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Hyejoon Park

Pittsburg State University, hyejoon.park@pittstate.edu

Min Zhan Dr.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, mzhan@illinois.edu

Shinwoo Choi Dr.

Texas State University, shinwoo.choi11@gmail.com

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After-School Childcare Arrangements and Maternal Labor Supply in Low-Income American Households: Comparisons between Race and Ethnicity

Hyejoon Park
Pittsburg State University

Min Zhan
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Shinwoo Choi
Texas State University

Even though after-school childcare arrangements are a significant matter for working mothers in the United States, only formal childcare has been recognized as relevant by researchers. Therefore, this study aims to find the association between different types of after-school childcare arrangements (after-school programs, relative, parental, self-care, and combination of care) and low-income working mothers' labor supply, including their working hours and months, with special attention to their race/ethnicity. The study employed the Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis and utilized the National Household Education Survey Programs: After-School Programs and Activities (2005). The results showed that White and Hispanic mothers using relative care reported longer working hours than mothers of the same ethnic groups who used other types of care. Hispanic mothers using parental (spousal) care also reported fewer working months than Hispanic mothers using relative care. Implications for policy, social work practice, and

research are discussed along with limitations, including the cross-sectional design of the study.

Keywords: after-school childcare arrangements, ethnic-minority mothers, low-income working mothers, labor supply, relative care

In the United States, social and economic changes since 1940 have significantly influenced women's roles in family structure, childrearing, and maternal employment. While only 28% of women in the United States worked for pay outside the home in 1940 (Colby, 2012), more than 62% of women were working by 2008 (Laughlin, 2013). Currently, more than half of American children under the age of 18 live in households where both parents work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) and parental working hours outside the home have increased since 1940 (Saltzstein et al., 2001). Particularly, mothers from ethnic-minority backgrounds with school-aged children have become a significant portion of the U.S. labor force. In 2008, for instance, the labor force included 68.7% of Black mothers with children under the age of 18—a population that has actively participated in the workforce since 1950 (Brewster & Padavic, 2002). In 2017, 78.4% of Black mothers with children under the age of 18 were in the workforce, the highest rate amongst racial groups. In comparison, 70.5% of White mothers, 65% of Asian American mothers, and 61.9% of Hispanic mothers worked while raising children (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018). Additionally, the labor force participation rates of Black and Hispanic mothers with children under the age of 18 have shown a marked increase since 1994, when the employment rates for Black and Hispanic mothers were 68.4% and 54.7%, respectively. By 2017, 78.4% of Black mothers and 61.9% of Hispanic mothers were employed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Even though families' social, demographic, and economic-political factors significantly influence their childcare arrangements (Capizzano et al., 2000), many studies have shown little interest in the intersection of mothers' races/ethnicities, their childcare issues (including after-school childcare), and

their working supply. Instead, studies have focused mainly on addressing the impact of after-school programs on child development (Caughy et al., 1994; Hagekull & Bohlin, 1995; Posner & Vandell, 1994; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004; Roffman et al., 2001).

Furthermore, few studies have analyzed the differences in the mother's labor supply or outcomes when different types of after-school childcare (after-school programs versus relative care) are implemented. Because they conceptualize childcare costs and government subsidies as being provided by the market (Arpino et al., 2014), the majority of relevant studies have focused heavily on the economic benefits of formal childcare sectors for households while largely ignoring the role of child support from informal care (Choi & Johnson, 2014). With so much attention invested in sociocultural or historical lenses (Arendell, 2000; Glenn, 2010), less focus has been placed on the benefits of informal types of childcare, particularly relative care, because its cost is primarily nonmonetary (Arpino et al., 2014).

Therefore, our study—investigating the associations between distinctive after-school childcare types and labor supplies of working mothers of different races/ethnicities—will contribute to a better understanding of childcare patterns and provide insight on how to efficiently and effectively assist mothers who are using informal childcare. In particular, the study aims to recommend appropriate childcare subsidies to policymakers who are concerned with the efficacy and efficiency of economic and family policies. Specifically, our recommended childcare subsidies are ones that would encourage working mothers of minority races and ethnicities from low-income households to participate in the job market in greater numbers and for more hours/months in order to bolster their economic development and potentially move them out of poverty.

To explore the impacts of formal and informal after-school childcare settings on the labor supply of working mothers—with a particular emphasis on working mothers from ethnic-minority backgrounds—we employed a national dataset, the National Household Education Survey Programs: After-School Programs and Activities of 2005. Using the nationally representative dataset, our study examines the association between different after-school childcare arrangements (both formal and informal) and the labor supply of working mothers—working hours and months—in relation to race/ethnicity. This study begins

by reviewing the different types of after-school childcare arrangements and the significant factors that influence their utilizations, such as sociodemographic, economic-political, and cultural factors. Finally, the use of relative care by families from ethnic-minority backgrounds is described.

