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Family Child Care in North Carolina



FPG-UNC Smart Start Evaluation Team
 June 2000



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Overview

RECENT ESTIMATES SUGGEST that about 28% of child care for children under age six in the US is provided in family child care homes, making this an important segment of the child care market. While there are many studies of child care centers, few research studies have examined family child care homes.

The primary goal of Smart Start is to ensure that all children enter school healthy and prepared to succeed. One of the ways in which local partnerships are working to achieve this goal is by improving the quality of and accessibility to care provided in family child care homes. In 1998–99, almost one-half of the 82 partnerships were funding activities that specifically addressed needs in family child care homes. Such efforts included child care provider education programs; technical assistance for family child care homes; support to achieve national accreditation; quality enhancement grants to purchase materials or equipment or for other improvements in the child care environment; registration of existing family child care homes; and increasing the family child care workforce, including recruiting potential child care

providers, providing training, and providing supporting funds for opening new family child care homes

We designed this study to learn more about the quality of care in family child care homes in North Carolina and the relationship between quality of care and involvement in Smart Start quality improvement efforts. We addressed three primary questions in this study:

- 1) **What is the quality of family child care in North Carolina?**
- 2) **What effect is Smart Start having on the quality of family child care?**
- 3) **What factors are related to the quality of care?**

A total of 151 family child care homes from eight Smart Start partnerships (Years 2 and 3) were observed in the spring and summer of 1998 to gather information about daily routines, activities, and materials in the child care home, and interactions between the provider and the children. We also interviewed the family child care providers about program services, their background characteristics, and enrollment of the child care home.

Findings

Family Child Care Quality

- ♦ The average quality of child care practices is in the medium range, suggesting that while some family child care homes are providing good care for children, many need improvement to meet the standards for developmentally appropriate care for young children.
- ♦ Some areas to target especially for quality improvement efforts are basic care (e.g., sanitary practices) and safety practices.
- ♦ In contrast, the interactions of the child care providers with the children are of somewhat higher quality than the child care practices in these homes.
- ♦ In general, the quality of practices is somewhat lower in family child care than in child care centers in North Carolina.

Relation of Quality to Smart Start

- ♦ One of the key factors related to better quality of the family child care homes was greater levels of participation in Smart Start activities. Family child care homes that were more involved in Smart Start were of higher quality than those that were less involved.

Relation of Quality to Other Factors

- ♦ Better family child care quality was also related to professional characteristics of providers—higher levels of formal education, having a CDA credential, participation in professional development programs, and membership in professional associations.
- ♦ Caregiver-child ratios were not related to quality of care, unlike what is typically found in center-based child care, most likely due to licensing regulations which allow fewer children to be served in family child care homes compared to child care center classrooms.

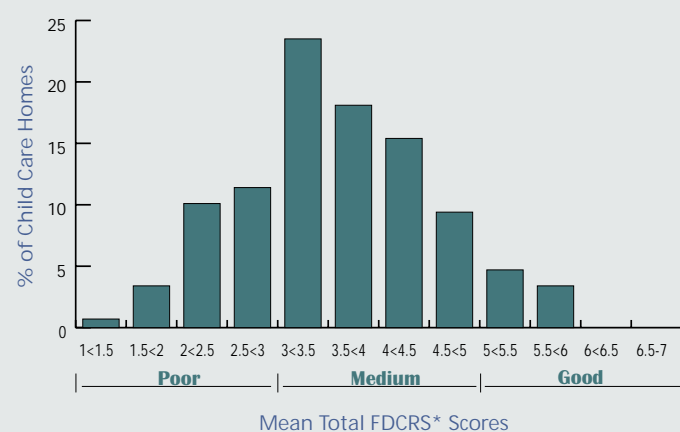
Other Issues in Family Child Care Homes

- ♦ Because family child care is typically provided by a single caregiver, family child care homes face some issues around the stability of the care provided that are less often faced by child care centers with multiple staff and more options for providing substitute care.
- ♦ The majority of family child care homes offered a variety of program services, including school-age child care, part-time care, drop-in care, and care during non-traditional hours. While these options may meet parents' needs for care, they have implications for the experiences of the young children in child care.
- ♦ Family child care providers are faced with issues around cost and quality, much the same as other sectors of the child care market, with better quality related to higher costs.

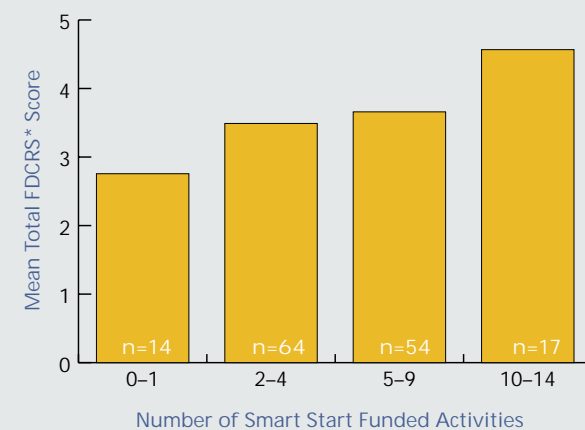
Family Child Care Data

For all graphs, N=149
*FDCRS=Family Day Care Rating Scale (Harms & Clifford, 1989)

Quality of Care in NC Family Child Care Homes



Smart Start Participation & Quality of Care



Professional Characteristics & Quality of Care

