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### Impacts of Affordable Childcare on Families

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Presented to the Faculty of the  
Department of Public Policy & Administration  
West Chester University of Pennsylvania  
West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of  
Doctor of Public Administration

By  
Amanda Kennedy  
December 2022

## Dedication

To my mom, Michelle Martin, thank you for encouraging learning within our lives. I could not have done this without your push for me to get a higher education.

## Acknowledgements

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## Abstract

Child care affordability has been an issue within the United States for many years. The rising cost of child care has impacted families and the decisions made within their families. The cost of care has risen past an affordable percentage of take-home income in every state and the nation's capital. Using literature from Marshall (2004;2021), Malik (2019;2021), and Blau (2003;2007), as well as from nonprofit organizations such as Child Care Aware, Children at Risk, and Children's Defense Fund, this research builds upon their findings. This study examines how affordability affects families with decisions regarding child care for their children. In addition, those impacted by the rising costs address their opinions on what can and should be done by the government to address these issues of child care affordability. The findings of this research show that child care affordability affects families and that these families want more government involvement in child care funding.

Keywords: child care affordability, government involvement,

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## Chapter I- Introduction

Access to affordable child care is an issue faced in the United States. Many families do not have access to affordable care that is also high quality. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines affordable care as 7% of household income. Affordability is 7% of household income regardless of parental working or marital status. Research shows that in every state in the United States, the average cost of child care centers exceeds this definition of affordable. As a result, families are spending more money on child care than what is defined as an acceptable, affordable rate (Child Care Aware of America, n.d.).

Affordability is a barrier to accessing quality child care within the United States. With child care costs accounting for more than 7% of household incomes on average, this makes most child care centers less accessible for families that are considered low-income or single-income families. The lack of affordability of child care is a barrier to accessing quality child care. Child care tuition costs in some areas of the country is equivalent to college tuition (Gamble, 2022). The costs associated with running high-quality child care programs increase operating costs, that are then placed on families paying tuition. Quality child care centers with higher costs impact families that do not qualify for assistance. Those that are high-quality and low-cost are not a norm for the United States. Child care centers in the United States follow the state's minimum standards and do not implement higher expectations due to not having the revenue or support to do so.

Affordability of child care is vital for families. However, with the rising costs of child care, there are limitations that families are facing when making family choices when choosing child care for their children. Although there has been limited academic research on this topic, Marshall (2003;2021), Malik (2019;2021), and Blau (2003;2007) have contributed to the

academic research in child care funding. A large portion of this research on this topic has been through nonacademic sources through non-profit organizations such as Child Care Aware, Children at Risk, and First Five Years Fund.

Though there is limited government-sponsored research on the affordability of child care, the Administration for Children and Families within the Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Government Accountability Office are two agencies that have conducted government-sponsored research. Research that has been conducted includes government spending in past years and the benefits of spending on child care. Lynch (2012;2016), Congressional Research Services, and Bipartisan Policy Center have researched the history of child care spending within the United States and the benefits of child care funding that people experienced during that time.

Malik (2019) addresses child care costs in the economy. Child care expenses have risen, especially for those in the middle class. Affordable care allows families to remain in the workforce while securing a place for children to receive care that emphasizes development and learning. However, there are impacts on expenses that reach further than remaining in the workforce. Birth rates have fallen due to the increasing tuition costs in child care (Belt, 2019).

Families are choosing to have fewer children in response to the high cost of child care. While wages have remained stagnant, it has impacted families needing child care for their children. Families must choose their children's care due to costs increasing for child care without significant income increases within their families. Centers have made child care cheaper by making teacher wages lower, which is not a solution to this issue of affordability in child care. Families are paying more than 10% of take-home income towards child care, with costs increasing since 2010 (Malik, 2019).



Costs impact quality within child care. Expenses such as mortgages or rent, the salary of teachers, utilities, and food costs impact the operating costs of child care centers. Staffing child care is an area that is cut, which impacts recruiting quality child care teachers. Salaries are usually low for teachers in early childhood education to save money. The price point that families can afford tends to be a price that recruits underqualified teachers in the classroom. With tuition costs exceeding the rate of affordability, it does not give many options for quality of care; families must choose the cheapest option, which may not be the best.

An analysis released by the First Five Years Fund in early August 2022 includes all 50 states. The research findings showed that only a tiny percentage of eligible families receive assistance. There is an emphasis on under-investment in child care by the government. There is growing concern amongst families around child care costs. Families are considering changes in their workload by taking on a second job, reducing hours, or leaving the workforce due to child care costs (Fillion, 2022).

In their proposal to Congress, Senator Patty Murray and Chairman Bobby Scott claim that child care costs have risen by 25% within the last decade. Families are faced with choosing between paying the cost of child care and leaving the workforce altogether to care for children. The average costs of infant care in the District of Columbia and many states exceed the average tuition costs of public universities. The high child care costs make it hard to balance providing for families and paying for child care (H.R. 3773, 2019)

Investment in child care is important “child care is the work that enables all other work” (Malik, 2021, para. 1). Child care allows families to enter and remain in the workforce.

Unfortunately, there has been continual failure to invest in child care as an infrastructure. The

lack of investment has put the quality of care out of reach for many families. In addition, with the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been more of a child care affordability crisis (Malik, 2021).

COVID-19 has made these disparities in accessing care more noticeable. With shifts in work since the pandemic, many families have less access to affordable care. We are not seeing the full impact of this cultural and societal shift following the pandemic. There has been some relief provided but not enough. In some states, there has been an increased number of people approved for assistance which has helped some. (Child Care Relief, n.d.)

In 2021 President Biden signed into law the American Rescue Plan Act. This policy included 39 billion to go towards child care relief funding. In addition, this act passed included additional funding for child care within the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which provided additional assistance to essential workers regardless of income for eligibility (American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, 2021).

The funding available through these different acts also comes with rules that the states must follow. Public administrators within the agencies that received funding for the above-mentioned American Rescue Plan Act must follow allowable activities to receive funding. For example, within the child care development fund, states must use the funding to assist low-income families. In addition, they must continue to match funding as they did before this act (Administration for Children and Families, 2021).

Funding is made available through the budget process. Budgeting “reflects choices about what [the] government will and won’t do” (Rubin, 2017, p. 1). While people believe the government should be more involved with child care spending, priorities are reflected within the budgets. Budgets reflect “specific policy decisions (Rubin, 2017, p.2). This issue of child care affordability reflects policy decisions rooted in public administrators’ and policymakers’ budget

priorities. While there is child care funding through grants, it has not been a priority reflected in decisions in policy that influence the government budget.

Within public administration, there is a goal to promote social equity. With the ideas of New Public Administration from Frederickson (1971) in mind, “administrators both execute and make policy” (p.29). Budgeting to help control child care costs can create social equity by enhancing the economic well-being of minority groups and those who fall below the poverty line. Social equity within the New Public Administration is seen through attempts at passing legislation to help families attain affordable quality child care. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 funding from this bill helped to stabilize child care. Equity was seen through efforts to aid without regard to income eligibility. This bill like others allowed for people to receive access to child care. Legislation that allows for easier access child care creates equity within the country. (Child Care Aware of America, 2021).

The policy process allows for public administrators to be involved with the issue of child care affordability. We have seen decisions that reflect spending, such as the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which added allocated funding from the federal government reflected in the budget. Kraft and Furlong (2012) emphasize recognizing issues and the need for the issue to be addressed. The issue must rise on the agenda for action to be taken. Agenda-setting is central to the public policy process. Agenda setting for public policies is a way to address the need for government involvement in child care funding. Working alongside parents, early childhood educators, child care center owners, and administrators can work to create agendas and alternatives that can directly impact the funding of child care. Historical policies have been passed, such as the Lanham Act, that has opened the potential funding of child care funding by the government.

## Research Question

This study answers the following research question: What effects does affordability of child care have on families with children under 5 in licensed child care? A secondary research question is how government involvement can improve the affordability of child care within this country? Within the policy process, the government can create public policies that include social equity through government budgets that include child care funding. Understanding the impact of child care costs on families can help create public policies that encompass social equity. With public policies in place, administrators can work to include funding for child care within future budgets. In addition, understanding parents' needs can help create better policies.

Definitions of key terms include Affordability, Children, and Licensed Child Care Centers. Affordability is the percentage of income a family can use on child care without forgoing other necessities for their family (Department of Health and Human Services, 2015). Children for this research are under the age of five typically attend child care centers, while those who are older are enrolled in a traditional school setting (either public or private). Licensed child care centers are most associated with set standards of care and follow the rules and regulations set by a state agency. Licensed child care centers follow policies and regulations created by policymakers. Regulations must be met to be a registered and licensed child care center within the state (Child Care Technical Assistance Network, n.d.).

This research explores affordability's impact on families choosing child care for their children. Families can use non-traditional settings of child care for their young children. Different options for child care have different price points that can reflect the quality of child care provided to families. Understanding why parents choose a licensed child care setting can

help in understanding how to improve the system that supports child care within the United States.

This research does have policy implications as well. Attitudes towards early childhood education and the funding of early childhood education are necessary when we address involvement from federal and state governments. How society approaches child care is essential, and positive views on children's early care are necessary. Seeing affordability as a societal rather than a political issue can help pass legislation in child care. Politicians and advocates of early childhood education can use this research to push for affordable child care through additional funding or legislation that impacts child care. Reframing current child care funding can only be done through policy.

#### Significance of the Research Question

Child care is a topic area that has an indirect impact on society. Direct impacts are the families who are looking for affordable care. In addition, child care affects the participation of families within the workforce. Parents need reliable care for children to be productive members of the workforce. Child care supports families in finding and remaining within a job. Centers offer a safe place for children to be taken care of and learn while parents are at work. Within society, child care centers allow parents to return to the workforce.

Addressing the affordability of care is important from a policy standpoint. It creates quality standards while making it accessible for all demographics. Those burdened by child care affordability issues may also have to rely on other forms of social services to help offset the amount of income used for childcare. When viewing the issue of affordability of child care as a societal issue, it is often forgotten the impact that affordability has on other areas of life and how that extends to other issues within society.

The importance of this research can be easily summed up with this quote “America’s greatest resource is its people: their creativity, skills, drive, and productivity. Developing that resource starts at birth, and the foundation for its strength is built in the first five years” (First Five Years Fund, 2016, p. 6). People are the greatest asset to America; we need to develop children from a young age to create a society that can use the resources that young children learn through attending high-quality child care. To make this happen as a society, we need to make child care accessible. Affordability is a barrier to accessibility for families. Affordability, as stated before, is not more than the acceptable percentage of take-home pay. More than 1 in 3 children in the United States are living in poverty; those who are least likely to be able to attend a high-quality child care program falls within this population who live in poverty. All children need a high-quality child care program to help them develop into successful adults. Investment in child care, especially for those unable to attain the quality of care their child needs, has significant future investments from these children who benefit from attending child care programs. Access to affordable care for all children is essential for everyone (First Five Years Fund, 2016).

### Approach

Qualitative methods were used to answer the research question. This method is most appropriate for understanding the social issues of child care affordability within the United States, and the impact affordability has on families. Qualitative methods help to understand an experience and to give meaning and perspective to an issue. This method allows for semi-structured interviews to focus on a topic (Hammaberg et al., 2016). This method is appropriate for understanding the perspective families have on child care and the government funding of child care.

This research sampled families who have children under the age of five in a licensed child care setting. These families are paying child care tuition at the full-time rate within their geographic area without child care assistance. Their experiences with child care and paying tuition are reflective of working families in the United States. These families come from different states of America, from rural towns and cities. The states represented in this research were Texas, Florida, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wyoming, and Delaware.