Studying the relationships between after-school childcare options and the employment of low-income mothers with different races and ethnicities is crucial. Both employment and average weekly wages for Black and Hispanic workers lag behind those of Asian American and White workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). These differences are part of an entrenched system of economic disparity that reduces opportunities for economic mobility and contributes to long-term poverty (Glenn, 2010). Therefore, the study will contribute uniquely to childcare policies by examining relative care practices within low-income racial and ethnic households.

Literature Review

After-School Childcare Arrangements

Mothers in the American workforce who have children between the ages of 5 and 14 have utilized one or more types of formal after-school programs (hereafter ASPs) or informal childcare arrangements (parental, relative, or self-care) during out-of-school hours (Lawrence & Kreader, 2006).

ASPs are usually regarded as formal education settings because of their high quality of programs and partnerships with schools and communities (Little et al., 2008). ASPs can be community-based or school-based programs (Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth, 2000). Community-based programs are implemented by the community, such as the YMCA/YWCA, organizations, or religious institutions (Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth, 2000). Working parents generally prefer this setting because of convenience and the variety of educational resources (Brecher et al., 2009). While many experimental studies on the high quality of ASPs confirmed their effectiveness, a recent study using a national dataset did not discover positive outcomes; instead, it implied that the school and community type might be significantly associated with the quality of ASPs (Park & Zhan, 2017).

Parental care (spousal care) is provided by a parent or a parent's live-in partner; however, it offers no net increase in available employment hours for parents, because time devoted to caregiving is unavailable for other work. Families using parental care showed less flexibility and fewer working hours than families using nonparental care (Craig & Powell, 2012; Hochschild & Machung, 1990).

Relative care is most often provided by grandmothers (Christensen et al., 2011), which may reflect social conditioning—childcare is predominately considered women's work, so grandmothers, as opposed to grandfathers, are the expected caregivers. Since family members are more likely to accept the parents' requests for childcare, relative care provides flexible childcare availability (Christensen et al., 2011). For instance, parents with nonstandard employment hours prefer to select informal care because of unscheduled, evening, or weekend work hours (Meyers & Jordan, 2006).

Self-care refers to children supervising themselves without an adult caregiver present; they also are called latchkey children (Lawrence & Kreader, 2006). In some cases, older children take care of themselves and their younger siblings (Christensen et al., 2011). Even though self-care provides opportunities to increase independence among older children (Polatnick, 2002), there are also multiple high-risk factors (e.g., possibility of drug use, gang involvement, and lack of safety) if these children are living in dangerous communities (Capizzano et al., 2000).

Major Factors Affecting Selection of After-School Childcare Arrangements

There are significant factors that impact the selection of after-school childcare arrangements for children of working mothers. In this section, such factors will be reviewed, along with previous studies in the literature.

Sociodemographic Factor

One of the factors that influence after-school childcare arrangements is the family's sociodemographic factor. First, families with higher incomes are more likely to select after-school

programs than families with lower incomes (Christensen et al., 2011; Riggs & Greenberg, 2004). Moreover, children who come from upper/middle-class homes have a higher likelihood of participating in programs with greater activity flexibility, along with more playmates and age-appropriate activities (Little et al., 2008). Parents' marital statuses are also relevant. Two-parent households are more likely to use formal childcare arrangements than single-parent households (Sonenstein et al., 2002).

Well-educated mothers are more likely to enroll their children in formal center care arrangements and less likely to use home-based care (Meyers & Jordan, 2006). Conversely, parents who live in economically disadvantaged communities are more likely to use informal care than those who live in economically advantaged neighborhoods, since living in advantaged neighborhoods provides more accessibility to various resources, such as organized programs and center supplies (Meyers & Jordan, 2006).

Economic–Political Factor

There has been a lack of studies on how the cost of after-school programs and the availability of public assistance for after-school childcare options play significant roles in parental selection of different types of childcare. However, since formal ASPs are one of the public childcare subsidy options, this exploration may offer potential background on these dynamics.

In general, childcare costs negatively affect the probability of a mother's ability to work (Powell, 2002). For instance, when childcare costs increase, mothers' participation in the workforce decreases. However, when the costs of childcare decrease, mothers' employment rates increase (Ribar, 1992). Also, childcare costs impact the utilization of paid or unpaid care. For instance, the price of formal care and sitter care reduces both the probability of mothers working and their use of formal care and sitter care (Powell, 2002). Since relative care is likely less sensitive to price than formal center care, its use is not significantly affected by childcare costs (Powell, 2002). Lastly, another adult (e.g., relative) presence in the household has a positive association with mothers working and utilizing that adult's help for childcare (Powell, 2002). In summary, childcare costs play a significant role in working mothers' choice of care type.

