, 1993).

Regardless of the causes and consequences of sex differences in child care arrangements, our findings have methodological implications for work on the economics of the family. Angrist and Evans (1996) and Iacovou (1996) have used the sex mix of children in two-child families as an instrument for subsequent fertility behavior to obtain estimates of the effects of fertility on female labor supply. This instrument is valid if, as both papers argue, the only effect of the sex mix of the first two children on labor supply operates through fertility behavior. Our results suggest that other mechanisms may be relevant as well.

Policy makers and academics have been interested in explaining the gender gap in earnings and other outcomes for some time. The results presented here show that parents begin to allocate resources differently to their children at a young age. Future research on the economics of the family may increase our understanding of reasons for the gender gap by uncovering mechanisms that underlie the decisions parents make for their children.

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Table 1. Definition of Variables

Variable	Definition
DEPENDENT VARIABLE	
Use of Child Care	1 if youngest child attended regularly scheduled non-parental, non-relative child care during week prior to interview, 0 otherwise
COVARIATES	
<u>Children's Characteristics</u>	
Child's age	youngest child's age in months/12
Child's gender	
boy	1 if youngest child is boy, 0 if girl
Number of siblings	
0-2 years	number of children age 2 or younger in household, excl. youngest
3-5 years	number of children between ages 3 and 5 in household, excl. youngest
6-17 years	number of children between ages 6 and 17 in household, excl. youngest
<u>Mother's Characteristics</u>	
Mother's age	mother's age in years
Mother's education	years of completed schooling
Mother's marital status	
single mother	1 if mother does not live with a partner, 0 otherwise
2 parents	omitted reference category for headship
Mother's race/ethnicity	
African American	mother is African American
Hispanic	mother is Hispanic
White	mother is White
Mother's work status	1 if mother works, 0 otherwise
<u>Household Characteristics</u>	
Non-maternal income	total yearly household income, excluding mother's earned income

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics by Mother's Race/Ethnicity

	White	Black	Hispanic
Enrolled in child care	.46 ^a	.41 ^a	.34 ^a
Boy	.52	.53	.49
Child's age	2.25 (1.51) ^b	2.08 (1.51) ^b	2.34 (1.47) ^b
Mother's age	29.79 (5.45)	27.29 (6.46)	28.90 (5.66)
Mother's education	13.30 (2.07)	12.62 (2.01)	11.67 (3.08)
Mother single parent	.13	.62	.26
Mother works	.49	.43	.41
Non-maternal income	27,235.34 (23,747.01)	11,599.75 (17,676.84)	15,912.62 (16,622.48)
No. of siblings age 0-2	.08 (.30)	.10 (.30)	.09 (.31)
No. of siblings age 3-5	.34 (.52)	.28 (.50)	.33 (.53)
No. of siblings age 6-17	.57 (.86)	.53 (.79)	.78 (.90)
n	1,531	234	203

^a mean.^b standard deviation.

Table 3. Proportion of Pre-schoolers in Non-parental, Non-relative Child Care by Child's Gender and Age and Mother's Race/Ethnicity

	Age < 3			Age ≥ 3		
	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
All children	.38	.31	.22	.64	.66	.60
Boys	.36 ^a	.37	.19	.59	.63	.72
Girls	.40	.24	.26	.70	.69	.49
p ^b	.11	.08	.35	.01	.62	.05
n	1,050	164	138	481	70	65

^a proportion of boys in care in subsample of White boys.

^b p value for χ^2_1 statistic for differences by gender.

Table 4. Probability of Attending Non-parental, Non-relative Child Care
Pre-schoolers Under Age 3 by Mother's Race/Ethnicity
(Logit Estimates)

Variable	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
Boy	-.17 ^a .84 ^b (1.27) ^c	.74 ^a 2.09 ^b (2.05) ^c [2.37] ^d	-.37 ^a .69 ^b (.90) ^c [.47] ^d	-.17 ^a .84 ^b (1.19) ^c	.77 ^a 2.15 ^b (1.87) ^c [2.16] ^d	-.61 ^a .54 ^b (1.12) ^c [.78] ^d
Child's age	.52 1.68 (6.77)	.38 1.46 (1.81) [.63]	.13 1.14 (.52) [1.49]	.48 1.61 (5.22)	.36 1.43 (1.46) [.45]	-.17 .85 (.54) [1.98]
Mother's age				.01 1.01 (.65)	.01 1.01 (.31) [.06]	-.05 .95 (.96) [1.12]
Mother's education				.20 1.23 (4.85)	-.06 .94 (.59) [2.39]	.25 1.28 (1.98) [.31]
Mother single parent				.66 1.93 (2.60)	.43 1.54 (.94) [.43]	2.27 9.68 (3.38) [2.24]
Mother works				1.70 5.46 (10.82)	1.69 5.42 (3.84) [.01]	2.26 9.58 (3.79) [.91]
Non-maternal income				5.5e-6 1.00 (1.65)	.00 1.00 (2.14) [1.68]	.00 1.00 (1.52) [1.11]
No. of siblings age 0-2				-.03 .97 (.13)	-.56 .57 (.88) [.78]	.44 1.55 (.64) [.65]