This research used semi-structured interviews. Each of these interviews lasted around thirty minutes. During this time researcher used an interview guide to help facilitate the conversation around child care affordability and government involvement. This interview guide allowed for flexibility for the participants to express their thoughts while capturing common themes with the participants. Following the completion of the interviews, the researcher transcribed the nine interviews and coded the data for analysis.

The significance of this research applies to public administrators and policymakers. It highlights the struggles that everyday Americans face with child care affordability. This research can be used to understand how affordable and high-quality child care can create a better future for the United States. Most research that has been done has captured the quantitative side of funding child care and reflects on the past efforts of funding in times of need. Little research focuses on the people who face this challenge of affording child care. This research is presented in five chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results, and Conclusion. Chapter 2 provides a review of existing literature on child care funding. Chapter 3 includes discussion on the methodology used for this research. Chapter 4 presents the results from the interviews which are then used to make recommendations in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 2- Literature Review

### Overview of Public Administration and Policy

Child care funding and changes within society come through public administration efforts. Budgets, social equity, and policy process are ways that changes are made with child care funding. Though this is not an exhaustive list of public administrations and policy influence on child care within the United States, it is a start to understanding the role played in child care within the country.

Budgets are essential in politics and public administration due to the reflected decisions. Budgets link tasks that require resources to be accomplished. Public budgets represent what the government will and will not do within the country. These budgets exhibit the priorities of legislatures and administrators of the country. At times, priorities seem conflicting, such as child care and police funding. There are degrees of importance within the budgets representing legislatures' constituents' and interest groups' demands. Constituents across the country do not always have similar interests. Their communities reflect their interests. Those in the mid-west do not have the same interests as those living in the coastal area of Texas. National budgets influence the economy. Budgets reflect all decisions that are made with limited resources (Rubin, 2017).

Turning to a classic, Key (1940) explains public budget theory that is relevant to today's public budget process. Administrators must consider when to spend or allocate money to one area of government spending instead of another. There is never enough money to cover all interests that need money. Within the government, money is scarce, and administrators must decide how to allocate spending. Budgets do not reflect the interest of all people. Public officials working on budgets must work to achieve people's wants with little money. They decide what is



essential and how to get that budgeted. Choices are made between competing interests within society (Key, 1940).

People can influence budgeting. There are always different interests within the country; politicians fight for budgetary allocations for the issues their constituents are the most concerned with. For example, child care funding is in place within the budget through various acts and budgetary lines. With the creation of policies, this area of the budget can increase. As a result, budgets can help to create social equity within the country.

Coined by H. George Frederickson, the concept of social equity has been an ever-present public administration theory. Social equity is the fairness of management and organization of services within government. While equality and equity are often used interchangeably, equity cannot be broken down mathematically in sameness as equality can be. The theory focuses on the human aspects of economic fairness. It is important to remember that equity is not a constitutional right but a term that "emphasizes fairness, right, and justice" (Guy & McCandless, 2012, p. s6).

Social equity within public policy and budgeting is a concept that public administrators are trying to achieve within decision-making. Gooden (2015) explains that "equity means the fair or just distribution of such services or policies" (p. 372). Budgeting greater allocation of money could help advance people's social equity in the United States. Equity goes beyond the concepts of equality. "Social equity recognizes the historical, political, social and economic influences..." that are a barrier to access and opportunities of people (Gooden, 2015, p. 373). To ensure fairness, administrators must uphold the principles of fairness within their work.

Social equity can be used within the policy process and reflected in public budgets. The decisions that politicians and administrators make can include social equity values. These public

administration concepts work together to create policies that back social equity and are reflected in public budgets.

Within the government, there are two functions, politics and administration. "Politics has to do with policies or expressions of the state will. Administration has to do with the execution of these policies" (Goodnow, 1900, p. 29). Politics and administration help to shape public policy in the United States. Politicians make decisions that reflect the wants and needs of their constituents; politics guide the policy that is developed. Administrators carry out these policies within their communities. Though Goodnow's article is over 120 years old, it explains the importance of politics and administration working together within government. Politicians and administrators can work together to create and implement policies for the people of the United States (Goodnow, 1900).

Public policy is what administrators choose to do or not do about issues within a community or the country. Issues or problems are what society deems unacceptable and requires further government involvement. Choices in any issue depend on societal attitudes and how the problem is defined in society. Policies are what society regulates itself through. Laws, executive orders, and judicial rulings are elements of public policy. It is government action and often inaction to societal problems (Kraft & Furlong, 2012). For example, public policy has been used to create funding for child care seen recently with the American Recovery Plan Act of 2021. It was first used as a tool with the Lanham Act in 1940. It is a public administration and policy tool to ensure budgeting for issues within the United States.

The combination of public administration and policy practices such as budgeting, social equity theory, and public policy use is vital in child care funding. Public policy can influence

social equity practices in the country. It can also influence the amount of money budgeted in the yearly budget.

### Introduction to child care

Child care within the United States is important for a variety of reasons. The National Association for the Education of Young Children chief executive officer Allvin (2017) states the importance of this area within society “Early childhood educators can’t be outsourced or automated. They are developing the capacity and curiosity of our future workforce—and they are a linchpin to the strength and vitality of the workforce and economy of today.” Without child care or childhood educators, it would make all other activities within society harder to achieve. It is important to invest in child care to benefit families and society. There is a lack in the United States of this investment in child care compared to other industrialized countries. Research has reiterated the benefits of child care within (Allvin, 2017).

Dan Lesser (2008) summed up the importance of affordable care in the first sentence of his article, Lesser states, “affordable, quality care is a basic human need for working parents who must ensure their children’s safety and well-being while the parents are unavailable to provide care” (Lesser, 2008, p. 394). Affordable care is important for families, access to affordable care that is of quality is through child care assistance programs run through the state and funded by the Child Care Development Block Grant. There is a need for parents to know that their child is being well taken care of while they are at work. The cost of child care can be the difference between quality and those centers doing the bare minimum required by the state. Affordability is a barrier for some families regarding child care options for their children (Lesser, 2008).

Bergmann (1999) explains this as “affordable child care is...care at a price to parents that does not cripple a family’s budget and leave insufficient resources to buy food and shelter”

(Bergmann, 1999, p. 209). As a family, not all the available resources should be going into the cost of child care. Families should not be spending so much of their income to cover child care costs. There must be a balance of paying child care expenses while maintaining the needed amount of money to afford other living costs (Bergmann, 1999).

Child care in the United States has an issue with affordability for families. This issue has grown over time. It has become more apparent in the past couple of years following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the rise of social media, it has been easier to connect with others and express the burdens of child care costs with other people across the country. Closures of child care centers and rising prices of remaining child care centers have made it harder for most families in the country to access child care at an affordable price point.

High-quality child care is often mentioned when speaking about child care within the United States. High-quality child care is a child care setting “that supports optimal learning and development” (Marshall, 2004, p. 166). It is important to define the concepts as they come up in the discussion about affordability. Families want both quality as well as affordability when it comes to child care. Quality is the staff-to-child ratios, the number of children in the classrooms, and the education and training of teachers in the classroom. It is important to understand that quality can have an impact on affordability. Running child care centers with lower ratios and smaller group sizes costs more money. Educated teachers will have higher salaries than those without degrees. Understanding the impacts of high quality is important to understand the overall issue of child care affordability within the United States. The money spent to create high quality is fronted by parents paying tuition, not the government. As child care centers go towards quality, it affects the affordability of child care. Quality child care is out of reach for most and is more than 7% of family income.

Chairman and commissioner Bryan Daniel summed up the importance of early childhood education and the investment at the Texas Rising Stars Early Educator Conference in July of 2022 with the simple statement that “today’s Texas Rising Stars program is tomorrow’s workforce” (2022). We are investing in children as young as infancy helps to develop the skills needed for the workforce. This is true of any early childhood education program within the United States. Though we do not know what tomorrow’s workforce brings, we can teach children to adapt through the skills we teach them at a young age. To do this, we must invest in early childhood education programs. We need to make sending children to early childhood education programs affordable for all families (Daniel, 2022)

#### Historical Overview of Child Care Funding within America

Child care costs are not specific to America but do have a significant impact on families. Child care funding has impacted Americans throughout history. In retrospect, child care funding has been critical in connection to pressing times within the United States. A brief history of child care needs within this country helps to better understand the United States policy. This section addresses the history of spending and government involvement in child care.

Child care dates to the late 19th century. Low-income and high-income families required child care outside the home during this time. The need for child care for these different income level families was for different reasons. Low-income families needed an environment of safe care for their children while they maintained jobs. On the other end of the income spectrum, high-income families wanted to care that offered educational opportunities for their children to help in their development. These same reasons are still driving forces for families considering care for their children. Child care makes it possible for working-class parents to enter and remain in the workforce following childbirth. Those families who fall into a higher-income level have

more options than those in lower-income levels when it comes to child care programs. These families also have an option for nannies instead of child care. However, many realize the importance of their children learning with their peers in a child care setting and opt for children attending child care centers (Moodie-Dyer, 2011).

Throughout history, child care funding has been inconsistent. With opposition from citizens on the policy of funding child care, there has been a battle on what sector should be funding child care. Some people believe that the government should put more emphasis on funding child care, while others think that child care funding should be taken care of by the family. This creates a battle between the public and private on how this issue should be addressed and who is responsible for funding child care.

During times of crisis or emergencies in the country, the federal government has stepped in to help with child care needs. For example, during World War II, the federal government provided money for child care to help women enter the workforce in great numbers. With men fighting a two-theater war, this left numerous vacancies to be filled by women, and most of those women were mothers. As a result, there was an increased demand for child care outside the home, with mothers actively in the workforce (Cohen, 1996).

When the government steps in to handle the issue of child care, it does so to help solve an issue in American society. An interest initially arose when women were entering the workforce in large numbers for the first-time during World War II. Then, during the interwar years leading up to the Great Depression, child care funding was to help with unemployment and child development rates. (Levenstein, 2020).

Though the funding of child care has not been consistent, it has created a policy that has had a lasting effect on the affordability of child care. In the 1940s, Congress passed the Defense

Housing and Community Facilities and Services Act, which has become to be known as the Lanham act. This has become an essential piece of legislation for creating affordable child care within the United States. To highlight the importance of this policy, Stevenson (2015) wrote information from the archives of the White House to share with the country. This policy was created to help with the war cause; it allowed families, regardless of income, to send their children to school six days a week, costing \$9-\$10 a day (in 2015's economy). This included both summers and holidays for children to attend. These child care centers were affordable for working families but were also considered high-quality. Child care centers offered low teacher-to-student ratios while educating the students. Within this price, snacks and meals were included in the price. This was the first attempt to create a universal child care system that was affordable to families. Many people do not realize that affordable child care can be done (Stevenson, 2015).

The Lanham Act, which started as a temporary solution to child care costs during World War II, helped to shape child care funding interest at the federal level. This act helped to provide funding for the construction of child care centers within the country. In addition, government subsidies were provided to all families regardless of their income level, and there was no limit on a child's age (Cohen, 1996).

Though not specifically designed for child care, the Lanham Act was funded through grants nearing \$52 million from August 1943 through February 1946. With 3,102 federally subsidized child care centers at the peak of the funding, more than 130,000 children were enrolled in these programs. Between 1943 and 1946, it is estimated that over 550,000 children received some child care through the programs created by the Lanham Act. There was initial reluctance to encourage mothers of young children to join the workforce. However, there was a need for these women to be in the workforce. In addition, child care services were deemed to be

a necessary service for wartime efforts. This act was the only time in history that there had been federally subsidized child care that families could send their children to regardless of family income. This act also changed the perceptions of child care. Before this act, child care was a place for poor mothers to send their children. Following the war, the sentiment toward child care changed across the socioeconomic spectrum (Ertman, 2019).