Receiving childcare subsidies is positively associated with an increase in mothers' work participation (Blau & Tekin, 2007; Michalopoulos & Robins, 2000). For instance, increasing subsidies by \$100 for full-time workers who use formal care would increase full-time employment by fourth tenths of a percentage point. However, growing subsidies by \$1000 for full-time workers using only parental care would increase full-time employment by just over 1% (Michalopoulos & Robins, 2000). Second, targeted childcare subsidies or full childcare subsidies positively impact working mothers' labor participation rates and use of different care types (Powell, 2002). For instance, if wages were subsidized by 10%, the labor force participation rate among working mothers would increase from 43.2% to 47.3%, with the most significant increase in the group that uses formal care (Powell, 2002). Additionally, when the subsidy for all types of childcare was provided, the employment rate of mothers using different types of care increased from 43.2% to 48.8% (Powell, 2002). This finding indicates that providing subsidies to working mothers, regardless of childcare type, would increase work participation rates.

Cultural Factor

Generally speaking, mothers from low-income households that identify as Black and/or Hispanic rely on family and relatives for childcare more than White mothers do (Arendell, 2000). Notably, some ethnic-minority groups put a strong emphasis on "familialism"—the fostering of cultural attitudes and values that view family care as a gendered and intergenerational responsibility, and as the obligation of extended families, regardless of financial capability. They also view lineal relatives and relatives living in the same house as mutually cooperative (Saraceno, 2016). Most of all, sharing childcare with extended family members is an accepted and reciprocated practice in Black and Hispanic families. For instance, both Black and Hispanic mothers rely significantly on grandparents, older children, and other relatives for childcare, particularly the children's aunts (Clutter & Nieto, n.d.).

Relative Care in Families from Ethnic-Minority Backgrounds

Women within ethnic-minority groups are viewed as both individual units of labor as well as available caregivers for all the children within that family (Arpino et al., 2014). This dual role alters the groups' understandings of mothering. Within these groups, mothering and childcare are not seen exclusively as the work of a child's biological female parent. Instead, childcare is viewed as a family-oriented labor service involving spouses and/or relatives (Glenn et al., 1994).

Relative care builds an effective support system for working mothers and provides flexibility for both working hours (shifts) and hours worked (Collins, 2000). Minority families' relationships and social connections, in particular, are fostered by relative/kin labor, especially during periods of extreme hardship and cultural transition (Glenn, 2010). For instance, Black mothers heavily utilized relative care during slavery and the Reconstruction period (Glenn et al., 1994; Kamo, 2000). Among ethnic-minority families in lower-income households, the probability of living in an extended family household is higher, so resources from other members are more likely to be available (Kamo, 2000).

There are instrumental (goods, childcare services, money), cultural, and emotional (companionship, advice) benefits of the use of relative care in ethnic-minority families (Glenn et al., 1994). These benefits are significant resources for families because they reduce socioeconomic barriers and psychological distress, as well as providing childcare opportunities (Miller-Cribbs & Farber, 2008). In fact, in opposition to formal childcare settings with daily schedules, relative care can adapt to negotiated schedules, payment types (e.g., cash, gifts, or non-payment), and transportation (Gordon et al., 2008; Snuggs, 2017). Overall, relative care offers convenience, flexibility, and easy-access childcare, and most likely creates greater benefits for working mothers.

Considering that relative care provides more flexibility and accessibility than ASPs, self-care, or parental care, we hypothesized that working mothers from ethnic-minority backgrounds—specifically Black and Hispanic—and low-income households would use more relative care than White mothers. Furthermore, we hypothesized that mothers from

ethnic-minority backgrounds who used relative care would have more positive labor supply outcomes than White mothers and mothers from the same ethnic-minority backgrounds who used different types of care.

Methods

Data and Sample

The National Household Education Surveys Programs: After-School Programs and Activities of 2005 (NHES: ASPA) was developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) within the U.S. Department of Education. The program involved random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone surveys of households in the U.S. from January 3 through April 24, 2005, to collect information for the 2004–2005 school year only (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). NHES: ASPA is a nationally representative survey that collected information about school-aged children in preschool/kindergarten through eighth grade (i.e., middle school children up to age 15) in the 50 states and the District of Columbia (Carver et al., 2006). NHES collected information relevant to after-school childcare arrangements three times—in 1999, 2001, and 2005. All the data surveys were collected separately from one another. For this study, we chose the most recent data collection of 2005.

For the ASPA interview, the adult living in the household was the respondent. For the most part, the respondents were mothers. However, respondents could be fathers, stepfathers, adoptive parents, foster parents, grandparents, relatives, or nonrelatives (Hagedorn et al., 2006) who knew the specifics of the child/children's care and education (Carver et al., 2006). All respondents were asked basic demographic questions about the child/children and parent/guardian (e.g., race/ethnicity, parents' educational levels, and parents' labor supply), the household income, and household characteristics (Hagedorn et al., 2006).

The total sample of 11,684 children represented a weighted total of 36,185,760 school-aged children (the weighted total respondent rate was 84%) from the Northeast (20%), Midwest (20%), West (20%), and South (40%) (Hagedorn et al., 2006). The data contained information about student participation in different types of care arrangements, such as ASPs (community-based

care and school-based care), relative care, neighborhood care, parental care, and self-care.