Table 4. Probability of Attending Non-parental, Non-relative Child Care
Pre-schoolers Under Age 3 by Mother's Race/Ethnicity - continued
(Logit Estimates)

Variable	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
No. of siblings age 3-5				-.04 .96 (.28)	-.43 .65 (1.13) [.97]	-.57 .57 (1.04) [.94]
No. of siblings age 6-17				-.21 .81 (1.87)	-.11 .90 (.34) [.29]	.11 1.12 (.32) [.86]
Constant	-1.16 (7.79)	-1.69 (4.02)	-1.26 (2.63)	-5.18 (8.28)	-2.31 (1.47)	-4.35 (2.43)
p		.04	.001		.14	.26
n	1,050	164	138	1,050	164	138

^a logit coefficient.

^b odds-ratio logistic regression.

^c (absolute value of t-test of logit coefficient = 0).

^d [absolute value of t-test for {Blacks or Hispanics} = Whites].

Table 5. Probability of Attending Non-parental, Non-relative Child Care
Pre-schoolers \geq Age 3 by Mother's Race/Ethnicity
(Logit Estimates)

Variable	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
Boy	-.53 ^a .59 ^b (2.72) ^c	-.17 ^a .84 ^b (.33) ^c [.65] ^d	1.31 ^a 3.69 ^b (2.20) ^c [2.94] ^d	-.51 ^a .60 ^b (2.26) ^c	-.34 ^a .71 ^b (.54) ^c [.24] ^d	1.31 ^a 3.72 ^b (1.87) ^c [2.47] ^d
Child's age	.42 1.52 (3.06)	.52 1.69 (1.33) [.25]	1.37 3.94 (2.82) [1.89]	.58 1.80 (3.52)	.74 2.10 (1.66) [.33]	1.63 5.10 (2.64) [1.64]
Mother's age				.08 1.08 (3.19)	.03 1.03 (.47) [.88]	-.05 .95 (.79) [1.89]
Mother's education				.28 1.32 (4.23)	.46 1.58 (1.96) [.73]	.02 1.02 (.16) [2.27]
Mother single parent				.25 1.29 (.79)	1.06 2.88 (1.16) [.84]	1.00 2.73 (1.21) [.85]
Mother works				1.31 3.71 (5.65)	.51 1.66 (.77) [1.16]	.48 1.62 (.63) [1.05]
Non-maternal income				.00 1.00 (1.59)	.00 1.00 (.25) [.09]	-.00 1.00 (.07) [.44]
No. of siblings age 3-5				.40 1.50 (1.26)	.83 2.29 (1.07)	-.63 .53 (.65)

[.51] [1.01]

Table 5. Probability of Attending Non-parental, Non-relative Child Care
Pre-schoolers \geq Age 3 by Mother's Race/Ethnicity - continued
(Logit Estimates)

Variable						
	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
No. of siblings age 6-17				-.40 .69 (3.10)	-.68 .51 (1.99) [.76]	-.77 .46 (1.80) [.82]
Constant	-.85 (1.52)	-1.35 (.83)	-5.81 (2.80)	-8.42 (6.81)	-9.29 (2.30)	-5.18 (1.49)
p		.88	.01		.71	.008
n	481	70	65	481	70	65

^a logit coefficient.

^b odds-ratio logistic regression.

^c (absolute value of t-test of logit coefficient = 0).

^d [absolute value of t-test for {Blacks or Hispanics} = Whites].

Table 6. Marginal Effect of Gender for Probability of Attending Non-parental, Non-relative Child Care
by Child's Age and Mother's Race/Ethnicity
(Logit Estimates)

	Age < 3			3 \leq Age \leq 6		
	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic
Boy	-.04	.15	.07	-.12	-.12	.30

Marginal effects are computed at the sample means as the difference of the predicted probabilities conditional on each of the two categories of the dummy variable for gender.