The Lanham Act is essential regarding child care funding through the government. This act was the first time the federal government took an interest in child care, though this was not a direct interest. The interest in this specific problem was addressed indirectly through this act. Following World War II, families began to support child care due to the research on the importance of the early years of childhood. Leading with this information, President Lyndon Johnson established the Head Start program in 1965. This program was created as a part of his War on Poverty. Though Head Start target demographic is low-income families, it represented the need in this country for access to education for young children. The program's goal is to improve children's readiness for school. In addition, it helped lower-income families access quality child care for their children (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2019).

Aid to families with dependent children (AFDC) began with President Franklin D. Roosevelt through the Social Security Act. This passage of AFDC was the first for the federal government to take responsibility for helping states care for children. This policy helped families with children who had lost their parents. Rather than sending them off to institutions, they would be allowed to remain in their homes. The supplemental income helped families to achieve normalcy. This act helped to bring the idea that centralized policy for aid should be with the federal government. For eligibility for this aid, different parameters had to be met, such as



securing work within the workforce. Though this act did not fund child care-related initiatives, it has helped to influence parameters for child care funding eligibility today (Ross, 1985)

Child care costs are expensive, and funding child care can impact the quality of care provided to children. In the 1990s, little to no research was conducted on how funding or costs is related to the quality of care received. The research that had been conducted concluded that child care centers that solely depend on parent tuition payments are more likely to be of lower quality than those that received funding from a variety of sources. Centers that did receive funding from various sources were paving the way to create better quality compared to those who depended on parent funding. The cost of tuition is not the best indicator of the quality of care received in child care centers. The tuition amount of high-quality care compared to fair or good qualities of care are close in price. Money paid in tuition does not always indicate that better care will be given or that the money is going toward development opportunities. There are different ways that funding and tuition costs, can create high-quality care for children (Helburn & Howe, 1996).

By the late 1990s, Congress passed bills to address the affordability of child care within the country. The Child Care and Development Fund was enacted in 1997 to address the need for affordable child care. This fund consisted of block grants which gave the state money to fund subsidy programs for families' income that fell 85% below the state's median income. The target demographic of this bill was low-income families. The subsidies that were received by these families allowed them to remain active in the workforce (Marshall et al., 2013).

Military child care is an exciting area to note within the development and history of child care in the United States. It has been an area of importance for the military for over three decades and is government run through the Department of Defense. Dating back to the mid-1980s with the Military Family Act of 1985, this has been a policy area within our government to provide

quality child care for servicemembers. This service to military families is considered a benefit to help with the quality of life within the military. The child care centers that the government runs on military bases help support the recruitment of servicemembers, retention, and satisfaction of people serving. If a specific base does not provide this service, they contract and subsidize private care for these families (Congressional Research Services, 2020).

Though there is a priority within the waitlist, these child care centers are offered to active and retired servicemembers, widowed spouses, contractors, and other federal government employees. All fees are based on a sliding scale of the entire family income. This is a primarily subsidized child care system within the federal government structure. Congress appropriates funding for this child care program of the military. Funding for this government child care system is made by appropriated and non-appropriated funding. This is an example of government-run child care within the United States (Congressional Research Services, 2020).

This example of the military child care centers is an example of government-run child care within the United States. Congress has a hand in appropriating funds for the Department of Defense to run this child care program. When the government sets its mind to it, funding for child care related expenses can be done. As seen by all the previous examples within this section government has had the opportunity to help fund child care throughout history.

There have been historical events within the country that have had an enormous impact on the funding of child care through the federal government. It has also impacted people's views on child care within the United States. Over the last hundred years, there have been more positive views of the child care system in the United States; it is no longer seen as a place for poor people to send their children but a place for children to receive a high-quality education.

Though with the societal perspective change in child care, lower-income families are impacted more when accessing quality childcare.

The COVID-19 Pandemic brought historic funding to child care within this country. With the American Rescue Plan, child care centers are seeing the strain of the Pandemic being lifted. With an allocation of \$39 billion provided to the states, this act is the largest allocation in history. The total amount is also more than five years of spending combined prior to the Pandemic. Stabilization of the child care industry is the goal of the relief fund. During the Pandemic, over 16,000 child care centers closed their doors across the country. Child care centers that received funding have stated that the money has helped them to remain open. However, there are concerns about what will happen once the money does run out. The funding is set to end in 2024 (Carrazana, 2022).

#### Current Child Care in the United States

Child care within the United States has been around for over a hundred years. In most industrialized countries, it is assumed that both parents are working parents now. As a result, most other countries have developed universal policies on child care, but the United States has not. Most discussions on public policies regarding child care have been pushed to the side. It has not been a focus of many elected officials within this country. "Despite assistance that many U.S. families need, child care is still generally considered to be only a public policy issue for the poor or an individual issue that each family must resolve on its own" (Palley, 2009, p. 155). This topic is viewed as a poor man's issue. Those who oversee making policies are not affected by child care costs. Government support for families with children does not always connect to child care issues. Discussions about child care though have been limited to how to improve and develop

programs for the poor; it leaves out the families who barely make enough to qualify for assistance through the government (Palley, 2009).

Economists point to child care being the perfect example of market failure. The price point for quality child care is too expensive for the parents and too unaffordable for child care centers to provide. There is no way to fix this failure in a private setting. The police and fire departments, and libraries are examples of market failures. However, as a society, we collectively pull together to pay for these services without asking if a person can afford these services. Citizens support these services and believe they should remain in society. Child care is not thought of in this way. Child care is a heavily regulated institution; however, providers are not wanting to be unregulated and agree that these are necessary regulations. It is expensive to keep up with the regulations. America has fallen behind in addressing how to fix child care costs compared to other wealthy nations (Gross, 2021).

Policy regarding child care in the United States has been organized around providing the academic potential to young children and allowing low-income families to remain in the workforce. Over the last half-century, these have been the policy's main goals for child care. Many states provide vouchers or subsidies for low-income families to pay for child care outside the home in either child care or in-home centers. This system of subsidies has been used to help offset the cost of child care and allow families to remain in the workforce. Most subsidies are for centers that are registered or licensed by states. Many subsidies are still underfunded, and there are long waitlists for families needing assistance. Eligible families do not always realize they are eligible for subsidized care, which has caused some programs or funding to be unavailable. Many people do not know there is assistance for child care (Lowe & Weisner, 2004).

The number of children attending preschool or center-based child care has grown recently. The numbers have grown significantly, and most children experience child care before elementary school. However, those in lower-income families are less likely to attend center-based child care in comparison to higher-income families. In academic abilities in kindergarten, high-quality child care is a factor in cognitive abilities. Exposure to academic skills found in high-quality child care programs helps to prepare children for elementary school. However, there are disparities between the different income brackets. Children from lower-income families also face having parents of lower-education achievements, which causes even more of a disadvantage to these children who are not enrolled in a high-quality program. The price of child care is often a deterrent for low-income families to enroll their children in more formal child care settings. Often, low-income families are priced out of formal child care facilities (Magnuson et al., 2007).

In an article that covers Suskind's book *Parent Nation*, she claims that America spends about \$500 on child care for each toddler, making it the bottom of the list for the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. Other countries in this group spend about \$14,000 for each toddler. A fourth of mothers return to work within two weeks of having a baby; America is one of six countries not to have any form of paid maternity leave at the national level. It is the only wealthy nation of the six not to have this paid maternity leave system. Almost half of the children in this country are living in areas that are child care deserts. With that in mind, child care cost has risen over 65% since the 1980s. Children are now the poorest age group in America, with 11 million living in poverty; this is about 16% of all children in the country. America spends billions on public education (kindergarten-12th grade) without focusing on birth through preschool. Suskind argues that there should be more focus on early childhood and a higher return on society (Rosalsky, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that there needs to be more investment in childcare. With more demands on child care centers to provide more social distancing options and sanitation requirements, there have been more child care costs. Families are shouldering this burden more than ever. The military currently has a child development program that has been working for the last three decades to find a center-based option at an affordable rate to accommodate military families. This includes flexible hours to accommodate various shifts, a sliding fee scale, and competitive teacher pay. More than a billion dollars is spent by the defense department each year. This ideal child care is by the government for the government; it can be achieved if the government wants to do it. Unfortunately, Congress does not pass bills that increase subsidies or improve child care spending (Hsu, 2020).

Elias and D'Agostino (2021) argue that a solution to our current child care crisis is to adopt an affordable, high-quality, and federally funded system. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need for universal child care within the United States. There are some parallels between this pandemic and World War II; many women were essential workers during these critical times in history. These women needed reliable child care to participate in the workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic is a window of opportunity for how we can change child care within the country (Elias & D'Agostino, 2021).

Economists have recognized the benefits of investing in early childhood education programs in the United States. These benefits are not only for the children but for society as well. Unfortunately, the federal government has given little money and federal support for early childhood education compared to public schools. A linkage between poverty or low-income and child development has been researched. Spending money on child care programs in this country

can help improve school readiness. Child care for families allows this school readiness to be achieved (Engle & Black, 2002).

Child care is unaffordable for many families in the United States; single-parent families pay upwards of 36% of their household income. Parent tuition is not sustainable for the quality of care, and families cannot afford the price of the care. The impact of the lack of affordability of child care in this country is that businesses have turnover with employment, children are not prepared for school, and families who cannot afford child care are less financially stable. In all regions of the country, child care is the most considerable expense families face for their children. In most regions, the cost of child care exceeds the housing costs that families have. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that affordability is 7% of family household income. In the least affordable state, infant care exceeds 17.6%. This is more than double the standard of affordability. Some families at or below the poverty level could not afford infant care due to the costs exceeding their annual income. Those making double the poverty level still pay 14% of their income towards child care. This is an issue that is faced at every level of income. Child care is unaffordable for most families in this country (Child Care Aware, 2019).

Families face institutional constraints when it comes to accessibility in child care. State by state, we see different child care costs, fewer Head Start program options, and families' subsidies. Landivar et al. (2022) found that subsidies are associated with mothers' employment, usually with lower education but do not reduce the burden of child care expenses. Subsidies that are provided still require expenses out-of-pocket such as co-pays which can still be a barrier to families. There is a positive relationship between child care investment and maternal employment in all states. This relationship is essential when addressing the need for investment in child care within the United States (Landivar et al., 2022).

In Texas, child care is vital to the state's economy. Education is an important area of the workforce; however, Texas is lagging in goals to increase an educated workforce. The goal of Texas is to have 60% of Texas residents obtain secondary education by the year 2030, this goal is not reachable, and projections of meeting this goal is now 2051. This is partly due to the state's lack of affordable child care options. Child care is 10-30% of a family's take-home income within the state. Therefore, quality child care has been a missing component of the plan for Texas's educational and economic goals (Children at Risk, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted child care. Specifically looking at Texas, which already lacked affordable care access. Many child care centers closed during the initial outbreak of COVID-19, which caused fewer options for care for low-income families. Centers struggled to remain open with limited funding and restrictions from various government mandates. Families found that returning to child care also meant increased costs due to facilities running with half the children to help mitigate the spread of the disease. In addition, increased tuition expenses this has caused a burden on families who pay full price in tuition (Jones, 2020).