Sample Selection

For this study, the sample was drawn using the following four criteria. First, the children must have attended formal schools (either public or private). Homeschooled children were excluded ($n = 269$). This resulted in a sample of 11,415.

Second, in order to select only low-income families—defined as families whose incomes were below 200% of the federal poverty threshold (Jiang et al., 2015)—it was necessary to apply 200% of the poverty threshold from the U.S. Census of 2004, which considered the annual household income and the number of household members (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Since the characteristics of the household income variable in the dataset were categorical, the median value in each category for the annual household income was used. Participants needed to choose one response based on the range of the household income: Response 1 was \$5,000 or less, response 2 was between \$5,001–\$10k, and response 3 was \$10,001–\$20k. After this application, the sample size narrowed down to 1,983.

Third, in order to select households with working mothers, those respondents who answered “yes” to the following question were chosen: “During the past week, did you (the mother/stepmother/foster mother) work at a job for pay or income, including self-employment?” At this stage, the sample size was reduced to 842, meaning 43% of low-income households had working mothers. Finally, in order to examine the independent variables in different types of after-school childcare arrangements, the following cases were excluded: those who did not use any type of after-school childcare arrangements ($n = 49$) and missing cases ($n = 25$). Finally, the data from participants who identified as other than Black, Hispanic, and White were dropped due to the small sample size ($n = 51$). The remaining sample of 717 was used for data analyses.

Independent Variables

The independent variables include the reference group, relative care ($n = 178$), and comparison groups: (a) After-School

Programs (ASPs) ($n = 114$), which include school-based and community-based programs; (b) self-care ($n = 94$); (c) parental care, which includes mother/stepmother/foster mother or father/foster father/stepfather ($n = 266$); and (d) some combination of care types ($n = 65$). The combination care includes combinations of community-based and relative care ($n = 28$), self- and community-based care ($n = 18$), and self-care and relative care ($n = 19$). Since the purpose of the study is to understand which care type is most positively associated with working mothers' time availabilities, considering all possible care types was crucial. Since parental care is part of the current trend, parental care was not excluded, even though it could lead to the possibility of simultaneous participation in the workforce. Employed mothers or fathers who stay at home after school still are subject to employment schedules to some extent (Craig & Powell, 2012), which causes parental care to have less flexibility than relative care.

Dependent Variables

There are four dependent variables that measure the labor supply of mothers from racial-minority backgrounds: (a) mothers' working hours per week, (b) mothers' working months over the past year, (c) mothers' availability of regular job shift, and (d) mothers' ability to attend job training/school. The specific four questions pertaining to mothers' labor supply are as follows: (1) To determine weekly work hours: "About how many total hours per week (do you/does she) usually work for pay or income, counting all jobs?" Answers were given in whole numbers (weekly hours) and treated as continuous; and (2) To determine mothers' working months over the past year, respondents were asked, "Over the past year, how many months, if any, (have you/has she) worked for pay or income?" Answers were given in whole numbers (past months) and treated as continuous.

Covariates

For control variables, we used sociodemographic and economic-political factors that affected childcare options. These control variables were included based on findings from previous studies that showed significant effects in selecting childcare options. Since the aim of the current study is to examine the

links between after-school childcare arrangements and the mothers' labor supply, we controlled for the following variables: mothers' educational levels, mothers' marital statuses, community type (living in urban or rural areas), and if they received government childcare subsidies. This question was asked: "Is the state government or welfare agency currently helping you pay for any childcare costs (for any child)?" (1 = yes, 0 = no).

Data Analysis

For the descriptive statistics of the data sample and variables, univariate analysis was used. To explore the association between different types of after-school childcare arrangements and mothers' labor supply—mothers' working hours per week and working mothers over the past year—the Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression was employed. This analysis helped us determine how much of the variance in these two dependent variables (working hours, working months) can be attributed to our independent variable (different types of care).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Weighted percentages, means, and standard deviations of critical variables are presented in Table 1. Weighted statistics were utilized due to the sampling procedure of the data collection. All of the estimates in the data were based on weighting the observations by using the probability of the selection of the respondents and other adjustments to partially account for nonresponse and coverage bias (Carver et al., 2006). Univariate analysis was utilized to obtain the sample's demographic information.

