



# FAMILY AND CHILDREN

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### Who Expels and Why: Understanding Expulsion and Discontinuity in U.S. Child Care Settings

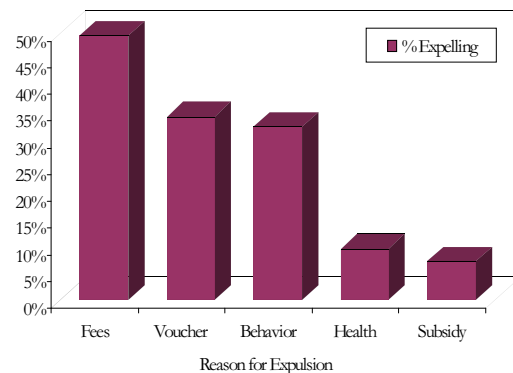
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Over the past 30 years, changes in the economy have necessitated a shift from single-earner to dual-earner families, resulting in a prominent role for early education and child care in the U.S. educational infrastructure. Due to this phenomenon, researchers have devoted a great deal of effort to understanding a) whether there are differences in educational attainment between children receiving parental care and children receiving non-parental care during early years of development and b) how child care influences parents' career prospects.

Despite this interest, researchers have overlooked the contours of volatility and continuity of child care and how discontinuities may affect achievement later in life. Volatility is an important issue because inconsistent child care may limit a child's opportunities for social and cognitive development and diminish a caregiver's ability to pursue steady employment. In the current study, this issue is addressed by examining an important determinant of continuity of care: the expulsion of a child from an early education and child care center.

Our sample of child care centers points to a number of important trends in child care expulsion. A central finding from our study is that centers are more likely to expel children for economic-related reasons, such as changes in voucher status or inability to pay fees and tuition (see Figure 1), than for behavioral concerns. Thus, socioeconomic status may have an early and long-lasting impact on academic achievement by influencing the level of volatility experienced in early educational environments.