Children at Risk is a nonprofit organization who has studied the effects on child care costs. Many families in Texas have trouble affording the high child care costs, which is between 10 to 30 % of their total income. Child care costs should not exceed more than 7 % of the family income. While in Texas, infant care could cost 10 to 50% of the family's earnings. Many mothers choose to remain in the home when deciding between child care costs and wages that could be earned. Half of the budget of the Texas Workforce Commission is used to help subsidize child care costs for low- and middle-income families; however, this only serves 10% of children whose families are eligible. Many families make too much to qualify for subsidized child care but not enough to afford to pay for child care. Research conducted across developed countries



found only one policy that works to promote women to participate in the workforce is spending on early childhood education. Spending increases the quality of care and allows women to rejoin the workforce with young children (Children at Risk, 2018).

Chairman and commissioner Bryan Daniel of the Texas Workforce Commission eloquently stated, "subsidy programs help families get jobs or better jobs to support their families." He emphasized the importance of helping to make it easier to help struggling families make career moves to better support their families. In the state of Texas, one way the state is accomplishing this is through the Texas Rising Stars program; this program is improving quality for children and is setting the standard higher. Those who are eligible to participate in this program must have children who are enrolled in subsidy programs. In addition, these child care centers must accept children receiving child care assistance. Therefore, children who come from lower-income families get a chance to receive a high-quality education. Daniel believes this program is doing a good job, and he understands that investment in children starts at a young age. We need to invest at a young age for families at all income levels; it is imperative to invest in low-income people (Daniel, 2022).

In Minnesota, the annual cost of child care is \$12,00 for infants. Other states pay more, but in comparison to average income, this state is paying the most. The average cost of child care is about 15% of family income in Minnesota. Child care costs reflect the effort to improve the quality of child care within the state; child-to-teacher ratios indicate quality improvements. However, this increases the cost of child care. These costs have become a burden to low and middle-income families. Parents are struggling to pay more, but so are the child care providers. Child care as an industry runs at a thin profit margin. Studies by the Department of Human Services found that most centers operate at a 1% or less profit margin. Investment in child care at

an early stage has long-term impacts on society; in Minnesota, they credit this to lower crime rates and higher income earnings. However, this investment has fallen on the families instead of the state (Hughes, 2006).

#### Effects of Child Care Costs

Child care costs have different effects on the family in a variety of ways. Through literature, we understand the impact that child care costs can have on a family. Though this does not capture the emotional aspects that the families are facing, this helps to understand the facts about child care costs and the effects that families have.

Child care-related expenses affect low-income families the most, especially mothers with infants. Mothers with infants will pay more in tuition for child care than mothers with older children. Previous research has focused on mothers with infants and older children. Child care costs are preventative to mothers returning to the workforce. These mothers do not have income outside their wages, which is insufficient to offset child care costs. Higher-income earning mothers are more likely to return to the workforce due to the money earned being enough to offset child care costs (Baum, 2002).

It is important to remember that affordability is an issue for all families within the United States. Low-income households are likely to spend one-fourth of their income on child care, and almost all families with the low-income pay more than 7% of total family income. Black and Hispanic working parents will likely face unaffordable child care center options within their neighborhoods. Research has shown that working Black and Hispanic families make less money compared to White and Asian/Pacific families. This disproportionate income earning, and lack of available, affordable quality child care centers will increase racial/ethnic disparities. This increases disadvantages for many families within this country (Baldiga et al., 2018)

Ojambo (2015) found through research that families interviewed faced challenges with remaining employed due to the affordability of child care. They feel stressed about paying for child care and feel unable to provide enough for their families. Child care can have emotional impacts as well as monetary impacts on families. Many wish to see available child care much like there is for public schools. Low-income children are more likely to be impacted by child care costs (Objambo, 2015).

In a report that was done in 2019 by Justin Martin for KERA News in Texas, many families are quoted as feeling the effects of child care costs. In Texas, lower-income families spend nearly 30% of their income on child care. With a lack of affordability, parents opt for unreliable care or lower-quality child care centers. It is noted that low-income families often choose for one parent not to work due to costs associated with child care. Education is a factor in this stay-at-home vs. working mother issue. Stay-at-home mothers achieve lower levels of education than those who return to the workforce. Aside from the effects on families, this is causing underemployment of the workforce made up of women. With child care costs, families turn to neighbors, family members, or unlicensed home care for their children. This is a cheaper option but comes at a cost for children's long-term development (Martin, 2019).

With different programs available for child care subsidies across the country, families are not aware of the different programs available to apply to. The acceptance rate for eligible families is 72%; families who meet all the requirements may not be approved for child care subsidies. The goal of child care subsidies is to provide equity to children, to encourage parents to remain within the workforce, and to address the imperfections of child-care markets within the United States. Subsidies allow lower-income families to remain in the workforce while ensuring equality of care for their children. As a society, it has been determined that children benefit from

early education, and the child's well-being is essential. At the same time, we want participation within the workforce. This allows for better economic self-sufficiency for lower-income families (Blau & Tekin, 2007).

A strong statement made about government involvement in the regulation of the child care market is, "[if] nonparental child care improves the intellectual and social development of children and there are external benefits to society from these improved outcomes, subsidized child care is justified" (Blau & Tekin, 2007, p. 721). Government involvement through policy is essential to child care within the United States. Government policy helps to improve different aspects of child care and the economy.

Lesser (2008) identifies the effects of child care expenses and earned income. The Cliff effect is an issue within child care, where slight income changes influence care affordability. Slight increases in family income can cause a family to lose affordability to child care. The more a family has, the less availability of government services, including child care assistance benefits. Many families forgo raises and overtime to qualify for child care assistance. Even with more money in raises and overtime opportunities, this money is not enough to cover the total cost of child care. Though people want to earn more, they often choose to earn less for their children to attend child care with assistance. Earning more money does not always mean it will be enough to help cover child care costs; a couple of dollars more can put a family over the threshold of receiving child care assistance (Lesser, 2008).

### Funding of Child Care

Child care funding is often linked to the employment goals of the country. Employment is linked to families finding reliable and affordable child care. Without childcare funding, a burden is placed on families with young children. In deciding who receives funding

there are questions on who the priority should be when receiving child care assistance. Different factors influence who gets assistance and how much assistance there is to be given at a time.

Reauthorization of current programs raises the question of what the role should be of the federal government when it comes to assisting low-income families in child care (Koppelman, 2002).

Child care is a necessity for most American families. Millions of children daily are cared for by someone who is not their parent. It is an integral part of society; parents must rely on child care to remain employed. The states set child care funding, with local communities playing a role in some states. Though assistance is available, no state serves all families eligible; only 1 out of 7 children receive assistance for care. Mandatory entitlement and discretionary funding come from federal funding (Children's Defense Fund, 2003).

A family's recommended amount of money to pay for child care is 7% of a family's income. The average tuition within the states exceeds this threshold. Those on the lower end of income face upwards of 28% of their family income in child care expenses at center-based child care. The Child Care and Development Block Grant is federally funded and helps to make child care more affordable for families living in poverty. However, the number of centers accepting assistance is declining within this country. Due to low reimbursement rates by the state for child care spots, many centers do not accept government assisted children (Slicker & Hustedt, 2022).

States can set criteria for eligibility for families to be approved for subsidies. The eligibility requirements can be exact dollar amounts families can earn, the percentage of poverty lines, or the state's median income. There is also a requirement that families wishing to receive subsidies for child care need to be working or receiving further education or training to get a job. As a result, only a percentage of eligible families receive these subsidies (Danziger et al., 2004).

Studies have shown that only a fraction of those eligible for child care subsidies is served. Between 15% and 30% of eligible recipients receive child care funding. Most studies have focused on who receives these subsidies but not who is denied. This has been a limitation in understanding how the funding of child care has an impact on families (Herbst, 2008)

The Child Care and Development Fund is the primary federal funding source that targets low-income working-class families through subsidies. This fund encompasses many funding streams, including the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Section 418 of the Social Security Act, matching funds within the Child Care Entitlement to States, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. All these funds are mandatory and discretionary within this fund; they are allocated to the states through a formula. Laws direct the states on how to correctly use the funds within the states. In 2016, 70% of expenditures were covered by the federal government, with states contributing the remaining 30% of expenses (Lynch, 2016).

The Social Services Block Grant is another funding area used for social services within the country, including child care related expenses. States have discretion on the spending on this block grant. The funding from the federal government is capped and is determined through a formula for each state. This grant aims to help eliminate dependency on assistance and provide self-supporting behavior within the economy. This is another avenue of funding that can be used to help support child care needs within a state. With the freedom to choose eligibility requirements, states could use this money in significant ways to support child care within the state to help make it more affordable for more families (Lynch, 2012).

Subsidies for families can help in offsetting the costs of child care. Families with children under twelve can apply for subsidies, given that they also meet specific income requirements. CCDF and TANF are two sources of assistance. The CCDF usually requires that a parent is

currently working or attaining employment or further education. TANF recipients are likely to have lower educational attainment and little to no work experience. Each of these funding sources does have some requirements for eligibility. However, it is estimated that 15% of eligible children receive subsidies. Maintaining eligibility is confusing and frustrating for many families. It is not a simple system to understand for most (Shattuck, 2019)

Funding for child care has increased at different levels of government throughout the states. Pre-K funding throughout the states is split between local, state, and federal government funding. Sin taxes can be a way to help increase funding for the education of young children while also discouraging the use of alcohol and tobacco. These taxes can help to increase revenue at the state level. Other forms of funding at the local level have come through sales taxes, property taxes, and taxes on certain commodities such as soda. While the local funding revenues are specific to Pre-K through the school systems, these models can help to create revenue for spending in early childhood education, not a part of the school districts (Parker et al., 2018).

Substantial funding for child care comes from the Child Care Developmental Block Grant Act. This act provides subsidies for low-income families who have children in care under the age of thirteen. In addition to federal funding, this act allows flexibility with state funding to improve the quality of child care. Initially enacted in 1990, this act has been modified in the last 30 years. One reauthorization happened in 2014, which helped to recognize the importance of child care in children's early years and how to help parents remain in the workforce. The historical beginnings of this act were to help low-income families remain in the workforce; this grant has helped to emphasize early education's importance on children's development. In addition, the 2014 revision to the act has helped to strengthen other aspects of child care through funding at the government level (First Five Years Fund, n.d.).

In 2018, Congress approved a 2.37 billion increase to the Child Care Development Block Grant Program. The importance of the increase in funding is that it helps states improve the quality of their child care systems within the state. As a result, families can receive better access to providers of child care that meet health, safety, and quality goals. While states have discretion on how to use the funding, many choose to reimburse child care providers at a higher rate. This is important for those centers with many children receiving child care assistance to have higher payouts; they can afford to buy materials and attain highly trained teachers for their centers to improve quality (Hassan, 2019).

Introduced into Senate, the Child Care for Working Families Act amends the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act of 1990 and the Head Start Act. This amendment is to help promote early learning for children in child care. This bill's target population is low to middle-income classes of families. More funding is provided for the Child Care and Development Block Grant, as well as recreating the assistance programming and allocating money for programs that serve infants and toddlers. The bill's parameters require states to have a transparent measurement of the quality of child care and payments based on cost estimations. Copayments of families receiving assistance will be based on a sliding scale not to exceed 7% of a family's income. Funding will go towards grants to help create preschool programs for children between the ages of three and five. This bill is currently in the introduction phase of legislation as of October 2021. The proposed allocation of funds can help develop child care and make it more affordable for families (S. 1360).