The race/ethnicity distribution for this sample was Black (23%), Hispanic (43.1%), and White (33.9%). As indicated in Table 1, other than parental care (36%) and self-care (13.2%), 17.1% of children were in ASPs, 7.4% of children were in some combination of care, and 26.2% of children used relative care. Among Black mothers, 18.2% used ASPs ($n = 30$), 23.6% used relative care ($n = 39$), 14.5% used self-care ($n = 24$), 34.5% used parental care ($n = 57$), and 9.1% used a combination of care ($n = 15$). Among Hispanic mothers, 17.5% used ASPs ($n = 54$), 24.3% used relative care ($n = 75$), 12.6% used self-care ($n = 39$), 35.3% used

Table 1. Percentages, Means, and Standard Deviation of the Sample (N = 717)

Variables	%	M	SD
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
After-School Childcare Arrangements			
After-School Programs (School- and Community-based)	17.1		
Relative Care	26.2		
Grandmother	41.3		
Grandfather	1.9		
Aunt	12.4		
Uncle	5.1		
Other relatives	16.6		
Self-Care	13.2		
Parental Care	36		
Combination of Care	7.4		
ASPs & relative care	2.9		
Self-care & ASPs	2.3		
Self-care & relative care	2.1		
Sociodemographic Characteristics			
White	33.9		
ASPs	12.3		
Relative Care	26.3		
Self-Care	12.8		
Parental Care	41.2		
Combination of Care	7.4		
Black	23		
ASPs	18.2		
Relative Care	23.6		
Self-Care	14.5		
Parental Care	34.5		
Combination of Care	9.1		
Hispanic	43.1		
ASPs	17.5		
Relative Care	24.3		
Self-Care	12.6		
Parental Care	35.3		
Combination Care	10.4		
Mothers' marital status			
Married	41.4		
Widowed/separated/divorced	32.5		
Never married	26.1		
Mothers' educational levels			
Without high school diplomas	31.7		
High school or equivalent	37.7		
College experience and above	30.6		
Policy level (childcare subsidies)			
Yes	16.4		
No	83.6		
Community-Level			
Urban	79.1		
Rural	20.9		
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
Mothers' labor supply			
Working hours per week		33.23	10.80
Working months over the past year		9.81	3.27

parental care ($n = 109$), and 10.4% used a combination of care ($n = 32$). With respect to White mothers, 12.3% used ASPs ($n = 30$), 26.3% used relative care ($n = 64$), 12.8% used self-care ($n = 31$), 41.2% used parental care ($n = 100$), and 7.4% used a combination of care ($n = 18$).

Regarding mothers' marital statuses: (a) 41.4% were married; (b) 32.5% were widowed, separated, or divorced; and (c) 26.1% were never married. In terms of mothers' educational levels: (a) 31.7% had less than a high school education, (b) 37.7% had a high school degree or equivalent, and (c) 30.6% had some college or higher. Only 16.4% of households received childcare subsidies. Furthermore, a majority of households lived in urban areas (79.1%).

For mothers' labor supply, the average number of working hours per week was 33.23, the average number of working months over the past year was 9.81, 20.9% of working mothers had availability for job training/school attendance, and 87.7% of them had regular job shift availability.

Regression Statistics

Working Hours per Week by Race/Ethnicity

Mothers' working hours per week were assessed by OLS regressions using the subsamples of Black, Hispanic, and White mothers. This model contained four covariates (mothers' educational levels, mothers' marital statuses, childcare subsidies, and community type) and independent variables. Controlling for the covariates, the model explained 7% (R^2) of the variance in Black mothers' working hours per week; however, p was not statistically significant for Black mothers ($F = 1.17$, $p = .32$). As shown in Table 2, there was no significant correlation between Black mothers' working hours per week and after-school childcare arrangements.

This model explained 11.3% (R^2) of the variance in Hispanic mothers' working hours per week, which was statistically significant ($F = 3.78$, $p = .000$). The results presented in Table 2 showed that Hispanic mothers using ASPs ($b = -6.40$, $p = .001$), self-care ($b = -7.41$, $p = .001$), and parental care ($b = -7.77$, $p = .000$) displayed shorter working hours per week than mothers using relative care. In addition, the Beta value (β) for parental care

Table 2. Regression Estimates on Working Hours per Week by Race/Ethnicity

Variables	White (n = 243)			Black (n = 165)			Hispanic (n = 309)		
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	SE(B)	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	SE(B)	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	SE(B)
	B	β		B	β		B	β	
After-School Childcare Arrangements (Relative Care)									
ASPs	-2.57	-0.07	2.55	.39	.01	2.83	-6.40**	1.93	-0.22
Self-Care	-2.60	-0.08	2.50	-1.25	-0.04	2.98	-7.41**	2.16	-0.22
Parental Care	-4.73*	-0.20	1.91	-2.85	-0.120	2.46	-7.77***	1.64	-0.33
Combination of Care	1.14	.03	3.09	4.81	.12	3.46	-1.25	2.31	-0.03
Mothers' Educational Levels (without high school diplomas)									
High School Diplomas	.20	.01	2.00	4.46	.19	2.39	-.97	1.42	-.04
College Experience and above	-3.30	-.14	2.05	2.27	.10	2.46	1.51	1.74	.05
Mothers' marital status (married)	1.44	.06	1.68	1.82	.08	2.44	.97	1.51	.04
Separated/divorced/widowed	-1.13	-0.03	2.53	1.00	.04	2.28	-1.63	1.55	-0.06
Never married									
Childcare cost subsidies (Yes)									
No	-.96	-.03	2.27	-.43	-.01	2.96	.39	1.96	.01
Community-Level (Urban)									
Rural	-.62	-.02	1.66	-2.29	-.07	2.69	3.40	2.81	.07
R ²	.07			.07			.11		
F	1.73†			1.17			3.78***		

Reference categories are in parentheses. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

(-.33) made the strongest unique contribution to predicting working hours per week. At the same time, the Beta values (β) for self-care (-.22) and ASPs (-.22) were slightly lower, indicating that they made less of a contribution.

For White mothers, this model explained 6.9% (R^2) of the variance in White mothers' working hours per week and it was not significant ($F = 1.73, p = .074$). The results, listed in Table 2, indicated that White mothers using parental care showed shorter working hours per week ($b = -4.73, p = .014$) than White mothers using relative care. With respect to Standard Coefficients (β), among White mothers, parental care (-.20) was the most important variable in predicting working hours per week.

Working Months Over the Past Year by Race/Ethnicity

Mothers' working months over the past year were assessed by OLS regressions. This model contained four covariates (mothers' educational levels, marital statuses, childcare subsidies, and community types) and independent variables. For Black mothers, the model explained 5.5% (R^2) of the variance in Black mothers' working months over the past year, which did not reach statistical significance ($F = .89, p = .54$). The results listed in Table 3 indicated no relationship between after-school childcare arrangements and Black mothers' working months.

For Hispanic mothers, the model explained 2.9% (R^2) of the variance in the mothers' working months over the past year, which was not statistically significant ($F = .88, p = .56$). The results listed in Table 3 indicated that compared to Hispanic mothers using relative care, Hispanic mothers using parental care displayed shorter working months ($b = -1.06, p = .039$). In terms of the Standardized Coefficient (β) for Hispanic mothers, the Beta value (β) for parental care (-.15) contributed to predicting working months. For White mothers, controlling for the covariates, the model explained 7.2% (R^2) of the variance in their working months over the past year, which was not significant ($F = 1.73, p = .061$). The results listed in Table 3 indicated that there was no significant correlation between White mothers' working months and different types of care.

Table 3. OLS Regression Estimates on Working Months Over the Past Year by Race/Ethnicity

Variables	White (n = 243)			Black (n = 165)			Hispanic (n = 309)		
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	SE(B)	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	SE(B)	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	SE(B)
	B	β		B	β		B	β	
After-School Childcare Arrangements (Relative Care)									
ASPs	.60	.07	.67	.50	.06	.89	-.54	.60	.60
Self-Care	1.24	.14	.66	.10	.01	.94	.17	.67	.02
Parental Care	.09	.01	.50	-.52	-.07	.77	-1.06*	.51	-.15
Combination of Care	.65	.06	.81	1.07	.09	1.09	-.19	.72	-.02
Mothers' Educational Levels (without high school diplomas)									
High School Diplomas	-.01	-.00	.52	.17	.02	.75	.43	.44	.06
College Experience and above	-1.00	-.16	.54	-.25	-.04	.77	.23	.54	.03
Mothers' marital status (married)									
Separated/divorced/widowed	-.84	-.13	.44	1.11	.15	.77	-.57	.47	-.08
Never married	.48	.05	.66	.91	.13	.72	-.02	.48	-.00
Childcare cost subsidies (Yes)									
No	-.05	-.00	.59	.36	.03	.93	.11	.61	.01
Community-Level (Urban)									
Rural	-.59	-.09	.44	1.18	.11	.84	.54	.88	.0
R ²			.07			.06			.03
F			1.80			.89			.88

Reference categories are in parentheses. *p < .05

Discussion

Even though informal childcare (particularly relative care) has contributed to the economic prosperity of working mothers, little effort has been made to assess its benefits, because informal childcare is unrecorded and characterized as a nonmarket activity (Choi & Johnson, 2014). Our analysis is thus an essential contribution because it deals with informal care issues and has uncovered significant findings that help identify the association between after-school childcare settings and working mothers, with a particular focus on relative care and mothers from ethnic-minority backgrounds.

The study outcomes regarding the relationship between childcare arrangements and the labor supply of mothers from ethnic-minority backgrounds support previous findings that Hispanic mothers were more likely to use relative care (24.3%) (extended family members, neighborhood care) than center-based ASPs (17.5%) (Arendell, 2000; Radey & Brewster, 2007). On the other hand, the study findings did not support the hypothesis that Black mothers and Hispanic mothers were more likely to use relative care than White mothers. Based on the study outcomes, White mothers used relative care to a higher degree (26.3%) than both Hispanic mothers (24.3%) and Black mothers (23.6%). Since all mothers in the dataset were economically marginalized, it can be speculated that financial considerations come first when mothers consider options for childcare settings. This explanation is supported by Fursman et al. (2003), who suggested that mothers in low-income households rely significantly on other family members. Furthermore, since economically disadvantaged mothers are more likely to live in marginalized neighborhoods with limited resources (e.g., transportation, a lack of suitable childcare settings), they need to rely on relative care (Gilmore-Barnes, 2006). This situation implies that more economic similarities and fewer cultural differences are observed in childcare choices among low-income working mothers.