In 1996 the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act was passed. Before this was the Aid to Families with Dependent Children; this program followed federal guidelines. Funding for child care fell under four different programs under this more extensive program.



These programs were the AFDC Child Care program, the Transitional Child Care Program, the At-Risk Child Care Program, and the better-known Child Care Development Block Grant. All these programs followed the federal guidelines that were set forth. The 1996 reform replaced the AFDC program with what today is the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families; the key difference between these two programs is the requirement for those seeking welfare or assistance must participate in the workforce to receive benefits. The newer legislation also consolidated spending on child care into the Child Care Development Fund. This fund is administered by the Child Care Bureau within the Health and Human Services. The new method of receiving welfare was to use child care subsidies to help families participate in the workforce. Though women are in the workforce, it is still difficult to access child care assistance, and many still must rely on other forms of child care for their children due to costs. Though there was an increase in spending following the shift in programs, it eventually slowed and decreased by 2001. Almost half of the states by 2001 decreased the availability of assistance to families and made eligibility requirement changes (Ahn, 2012).

In 2019, Administration for Children and Families pushed for further input from public interest and stakeholders on strategies to improve access to affordable child care for families. It is one of the highest costs and becomes a barrier for working families. Infant care in over half of the state's costs more than college tuition, and the importance of high-quality care becomes a struggle for many who want or need the care but cannot afford the price. Investing in quality child care can have economic impacts by allowing families to return or remain in the workforce. Investment now in child care by developing children who will have success later in school and throughout life. Funding comes from direct federal spending, federal tax credits/subsidies, and

state funding. Direct federal funding includes the Child Care and Development Fund, Head Start Partnerships, Temporary Assistance for

Over 20 billion was spent with these programs: Needy Families, Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five, and Social Services Block Grant. Federal Tax Credits include Child and Dependent Tax Credit, Employer-provided child care exclusion, and Employer-provided child care credit which is about 5 billion spent. Last is the state funding, which is the State Match and Maintenance-of-effort for the CCDF and State Pre-K Spending, which amounts to around 10 billion. In all, this current spending total approximately 37 billion dollars together. These are the significant sources of funding for child care within the United States (Department of Health and Human Services, 2019).

Child care subsidies are essential in helping families become self-sufficient within the economy, especially those who are considered low-income. Self-sufficiency is also crucial for economic and non-economic reasons. Families should have a better work ethic and build capital within the workplace. Providing subsidies can help save the United States money in the long run by helping families be able to afford more. The desire for families to remain in the workplace is the argument for tying subsidies to employment (Blau, 2003).

#### COVID-19 Impact on Child Care Funding

COVID-19 increased funding of child care through different short-term acts and policies. Though not likely sustainable, it currently allows families to access quality child care. During the Pandemic's beginning, service workers and lower-paid essential employees were brought to the top of waitlists for child care assistance in Texas. These families received a year of child care assistance with a \$0 family co-pay. This allowed families to access centers with quality

programs. COVID-19 has increased funding for a limited time. (Texas Workforce Commission,2022)

The Texas Workforce Commission is how money for child care spending is allocated throughout the state. The COVID-19 Pandemic saw increased funding through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, which is valid for other states. The legislation that increased the funding was the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. This increased the reimbursement rates to child care centers during the Pandemic. This increment of the reimbursement rate was to help offset the operating costs of the child care center to take that burden off families. More funding came from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplement Appropriations Act (CRRSA) and The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). ARPA is broken into discretionary and stabilization grant funds; within the stabilization grant fund, 90% of the money must be spent on funding child care programs. With the grant, the money must be used on existing child care programs, not the creation of child care centers. This allocation also helps to support child care deserts (areas within the state with more children in need of care than the number of child care centers available) (Texas Workforce Commission,2022).

Spending on child care has changed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, as seen in Texas. This is not the only state in the country experiencing a change in funding. At the federal level, different initiatives have been made to help families during the COVID-19 Pandemic. COVID-19 has been a significant event in this century, allowing for a shift in child care funding. Throughout history, shifts in funding have been impacted by significant events.

### **Ideas for Funding Streams**

To help fund child care, one method that has been mentioned is making a charitable donation at the federal level. Whitehurst (2017) discusses this concept in his article. His

argument for why the federal government should fund child care is that nearly half of the population in the country would be eligible for child care assistance. Support for funding child care is that it should be funded if it does not add to the deficit. A solution to this is making a tax deduction as a charitable deduction to offset the deficit. This is a different approach to funding child care that has not been explored in depth, though it can present downsides as it is a different concept to claim child care within taxes (Whitehurst, 2017).

Funding for child care is made up of a fragmented system. In the 1990s, over twenty federal programs helped to aid child care. Another area of funding for child care centers that is often forgotten is the Child Care Food Program, where centers are eligible for reimbursement of meal costs. Proposed federal spending in child care does add to the government's overall deficit. A solution to fixing the current child care funding is to have a two-tiered system of support from the federal government. The first tier would make the current child care tax credit more equitable; one way to do this is to make the credit refundable and more progressive. A second recommendation is to repeal the flexible spending accounts that come from Section 129 of the Internal Revenue Service Code. One way to do this is to phase out the tax credit at the very highest of incomes. This code and the child care tax credit are essentially the same objectives, so there is no need to have multiple tax options. The second tier proposed is to act as a safety net for low-income families. This could be for the government to finance the centers within low-income areas such as public housing or high-poverty areas. These families then should receive services from the center at little-to-no cost. Ways to finance this would be through the federal government or grant matching (Robins, 1990).

Barnett and Hustedt (2011) proposed a policy to create a more reliable funding stream for early education to increase the amount of public funding available. One funding model that can

be used is "The School Funding Formula" this allows for funding based on the number of children enrolled, not dependent on the children's eligibility. This is a model used for public schools; in this model, as presented in this article, the money would go to school districts, so there would be a subcontract needed for community preschools to receive funding. There have been attempts across the country to set up state-wide universal pre-K, which helps families receive quality education for free. This is a state-by-state attempt and not a federal attempt at universal pre-k in this country (Barnett & Hustedt, 2011).

## Chapter III- Research Methods

### Introduction

The primary research goals were to answer what effects families face with affordability and what families believe the government should do to help alleviate those costs. Findings of this research can help shape public policy regarding the federal, state, and local funding of quality childcare that is attainable for families. Through public policy initiatives, budgets can reflect decisions that reflect a priority for child care funding. Funding child care in budgets helps promote social equity within the United States. Quality child care must be at an affordable rate for families.

The following sections describe the methodology used for this research; this study used qualitative research approaches, using interviews with open-ended questions. The interview questions were semi-structured to allow a natural flow of conversation between the interviewer and families. The sample included families recruited from various social media platforms.

### Research Question

The initial research question was: What effects does affordability of child care have on families with children under 5 in licensed child care? This initial research question aimed to understand how people's decisions are impacted in choosing childcare centers for their children. If cost is the most important decision when considering childcare for children. Overall, the cost of living is increasing, and childcare is also an increased cost within families. A secondary research question is how government involvement can improve the affordability of child care within this country? Understanding if childcare costs are the most important factor for families when deciding if a childcare center is suitable for their family is essential for providers and different community actors. With the knowledge that childcare is a rising cost, it is also essential

to understand the families' perspectives on government funding or involvement in this issue. Using perspectives of people's understanding of government involvement can help make changes to child care funding.

### Sample

The research focused on families that had their children enrolled in licensed child care centers. For purposes of this research, a licensed child care center is a center outside one's home that is registered and licensed with a given state. For accessible sample collection, social media was used to find the pool of participants. The most appropriate approach in this study was the case study approach. Within the sample is parents of different socio-economic backgrounds. Focusing on different economic backgrounds and the effects those backgrounds have on the ability to pay for childcare. These different families were chosen for interviews due to their experiences paying for childcare tuition at a licensed child care center.

### Data Collection

Data collection in this research was through interviewing. "An interview is considered a social interaction based on conversation" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 164). Interviewing allowed for a more in-depth view of parents' choices when choosing a child care center or care for their children. The qualitative research interview is further described as "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 3). The research question what effects affordability of child care has on families with children under 5 in licensed child care, was to understand the impact that affordability has on childcare choices; this method of data collection was the most appropriate for getting a sense of what families are thinking and feeling regarding choosing child care for their children. Open-ended questions allowed for more information to be given freely

that did not need prompting. To keep the scope of the research, an interview guide was used with semi-structured questions (Appendix A). Open-ended questioning allowed for more conversation rather than having a definite one-worded answer.

In addition to using families' interviews, archival information about childcare funding from the government was also helpful. Using the information on how government involvement helped different people in the past helps to better understand how people currently feel about government involvement in spending for early childhood education now. In addition, older research clarifies how viewpoints have changed over time and what has been accomplished in the past to help lower care costs for families.

As mentioned, data collection for this research was conducted through semi-structured interviews with nine different participants representing their families from all areas of the country. Texas, Florida, Delaware, Wyoming, and Minnesota were the states represented as demographics within this study. This helped with the perspectives of different areas of the country.

During this stage of data collection, it became clear that some broad themes were emerging before the coding and analysis phase began. These themes of struggling with child care affordability and lack of knowledge on government spending on child care was evident in the data collection process. It was later shown through the analysis phase.



## Demographics Results

The breakdown of the demographics of the participants is found in Table 1. The demographics represented in this table are from questions 8 and 9 of the interview guide (Appendix A). Only one participant in this study was a single parent family. All families had either one or two children. Within in this participant pool no family had more than two children. Eight participants stated that they had both eligible parents working, one participant had only one parent working in the household. These demographics are discussed in the results chapter as well.

**Table 1**

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Interviewed</b>
Married	8
Single	1
<b>Number of Children</b>	
1	5
2	4
<b>Employment Status</b>	
Both Parents (Parent)	8
One Parent	1

## Institutional Review Board

This research required approval from West Chester University of Pennsylvania's Institutional Review Board (IRB) due to the nature of studying humans. This process involved applying to IRB for review and approval. Application to IRB included documentation of the interview guide, social media flyer that was posted on various Facebook pages and groups, Instagram, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Within the IRB process, the overall research purposes, background to the research, and expected findings of research was also described. An outlined step-by-step procedure of this research to include how people were chosen for the study and the exclusion criteria of this study was also included. Informed consent was also a requirement of

this research (Appendix B). IRB for this research was approved on March 14, 2022, with research to begin on April 1, 2022. (Appendix E)

### Conflict of Interest

The researcher is an assistant director of a preschool in Texas. Due to the nature of the researcher's role within a child care setting working with families of different economic backgrounds, protocols were implemented to mitigate issues with conflict of interest. Some families of the researcher's child care center participated in the research. These families were recruited from different social media outlets and not through solicitation of the center's families. It was disclosed to those families that the questions asked did not reflect any stance of the child care center and that this was not a center-sponsored interview.

A brief introduction was provided to the families that were not a part of the child care center where the researcher worked. This included the purpose of the research and the acknowledgment that the researcher was also an assistant director of a child care center. In addition, this email was sent to any person interested in the research through social media. Doing this helped to ensure that potential participants knew going into the interview the current role of the researcher.

Other protocols included ensuring those families who participated in the research did know that the researcher was conducting the research through university-sponsored research. The researcher did express at the beginning of each interview that the interview was for research purposes for a doctoral study.

Making sure that participants were clear on the role that the researcher had in this study was necessary for the families associated with the researcher's child care center. It also was

necessary for the other families who were not a part of the child care center that this was for academic purposes and not for the child care center's benefit.

## Recruitment

Recruitment of interviewees was through posting an informational flyer within various Facebook groups, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. The flyer informed potential participants to contact the researcher through their university email. Potential participants were then emailed further information that included the informed consent, interview questions, and a description of the research for a more informed decision process (Appendix C). In this email, the researcher's introduction, mentioned in the informed consent section, was also included. This email can be found in (Appendix D). The interviews were conducted via Zoom after participants read through all documents associated with the interview.

## Informed Consent

Informed consent followed West Chest University's policy and IRB's approved practices. Before the interview, the families participating in the research study were given consent forms in advance. The consent and risks to participation were discussed with participants prior to the beginning of the interview process. Scanners, emails, and DocuSign were used to help collect informed consent due to the virtual aspect of this research. Most participants were not local to collect informed consent in person. These forms are stored by the approved procedures of IRB.

## **Participant Protections**

To protect the identity of the families that participated in the interviews full names were not used. To keep anonymity within the research, each family was coded as family followed by a number for references and quotes to their interviews. This allowed for information to be shared

without the harm of the family's identities being assumed. For this research, preschool names are not identified to keep even more anonymity with the research participants.

Direct quotes from families used in subsequent chapters use the format described to quote families. This is to keep with the anonymity promised to the participants. Participants' names with their family number codes are in a locked computer file on password protected computer only accessible to the researcher.

### Interview Procedures

Interviews were conducted via Zoom. Each participant had an individualized Zoom password to attend their interview. These Zoom passwords were only shared between the interviewer and the interviewee. No password was reused for participants. Those who missed their Zoom meeting were issued a new password—utilizing Zoom for interviews allowed participants to schedule their interview during their free time. At the beginning of the interview, consent from participants was obtained. Objectives and a summary of the project was provided as well. Emphasis was given to the fact that this research was through the university as partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion of the Doctor of Public Administration program.

The researcher allowed participants to ask questions before the formal interview began. Following a discussion with the participants, the interview started. Next, the researcher began recording on Zoom to be later transcribed and downloaded for the interviewer. An interview guide was used to help facilitate the conversation with the participants. After the interview, participants were allowed time to ask additional questions; at this point, the recording had stopped. The entire process lasted about 30 minutes. The interviews were stored in compliance with West Chester University's IRB policy.

## Transcription

Following the interviews, the researcher downloaded the transcribed interviews. These downloads had time stamps and each speaker's name as it appeared on the participant's Zoom account. These original transcriptions had to be resaved into a word document to get entire sentence structures to allow for more straightforward interpretation. The transcriptions then had to be edited to ensure correct wording. The researcher used the audio recording to help ensure the transcriptions matched the wording of the participant. Transcriptions were used as the basis for coding and analyzing the interviews.

## Coding and Analysis

Collecting the data produced a vast amount of text which required creating a coding process. Analysis began as data collection was ongoing. Starting the analysis early in the process helped to identify broad themes that impacted the research question. Themes included

- families facing struggles with child care costs
- the lack of understanding of government involvement in child care spending
- family choices regarding family planning

This helped to identify themes as interviews were being conducted within the written notes to help find the information quickly.

MAXQDA was used to code and analyze the transcripts from Zoom into questions from the interview guide. This allowed the researcher to see the answers to a particular question simultaneously. This helped to find common themes stated within each of the questions without having to search through multiple word documents. This concisely put all the sections together in a format that is easy to read. From here, the researcher could find quotes that adequately summed up the real emotions of the participants.

Using a case study method for analysis allowed for cross-case analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 120). Starting with a direct interpretation, the researcher could pull apart data from a single case and reconstruct the meaning of the data. Within case studies, the “researcher establishes patterns and looks for correspondence between two or more categories” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 219). The researcher was able to use a naturalistic generalization from the analysis of the data; these generalizations can help people to learn from the cases.

Yin’s (2018) seminal work on case studies helps to emphasize the use of case studies and helps to understand when to use this method. Many questions about the “how and why” of child care and government involvement are asked. The answers to the questions are more explanatory, allowing for a case study approach to be used in the findings of the analysis process. The strength of this process allowed for various pieces of evidence to be used. Such as previous literature review documentation and the interview of participants for this research. The use of a case study method “illuminate[s] a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken” (Yin, 2018, p. 14). The interview helped support a case study approach for presenting the findings of the analysis of the codes used within this research (Yin, 2018).

### Validity

Concerns with validity within qualitative research have increased throughout the years. Traditional validity within qualitative research relies on the researchers' claims to have knowledge of the reality of what is being studied. There has been an emergence of different approaches to validity; for this research, transactional validity was used. Cho and Trent (2006) convey that this approach achieves accuracy by verifying the data and ensuring that the interpretation is correct. The researcher's credibility is proven through the steps taken to verify data. (Cho & Trent, 2006).

Yin (2018) uses the term "analytic generalization," which asserts the understanding that generalization is not statistical and that there will be an argumentative claim. Analytical generalization aims to generalize concrete situations and not to contribute abstract theories. As a result, generalizations can be made higher than studied cases (Yin, 2018).

## Chapter IV- Results

The following section is the results of the qualitative data collection. Within this section, the interviewees are referred to as Family # in their responses. This is to keep the respondents' anonymity and to protect their identities.

This is not a complete picture of child care spending or government involvement. Before the coding process, it became apparent that participants expressed common themes. Not all participants were impacted the same way financially, though it was a burden. Later sections of this chapter will explore these burdens. What predominately emerged in the discussion was the lack of knowledge of government spending or assistance on the issue of child care affordability. This topic will also be discussed more in the following sections.

The questions sections were related to Child Care, Government Involvement, and Family Dynamics. The child care related questions explore:

- The experiences participants had with child care.
- How they felt about the amount of money they spend on child care based on those feelings.
- What are their perceptions of the child care market
- How child care costs have impacted their family

Government involvement questions were intended to gauge individuals understanding of spending on this area within the government. Questioning included:

- Participants knew about government spending
- What they think the government should be spending on
- If government should spend more or less within this area
- Why there is not more spending or involvement



The last section of questioning included the family dynamics such as

- Family size
- Marital status
- Number of children in care
- Parent employment status.

Though not initially looking for where participants lived, each participant mentioned it in their responses.

### Coding and Analysis

For this research, coding was conducted through MAXQDA to present the line-by-line transcription of the interviews. Within this coding, lines were numbered to help navigate the responses to quote within the results. The initial open coding was satisfaction, dissatisfaction, overall experience, food program, government involvement, spending, family size, marital status, and job status.

Codes used to help identify the text's categories of child care, government involvement, and family dynamics to coincide with the three topic areas within the questions. These three codes helped decide where this information would fit into the line of questioning due to participants circling back to previous questions when answering questions later in the interview. Some participants also began their interviews with answers that fit later questions in the interview guide.

Themes began emerging throughout the coding and analysis process. The researcher noted common themes throughout the interview process in their notes to revisit. Themes of struggling were seen throughout the interviews. Participants struggled financially and emotionally with child care. Repeatedly participants mentioned the food program as a way that

the government is involved in spending for child care currently. Many participants have experience with this program through the child care centers that their children attend. However, some participants expressed child care related expenses have impacted their family planning decisions.

This analysis and common themes are presented in the following section of this chapter. Broken down into specific categories and correlating questions, these common themes are explored. Direct quotes from participants help to emphasize the thoughts of those participating and reflect common themes of ideas. The quotes also represent ideas to expand on specific research areas, especially in questions on what participants believe should be paid for by the government.

#### Child Care Questions

The first questions asked were about child care. This allowed participants to explain their experiences and to reflect on whether child care services are reflected in the cost of tuition. Conversation allowed participants to bring up anything they felt was important in their deciding factor of child care and what is important to them when choosing a child care center.

#### Question 1

To better understand the participants and their experiences with child care, the first question of the interview was, “please tell me about your experience with child care.” Using open-ended questions allowed for more in-depth explanations of their participants experiences with child care for their children. This question is intended to get participants talking about child care in general. A lot was learned about participants emotional ties to the child care centers their children attend. Participants have experienced both good and bad with child care centers.

Participants have struggled to find care; many began with their experience of finding the right school or a school that had openings. As one participant expressed...

*So, that's what I was looking for daycare I was on one waiting list and that day they closed completely. And then I found another place, and the Thursday or Friday before he was supposed to start the following Monday, they told me they no longer had a place for him... (Family 1, personal communication, April 4, 2022)*

*We've had pretty good experiences my daughter's five, and we just moved away from a military community back to a normal nonmilitary community so it's a little different... In general, it's been pretty good there's been a couple schools that were not so great, they didn't work with my daughter, and her personality very well and so that caused some issues, but once we found schools that fit with... how she learned, then it was fine.*

(Family 3, personal communication, May 20, 2022)

## Question 2

The second question built on their experiences within child care. The question was: ‘based on your experience with childcare, do you think childcare costs reflect the services received?’ This allowed parents to honestly answer if they felt their money was being spent appropriately for their family needs. There were mixed answers to this question, though there were emergent themes that developed from this question. Although many were fortunate enough to live in an area where child care was not overly priced, most participants compared their child care tuition to cities surrounding their center. All those interviewed did not live in large cities with higher tuition rates. These participants expressed...

*I think its variable depending on the daycare. I think. Yes, yes um but not across the board. Like its [School A], I would pay more ... at [School B] I would pay less than what they wanted. Because obviously you're paying for... their new*

*building and their new everything and... I didn't see the service factor in like the campus part of service, but I like the campus. At [School A] I like the service. So, yes and no. (Family 4, personal communication, June 2, 2022)*

*Yeah, I'm pretty fortunate, where I am that the cost isn't as high as I know, some places are, and it's pretty blanket it's like pretty much the same cost anywhere. Child care facility in like our city, we are a college town, so if you can't get into any of the daycares which happens to a lot of people, and you have to go the route of like students as like nannies, that that can get pretty pricey, but I haven't experienced that I've just heard about. (Family 9, personal communication, July 17, 2022)*

### Question 3

To build from the previous question, participants were asked how they perceive the current market rate for childcare tuition. They could talk about how they felt the current child care market was for their area. As stated above, these participants did not live in large cities; many lived in moral rural areas. This question allowed them to reflect on their child care costs within their area of the country. Some areas of the country had no choices in child care options, so they must accept the rates and have no options for different child care rates. In these areas with scarce child care, the market seems to be flat across the area; no one center varies too much, or at least in the participants' areas. As one participant expressed...

*It's unfortunate that it's so expensive but I think because it's privatized, for the most part it's cheap comparatively per hour than you would pay, for you know somebody just to come babysit at your house all day... So, I think even though it is expensive they're essentially going to school and getting taught... they're being fed and being taking care of the entire day as well, so it's kind of a given take there. (Family 3, personal communication, May 20, 2022)*

*I feel like most of the places are where they need to be in order to give good childcare... At the same time when you think about the fact that a person is paying or a couple or a family, whatever at least \$1,000 a year for child care. What does that leave them to do the rest of what they need to do right?... There are some like when I was looking at numbers some places that were over \$300 a week for one kid and so, I think some places are more astronomical than they need to be. When you look at what they're charging versus what they're paying the actual teachers to teach and to take care of the kids sometimes those prices...are way too much.*

(Family 1, personal communication, April 6, 2022)

#### Question 4

The next question builds on the previous questions and goes to the core of the research. The cost of child care impacts families in different ways. What was evident in the interviewing process is that all the participants had some impact on their families with child care expenses. Some had to make different adjustments to their lives to cover the cost of child care; other participants had to make drastic changes or decisions for their families to afford child care. All participants have had to make choices regarding paying for child care. This question allowed them to reflect on the role of child care expenses in their family. Participants noted below the extreme measures they have faced. One participant explained...