This study found no relation between the use of relative care and labor supply for Black mothers. The findings did not support the hypothesis that Black mothers experienced significantly more benefits from relative care than from other care types. There is a need for further investigation into the correlation between childcare availability and childcare options

based on the labor supply of working mothers. In particular, considering that Black women have been encouraged to work outside the home since the 1950s, it can be speculated that many Black female relatives in extended families also have needed to work outside the home for regular pay (Brewster & Padavic, 2002). This work demand would likely result in limited time for childcare duties and may lead mothers to rely more on formal childcare settings in the community (Brewster & Padavic, 2002). As indicated in this study, the rate of ASPs use by Black mothers was higher than that of both Hispanic and White mothers (respectively, 18.2%, 17.5%, and 12.3%).

According to Brewster and Padavic's study (2002), a significant percentage of Black women have moved into the labor force since the economy underwent reconstruction in the mid 1970s. This move increased the demand for formal childcare while simultaneously decreasing the availability of relative care. Likewise, this research finding suggests that in order to form a clearer understanding of relative care in economically disadvantaged Black households, it would be necessary to examine the dynamics of relatives' roles in childcare (e.g., whether relatives have limited time or less flexibility in caring for children as the result of their dual roles of caregiver and worker).

Another possible hypothesis drawn from these results is that even though Black families, historically, have relied on relative networks for urgent and instrumental support (e.g., childcare, household tasks, monetary assistance) and emotional support (advice, discussions), a long period of community poverty and generations of family poverty have diminished the benefit of kin support, especially for those living in economically disadvantaged communities (Miller-Cribbs & Farber, 2008). Structural resiliency theorists argue that relative networks, once crucially active among Black families, have decreased due to economic and social changes. Black families in economically marginalized positions now have fewer ties and less kin support than White families do (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). Theorists also emphasize that extended families with collegiate educations are more likely to develop empathy, work paid jobs, and be able to obtain enough resources to share with other family members. Economically marginalized families have a lower chance of family integration due to persistent poverty, which disrupts kin networks (as cited in Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004, p. 815). Since our

samples focused on low-income families, this explanation can be applied to our study findings of the statistically insignificant association between relative care and Black working mothers' labor supply.

Our research found a positive association between relative care and Hispanic mothers' labor supply, which supports our hypothesis that the availability of extended family members to provide relative care is positively interrelated with the mother's working hours. Even though both relative care and parental care are considered extended family care, relative care is a more helpful resource for Hispanic mothers than parental care (including spousal care).

However, the association between relative care and labor supply among White mothers needs further investigation. Although White working mothers using relative care had more extended working hours per week than mothers using parental care, no relation was demonstrated in terms of working months. White mothers using self-care childcare showed longer working hours (i.e., working months) than mothers using relative care. In contrast to Hispanic mothers, this finding implies that certain time constraints may prevent White families from using relative care as permanent childcare. Additionally, this result illustrates that not all relative care provides flexibility for or the hours of childcare needed by working mothers.

The study's discovery that low-income mothers—specifically Hispanic mothers and White mothers—were more likely to use relative care partially reinforces previous studies (Early & Burchinal, 2001), which found that parents from ethnic-minority backgrounds and low-income households chose relative care over inflexible formal childcare arrangements (e.g., ASPs). Even though there is substantial evidence that working mothers from ethnic-minority backgrounds employ more relative care than structured center care, few studies have considered how or to what degree relative care helps these mothers improve labor factors, including labor supply and economic efficiency. Therefore, this study sheds light on the positive outcomes of relative care on Hispanic mothers' time available to work. By extending the female parent's or guardian's working hours, relative care can contribute to the household's economic wellbeing. At the same time, this study's implications suggest a need for a more careful examination of the different reasons why Black and Hispanic

mothers in the workforce select relative care. The association between relative care and Black and Hispanic mothers' labor supply also should be investigated in order to fully comprehend the relationship between relative care and the labor supply of mothers from ethnic-minority backgrounds.

Limitations

There are five identified drawbacks in the current study. First, this study is not experimental research and thus it is impossible to control for all potential covariates (such as school environment, the number of households, child's age variation, etc.) that can affect the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The data is also cross-sectional, collecting information over the course of three months (from January 3 through April 24, 2005); therefore, the causal relationships between independent and dependent variables cannot be determined. Second, the annual household income was measured within specific ranges and did not provide the actual amount of income, so the identification of "low income" is based partly on estimation. Third, since there were no variables in the dataset that asked about the quality of care outside of ASPs and about the direct reasons for choosing childcare arrangements, examining the rationales for the selection—such as flexibilities and cultural/historical backgrounds—is difficult. Fourth, even though this study attempted to utilize a recent dataset from the National Household Education Surveys and Programs designed by the U.S. Department of Education, the file is becoming outdated. Finally, since the data considered U.S. households only, it would be inadvisable to directly apply the American families' characteristics—as well as this study's results—to other countries.