*Now...I am a teacher a middle school teacher my husband works full time as an agricultural specialist. And we have had to pull my son out of daycare for the summer because it's too expensive on two salary-based incomes. We've had to pick and choose certain bills during that time when he was in daycare. It's caused*

*a lot of I guess family stress, marital stress on money. Yeah, there's a lot of money issues.* (Family 5, personal communication, June 13, 2022)

*Oh, my goodness, look like our whole entire experience. We lived in Tyler we actually sold our house and moved out into the Ben Wheeler area to save money once COVID hit and we were putting our kids and our daughter into childcare... We couldn't afford our House and Tyler all of our expenses and Tyler the childcare, so we just moved.* (Family 6, personal communication, July 4, 2022)

Each of these questions was used to understand how child care and the cost of child care impact families. Other emotional effects come with child care. Some regretted spending money for children to attend child care programs; others felt that their children were learning and loved their teachers. For some, there had been attempts for children to stay at home with them, but they felt they had to find some way for their children to attend school regardless of costs due to their children's well-being.

#### Government Involvement

The next section of questions was to establish what participants knew about government involvement in child care spending. These questions help in understanding what the knowledge of child care spending was amongst the participants that were interviewed. Common themes were found among them; overall, there was a lack of knowledge. However, all participants had some idea of what the government could do to support child care funding in the United States. These questions are linked to the first research question about the impacts of child care affordability on families. Previous section of questions supports a secondary research question on government involvement. Understanding how the first three sections are essential to the

affordability and understanding of child care which opens participants to explore government involvement in child care funding.

#### Question 5

The first question in this series was, “What do you know about government spending on childcare?” This question allowed the participants to reflect on their knowledge of child care spending in the United States. From this question, it was easy to gauge what they know about child care spending within the United States. A portion of participants were honest that they did not know what was spent or had no clue but knew there was assistance. Few had understood or had used child care assistance within their experience of child care. Most were familiar with the food program assistance offered at child care centers as one family noted...

*It seems like... it could be more generous. I do know, like a few things like there's rebate systems put in place... for daycares that are providing lunches I know there's. Like CCS spending, but those are the only two things that I know about.*

(Family 4, personal communication, June 2, 2022)

*I mean I feel like I have limited knowledge and especially in the US, I know you know in some European countries like that's part of what the government subsidizes or provides for working families... like Bringing Up Baby, which is like about French parenting I think has is probably like the most familiar I am with how other governments support childcare expenses.*

(Family 8, personal communication, July 7, 2022)

## Question 5A

The next question asked participants to explain what they felt the government should be doing. All felt that the government should be doing more than what is currently being done. They all believed that the government should be more involved with some aspect of child care funding. Each participant had a different idea of what could and should be funded by the government. They expressed different ideas on how the government could be more involved in funding. One participant suggested...

*I feel like they should be more involved honestly... But I see a huge issue like for myself and other included like there is this weird like 8 to 5 culture in America, where we work, five days a week from 8 to 5 and to facilitate that we have to have childcare and like right now there is no like solid sustainable reliable childcare option... So, I feel like government involvement would be good, just like maybe to set some like requirements like they do for schools...It would be cool if it was like pay base like if you make it made a certain amount money, if it was like graded for you like that, but I don't think there should be a completely free option, because that would just take too many tax dollars. But it would be nice if there was like some kind of pay scale... where like you have childcare, these are the things are guaranteed like...curriculum... (Family 6, personnel communication, July 4, 2022)*

*I think the government should be more involved in spending childcare for everybody, not just selective of those who can't afford it, or have a baseline*



*minimum amount of money. That they get paid, the daycares get paid for because it's a killer on everybody.* (Family 5, personal communication, June 13, 2022)

### Question 6

This question focused on what the government should spend on child care. Participants had the opportunity to express what they believed the government should be paying for regarding child care expenses. The question posed was, “what expenses should the government be involved with regarding child care?” Although every family stated that the government should be doing more, each family had a different take on what that could be.

One common theme in this question was the continued support of the federal child care food program, even if their family did not qualify for the benefit. They understood the importance of this program in offsetting child care costs for a center. Some of the participants had other ideas on what the government should do. They noted what they would like to see from government spending within child care outside of the food program. One participant noted...

*I think probably the biggest thing would maybe just subsidizing either like a portion of childcare for working families, so if both the mom and dad work... and they can provide proof of that and maybe the government would be willing to pay for a portion of it.* (Family 2, personnel communication, May 20, 2022)

*Oh well, for instances for it'd be nice to have an actual like curriculum set, the government being involved in ensuring all teachers are licensed and possibly childcare costs or ways to support educators to not have to raise their prices, especially in times like this.* (Family 5, personal communication, June 13, 2022)

## Question 7

The last question of this series of questions allowed participants to consider why the government may not be participating further in child care funding. “Why do you think there has not been further involvement in spending in this area within the government?” Participants reflected on why the government does not get further involved in their opinion. A common theme found in the interviews was that this area of spending is just not a priority for the government. This sentiment was felt by all interviewed. They felt that the government was not as involved with spending due to child care typically being privately owned. Participants reflected on why they believed child care was not a priority. One participant expressed...

*I think, I think the fact that they're privately owned is a portion of it, and I think it's unfortunately a lot of things with our kids are low on the totem pole... (Family 7, personal communication, July 7, 2022)*

*I think it's just you know the precedent of it being a private industry, for one, I think that you know that generationally the change in the amount of mothers, in particular, who are working now compared to... 20 years ago, or even more I don't know that our government has kept up with like the changing workforce.*

*(Family 8, personal communication, July 13, 2022)*

## **Family Dynamics**

This area of questioning to help find the demographics of the interviewed people. These were more closed-ended questions compared to the previous questions. However, some also mentioned other aspects of their family situation that were not asked. To better understand the participants interviewed and how their family makeup affected their ability to pay for child care,

questions regarding their marital status, family size with the number of children in child care, and if all parents were currently working in the household were asked. These questions are questions 8 and 9 of the interview.

### Question 8

All but one participant interviewed was married, there was one participant that was a single-parent household. Although each participant interviewed had either one or two children total, most of those with two children had both in child care. Some emphasized that the cost of child care had impacted their family planning decisions. Families are holding off on having more children due to the costs associated with child care. This is one impact that has been repeatedly addressed within these interviews. One participant explained...

*I'm married, we have an almost two-year-old who's in child care. A big determination on whether and when we have a second is paying for double.*

(Family 7, personal communication, July 7, 2022)

### Question 9

To understand how child care related expenses impact families, asking participants if they chose to participate in the workforce was important. Of the dual-parent households, only one family did not have both parents fully employed. Due to child care costs and illness restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic, one family chose for the father to remain working part-time to have more flexibility to stay home; earlier in their child care experience, this parent was also attending school. Child care has impacted families in many ways; some have had to make workforce decisions based on child care like this family, as one participant noted...

*My husband's not currently working is about to start, though... he was in college at the beginning, when he just he was staying at home with my daughter... He had*

*finished his degree... we put her in school, but after we had our son, you were like well, it might be cheaper for him to stay home, so he tried that and then we're back around to putting both kids in childcare and him going back into work.*

(Family 6, personal communication, July 4, 2022)

## **Conclusion**

The participant interviewed for this research all faced challenges regarding child care. It was interesting to see that not only financial impacts were affecting the participants, but emotional impacts. The interview process opened more areas to explore within child care spending by the federal government. The open conversations allowed for other areas to be considered when discussing child care's impacts on families. More than financial impacts are guiding participants when deciding what child care center, they choose for their children. There is no choice in some areas of the country in child care centers. Those that can make a choice choose based often choose emotionally rather than logically when deciding on child care centers for their children.

## Chapter V- Conclusion

### Summary

This research aimed to understand the impacts families have on child care and how they perceive child care funding from the government. In addition, this qualitative study sought to understand family perspectives on child care, the involvement of the government, and what they believe should be done by the government in this area of society.

Through a qualitative research approach, nine people participated in a semi-structured interview from across the country. The coding process revealed common themes throughout the interviews, including the financial constraints that child care has on families, which was one of the original theories. In addition, all participants touched on the idea that the government should be doing more to help support child care funding.

These interviews touched on the emotional side of child care spending for families. All participants have had to make choices for their families regarding paying for child care. One extreme was a participant having to sell their home to move to a community that would allow the parents to work and send their children to a child care center; for that family to have a two-working-parent household. Another participant had to pick and choose what bills would be paid to be able to afford to send their children to a child care center and remain in the workforce. These participants are likely not the only ones in this country who are facing difficulties paying for child care; they are just two examples of the extreme action's participants have had to take to afford childcare and remain active members of the workforce. Other participants admitted to feeling the financial strains of child care on their family budgets but were fortunate that they were able to be able to afford child care and all the other necessities for their family.

This interview process also allowed for the opportunity to get insight into what people know about child care funding that the government has done. The question was broad to understand what people already knew about different policies and available funding avenues. For example, almost all the participants were familiar with the food program; the federal government has a food program that allows child care centers to be reimbursed for food costs up to a certain point. However, most had to fill out the required forms even though they would not qualify for the program.

All the participants proposed ideas on what the government should pay for regarding child care spending. The participants all said that the food program should continue as this helps child care centers secure money for food for the children without having to put the costs directly on families. Many expressed that the government should pay for curriculum for child care centers; these participants want children to learn while at school and not have to have the burden of teaching their children in the evenings after work. Many believe curriculum should be a requirement of child care, and the government should pay for it through a voucher system to allow for free choice of curriculum for the child care centers.

Participants expressed that the government should pay for items or required changes that come from policies. It takes a long time to make changes and can be costly. Many do not want these changes reflected in their monthly tuition; some of these participants expressed that if the government requires changes within the child care sector, the government should pay for these changes.

Through the policy process, people can become more involved and advocate for government involvement in child care budgeting in public budgets. These interviews expressed a need for involvement by the government in spending in different areas. Participants hinted at

ideas of social equity through government involvement. Government spending can help all families, but those who fall into the middle-income brackets are often left out of decisions. They make too much money to qualify for assistance but barely make it. Public policies would allow for more allocation of resources if written to include money in the policy by the government rather than using unfunded mandates. Increased spending can help to create social equity in society. It would allow for lower-income and middle-income families to be able to afford higher-quality child care. It will give children an equal start in elementary school if their families can access child care.

### **Limitations**

This study had limitations that had potential impacts on the research. These limitations included the study sample, which included the demographics, recruitment process, previous research, and time. These limitations are discussed in greater detail below as how they impacted research. This section will conclude with alternatives to fix future research.

One limitation of this research was the study sample. The demographics for the study included busy working parents. This demographic was challenging to schedule times to meet with. They are typically working all day or have their children with them. It made it difficult to find spare time to meet for an interview. This was anticipated, which took months to reach the low number of interviewees. Having more interviews for this research would have been excellent from various perspectives.

As stated above, the demographics played an influence on my participant pool; the researcher did not get as many participants as hoped. However, using the participants available, common themes were found. The recruitment method was through social media, which should have given a larger pool of people. However, algorithms likely played a large part in who saw

the social media posts within different social media groups. Therefore, collecting the sample should be approached differently for future research in this area.

To go along with the limitation of the recruitment process. Not working with a set organization or agency had challenges to this research. Partnering up with a possible non-profit organization specializing in child care issues or even a local workforce commission could have helped expand the sample pool. States use agencies such as workforce commissions or health and human services to help provide child care related funding. Partnering with them would have been a challenge due to red tape; a qualitative study could be a benefit. Through non-profits, this may have been a more straightforward partnership.

Other limitations are previous research in this area. There has been limited research on the impacts of child care funding on families using qualitative methods. Most research has examined how child care assistance has helped families using quantitative methods. The research that has been done has not explored the emotional side of child care spending in the United States through the view of families paying for child care. Quantitative research did help supplement areas of research I could not find for myself.

Time was also a limitation of this research. To get the intended number of participants more time could have been helpful. It was a slow process to get the intended number of interviewees. More time could have allowed for more people to be recruited for interviews. This research could also benefit from a follow-up to see if the participants still felt the same over time. With follow-up, this would be a long-term research goal.

There are many ways that this research process could have been better. Due to the purpose of this research as a fulfillment of university requirements for the Doctor of Public Administration program, some ideas for improvement would not be feasible. These can be used



for continued future research on child care policies that could be done. These limitations can be overcome for more discussion on the affordability of child care in the United States.

### **Areas for Future Research**

An area that I find interesting and not explored through this research is the funding of military child care centers. Briefly mention as an example within the history of child care in the literature review of this research. Only one family interviewed had experience with child care in the military, with the limited scope of privately-run child care centers in mind during the recruitment process; that portion of the interview was not used for analysis for this research.

Research on the significance of military child care programs would benefit child care in the civilian world. The brief information I have read seems to encompass ideas of how to better fund child care that the participants of this research had. Within this form of government-sponsored child care, there is a strive for quality (parents wanting age-appropriate curriculum), a sliding scale on fees (affordability for all), and quality teachers (parents expressed wanting teachers trained and paid well). Our government is already doing this child care model. Unfortunately, it is not accessible to many families in the country. Studying this form of child care can help bring future policy changes for civilian child care centers in the United States.

Another area to research more is the impacts that child care has on the retention of employment for families. From the interviewing process, it was evident that child care impacts employment opportunities for families; with the increased awareness of illness since the COVID-19 pandemic, families must take more time off work to deal with sickness. Child care centers do not have a set guideline across the board on when and why to send children home for illness and the exclusion of care. Each state creates guidelines for the exclusion of care. This impacts retention within the workforce, which seems to be more significant now than ever.

The original goal of child care within the United States was for a place for children to be watched while parents were at work. However, child care has evolved since the late 19th century. Research on workforce retention would benefit understanding how to improve child care within the country. Discoveries through that nature of child care can help improve child care accessibility and reliable child care and potentially create universal policies on child care in the country regarding illness policies.

Further research on families receiving child care assistance should be done as well. Research with more longevity needs to be conducted to better understand how spending on child care can have lasting impacts on families. Following a cohort of families over time can help to understand how child care assistance has helped their families during difficult times and how their families are doing past that hardship. Unfortunately, most research does not have enough longevity to provide this information. Almost all research is quantitative as well.

Social equity within child care spending should be researched more. Funding child care can help to improve child care, this can also impact social equity within the country. More research needs to be devoted to how funding child care can help improve social equity. Providing more money for child care can make lasting impacts on families. Researching how this funding helps to increase social equity is important for understanding how to better improve social equity attempts within the country.

These are future areas of research that have developed from interviews. I believe they are essential aspects of child care to help improve child care policy in the United States. Looking at how these areas are essential to families can help to create quality child care centers in the United States that are at an affordable cost to families. Right now, most centers are not of quality and do not meet the affordability requirements for families.

## Recommendations

Changes need to be made at the federal level for funding child care. Child care assistance is available for families. As shown through this research, many people are still struggling; many do not qualify because it is deemed that they can afford child care due to the legislation passed. All states and the capital have child care that exceeds affordability rates for families. Most families pay a quarter of their salary in child care when the acceptable rate is 7% of family income. The legislation only considers families who meet the definition of poverty. Assistance is only for those meeting the poverty levels, and only a tiny percentage of eligible receive benefits.

A recommendation is to fund child care centers rather than individuals. Giving money to a child care center will allow for rates for all families to go down. The sliding scale now does not meet the operating costs of child care. The states reimburse at a lower rate than what is needed to run a child care center; many centers do not accept state assistance for this reason. Those that do accept many families will run at a lower quality than strictly private pay centers. Funding child care centers can help to decrease operating costs overall.

Funding a center directly can help take some operating burdens off the family. Child care centers operate with such a small margin of profit. The extra money from the federal, state, and local governments can help to decrease costs to families and use the money to hire qualified teaching staff, pay for overhead costs and provide materials for quality child care centers without continually increasing tuition for families. Quality child care benefits society and investments should be made to help child care centers operate at a higher standard.

Using child care to promote social equity is another recommendation I have. Funding child care allows for families to remain the workforce while ensuring quality child care is provided for children. Using child care as a way for all students to have an equal start within life

is important. The first years of a child's life are some of the most important for development and learning. Funding child care at an early age can allow for low-income children to go into public school with the same amount of education as their peers whose families can afford child care.

Many approaches can be taken to help child care funding in the United States. This is a policy issue that will take years to see fundamental changes. There are many ways we can improve access to child care. Making it affordable is the first step for families to access quality child care.

#### Final Concluding Thoughts

Child care is an issue that needs more attention. Child care is the center of society; without it, we cannot accomplish anything. We need a productive workforce to carry out societal needs. We need affordable, quality child care centers for children to attend to reach our goals as a country. Unfortunately, families are faced with choices when it comes to paying for child care. Each family faces different impacts due to the unaffordability of child care within the United States.

More research should be done to understand the impact of child care. This issue can span many different disciplines. This is an area within society that needs better public policies. The policy needs to be delivered in ways that benefit more people than a few.

Child care is an issue that is relatable to many Americans. Not everyone chooses to have children, but reliable child care impacts everyone's lives. There are economic implications of reliable child care. The workforce is more efficient when families have reliable child care. Reliable quality child care also creates a better-educated future. Investing in child care now can help to a better future.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Impacts of Affordable Childcare on Families

Amanda Kennedy

##### Child Care

- 1.) Please tell me about your experience with childcare.
- 2.) Based on your experience with childcare, do you think childcare costs reflect the services received?
- 3.) How do you perceive the current market rate for childcare tuition?
- 4.) Tell me about a time that childcare related expenses have impacted your family.
  - a. How did your family overcome this obstacle?
  - b. Did your family have to make choices between paying childcare or other expenses?

##### Government Involvement

- 5.) What do you know about government spending on childcare?
  - a. Do you believe that the government should be more or less involved with spending on childcare?
- 6.) What expenses should the government be involved with regarding childcare?
- 7.) Why do you think there has not been further involvement in spending in this area within the government?

##### Family Dynamics

- 8.) Tell me about your family situation?
  - a. Are you married, divorce, separated or single?
  - b. How many children do you have in care currently?
- 9.) Are both parents in the household currently working? (If together)
  - i. If not working, are you choosing to not participate in workforce or currently in school?

## Appendix B

### **Project Title: Impacts of Affordable Childcare on Families**

Investigator(s): Amanda Kennedy; Amanda Olejarski

#### Project Overview:

Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Amanda Kennedy as part of her Doctoral Dissertation to determine the effects of affordability childcare has on families. Your participation will take about 45 minutes to informed consent explanation, ask if there are any questions about the informed consent, sign informed consent, ask for additional questions before starting interview, complete interview, ask if there are any follow up questions from participant. There is a minimal risk of Social risks that may include embarrassment due to talks about economic impacts on families. This research will help This will allow for better understanding on how costs of childcare impacts families. With this information we can better understand how different funding can have an impact on childcare related costs.

The research project is being done by Amanda Kennedy as part of her Doctoral Dissertation to determine the effects of affordability childcare has on families. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Amanda Kennedy any questions to help you understand this study. If you don't want to be a part of this study, it won't affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**
  - To determine the effects of affordability childcare has on families.
2. **If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:**
  - informed consent explanation
  - ask if there are any questions about the informed consent.
  - sign informed consent
  - ask for additional questions before starting interview
  - complete interview
  - ask if there are any follow up questions from participant.
  - This study will take 45 minutes of your time.
3. **Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
  - No
4. **Is there any risk to me?**
  - Possible risks or sources of discomfort include: Social risks that may include embarrassment due to talks about economic impacts on families.
  - If you become upset and wish to speak with someone, you may speak with West Chester University
  - If you experience discomfort, you have the right to withdraw at any time.

5. **Is there any benefit to me?**
  - Other benefits may include: This will allow for better understanding on how costs of childcare impacts families. With this information we can better understand how different funding can have an impact on childcare related costs.
6. **How will you protect my privacy?**
  - The session will be recorded.
  - The session will be recorded using Zoom. The recording will be used to help in the analysis process. This is used as a second method of capturing the interview in case interviewer missing something in the written notes.
  - Your records will be private. Only Amanda Kennedy, Amanda Olejarski, and the IRB will have access to your name and responses.
  - Your name will **not** be used in any reports.
  - Records will be stored:
    - Password Protected File/Computer
  - The families who participate in this interview will not be named directly. References to the interviews will be coded as "Family and a number" to correspond with the order of the interview. Records will be destroyed After manuscript development, but no less than three years
  - Records will be destroyed years after study completion.
7. **Do I get paid to take part in this study?**
  - No
8. **Who do I contact in case of research related injury?**
  - For any questions with this study, contact:
    - **Primary Investigator:** Amanda Kennedy at 830-708-9811 or ak943620@wcupa.edu
    - **Faculty Sponsor:** Amanda Olejarski at 610-436-2448 or aolejarski@wcupa.edu
9. **What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?**
  - Not applicable.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Subject/Participant Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



## YOU MAY QUALIFY IF YOU

- Have children in childcare under the age of 5
- Attend a full day, childcare program in a traditional childcare setting.

## PARTICIPATION

### INCLUDES

Zoom interview

for more information email

[AK943620@WCUPA.EDU](mailto:AK943620@WCUPA.EDU)

## Appendix D

Good afternoon,

Thank you for taking interest in my research. I am studying the impact that childcare costs have on families.

A little about me, I am an assistant director for a childcare center in Texas. I see from the administrative side the costs of childcare. I am working towards a Doctor of Public Administration degree, so to tie into this discipline I will briefly dip into questions on government involvement with this policy issue. Questions will cover childcare experience, government involvement and family dynamics.

I have attached the questions I will be asking to this email for you to look over. To keep confidentiality within the research I will not release names within the dissertation, your contribution will be assigned "Family #" in order of Zoom interviews.

After reading over the questions and informed consent if you are still interested in participating, we can work to set up a time for a Zoom interview.

Thank you so much for taking interest in this research. I know this is a policy issue within our country and would love to see some change. If you have any questions before agreeing to participate, I am more than happy to answer!

Best,  
Amanda Kennedy, MPA

## Appendix E

Date: 8-29-2022

**IRB #:** IRB-FY2022-184

**Title:** Impacts of Affordable Childcare on Families

**Creation Date:** 12-28-2021

**End Date:**

**Status:** Approved

**Principal Investigator:** Amanda Kennedy

**Review Board:** West Chester University Institutional Review Board

**Sponsor:**

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### Study History

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<b>Submission Type</b> Initial	<b>Review Type</b> Expedited	<b>Decision</b> <span style="color: red;">Approved</span>
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### Key Study Contacts

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<b>Member</b> Amanda Kennedy	<b>Role</b> Principal Investigator	<b>Contact</b> ak943620@wcupa.edu
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<b>Member</b> Amanda Kennedy	<b>Role</b> Primary Contact	<b>Contact</b> ak943620@wcupa.edu
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