Despite these limitations, this study is one of the first to examine ASPs and other types of after-school childcare arrangements using a nationally-representative dataset. It also examined the differential labor supply of maternal work in the context of economically disadvantaged households, various types of childcare, and differing racial/ethnic backgrounds. These findings could encourage scholars to study relative care in greater detail, since the study of relative care has been peripheral to much of the research into childcare issues in the United States.

Implications

Policy Implications

Many working adults in economically disadvantaged families in the U.S.—particularly families from ethnic-minority backgrounds—rely on extended family to take care of their children (Arendell, 2000). To support the adult caregivers—who spend as much time with these children as ASP teachers would—direct financial assistance would be more effective than providing indirect childcare policy interventions or public childcare subsidies (e.g., income transfers, cash benefits, vouchers for formal childcare, or tax deductions) to help buy formal childcare services (Saraceno, 2016). In fact, many grandparents caring for children usually have health-related problems that interfere with their abilities to care for their grandchildren (Ruiz & Zhu, 2004). Considering that many American families from ethnic-minority backgrounds utilize relative care in order to maintain their cultural values, providing a direct support system (i.e., financial assistance) to these families would not only help relatives' health and economics, but also encourage them to build strong bonds while transferring their cultural values to a younger generation. Exemplary models for relative care support can be found in the U.S. state of Georgia, where kinship care services locate resources within local communities (U.S. Department of Human Services, 2019), and in the U.K., where family policies support childcare by grandparents (wherein grandparents who spend at least 20 hours a week providing childcare for children under 12 years of age are entitled to claim credits for their basic state pension) (Statham, 2011).

In addition, our finding that relative care is positively associated with Hispanic and White mothers' working hours implies that relative care has the potential to increase these mothers' job participation rates. These caregivers' efforts and time should be rewarded as much as they are for childcare providers in formal center care settings.

Since families from ethnic-minority backgrounds often live with extended family members or in close physical proximity to relative caregivers, assistance easily can be provided and needs can be met immediately (i.e., asking for childcare) in these contexts. Therefore, the labor participation of working families

could be increased if compensation provided incentives for relative care (Arpino et al., 2014). Most of all, the finding that low-income Black families prefer to use formal childcare reveals an urgent need to increase the number of affordable childcare settings in economically disadvantaged Black communities in order to accommodate the childcare needs of working mothers.

Practice Implications

Relative care often cannot provide childcare flexibility in low-income Black families due to the large percentage of adults working in these families. Once social workers learn about the potential inflexibility of relative care in such scenarios, they must assess current conditions within the households. Social workers then must judge if they have the capacity to design proper intervention plans that will help and not hinder kinship relationships and recover relative-network strengths (Miller-Cribbs & Farber, 2008). Social workers can develop delivery systems through public schools and community agencies to increase the availability of formal childcare for low-income families who cannot utilize relative care (Jansson, 2015). Additionally, social workers can search for local, public agencies and/or churches that can provide childcare services, and then communicate this information to low-income families so they can easily locate and access those services (Roll, 2010).

Research Implications

While Christensen et al. (2011) and Gilmore-Barnes (2006) found that mothers in economically disadvantaged rural areas had increased their usage of relative care because of a lack of structured childcare settings in their area, our study was unable to find any significant association between the location of participants' residences (rural or urban areas) and the frequency of using relative care or ASPs. Given the information available in the dataset, it is difficult to explain this inconsistent finding. It might suggest the importance of further investigation regarding the need for ASPs in economically marginalized areas, both rural and urban.

Qualitative research using participant interviews is recommended to offset the limitations of this study's design. Qualitative

research allows participants to describe their perspectives and feelings, which would be critical to understanding the mechanisms of how ASPs, relative care, and other types of childcare impact working mothers. This approach also would help explore the different outcomes of Black and Hispanic working mothers' labor supplies and would assist researchers in understanding why White mothers using relative care showed a positive result for working hours per week but not for working months.

Additionally, a qualitative or mixed-method research design would clarify the different effects of relative care on low-income Hispanic and White mothers. As discovered in this study, Hispanic mothers using relative care were likely to increase both their short- and long-term working time, while White mothers using relative care were likely to increase their short-term working time only. The suggested research design would help researchers explore why Hispanic mothers were more likely than White mothers to experience more positive labor supply outcomes. Along with the suggested methods, utilizing structural equation modeling analysis to detect the moderating variables of race and ethnicity would be recommended for another study.

Finally, the research findings could be evidence that the focus of future research should be on the economic interests of and social changes in economically disadvantaged families from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, rather than on the detailed historical and cultural characteristics of these people. Such future work might help researchers understand the childcare choices of families from different racial/ethnic groups and offer more effective solutions to assist economically disadvantaged, working families.

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