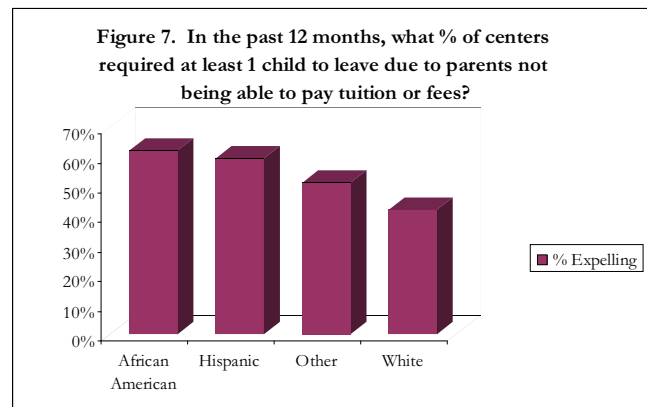
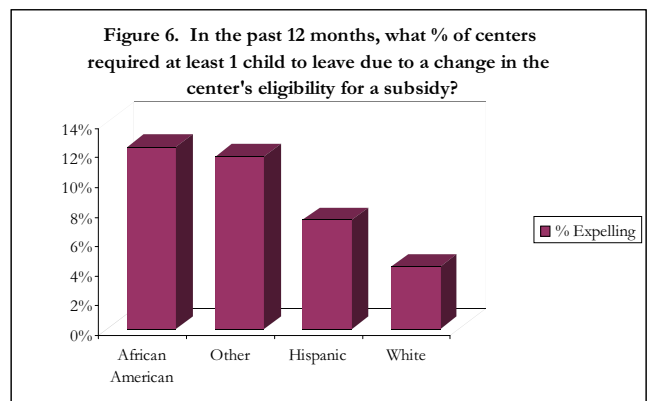
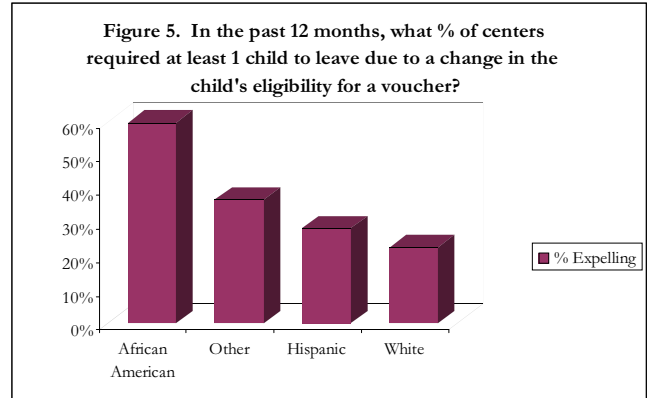
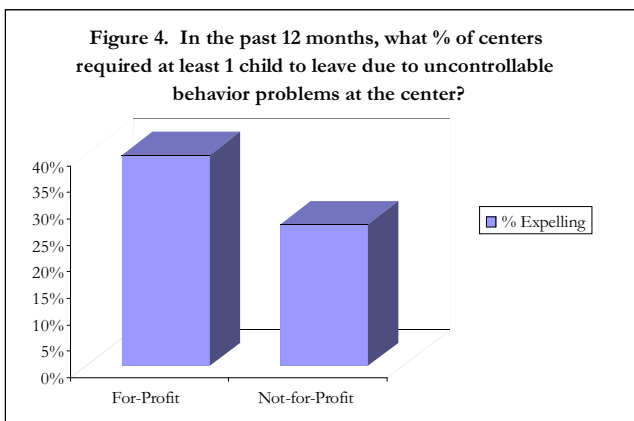
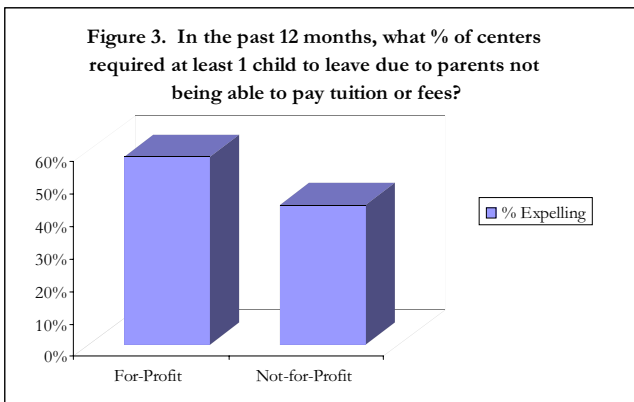
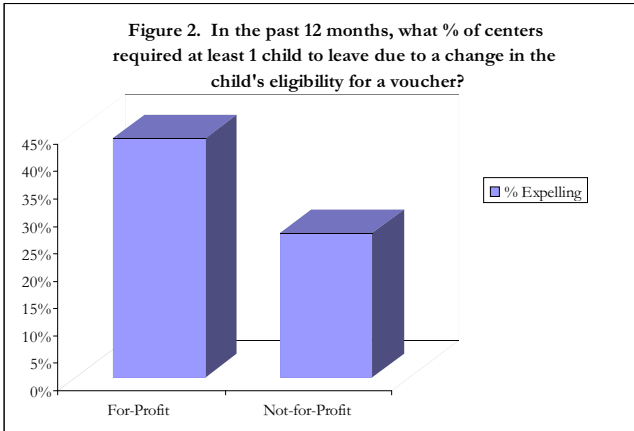
Figure 1. Percent of Centers Expelling at Least One Child by Reason for Expulsion



However, our findings also indicate that expulsions for economic reasons occur more frequently in centers with particular characteristics. For example, our findings of significant differences between profit and not-for-profit centers in fee- and voucher-based expulsions are not surprising given that for-profit centers rely almost exclusively on tuition to support center operations (see Figures 2-4).

A key implication of this finding is that communities populated exclusively by for-profit centers may experience greater discontinuity in child care and greater volatility for families requiring care. Thus, it is important for local community organizations, such as secular groups and religious organizations, to participate in the child care arena, either through the formal operation of child care centers or by subsidizing slots for disadvantaged children. Although this need is filled in some cases by federally funded Head Start centers, not all children are eligible.

With regard to race, our findings suggest that the U.S. early education and child care system contributes to broader racial divides in two ways. First, centers that are not comprised of a majority of White students are more likely to expel for economic reasons (see Figures 5-7). This issue is important because consistent child care provides an educational foundation for future development, and parents depend on consistent child care to ensure



career advancement. Thus, when child care volatility becomes concentrated in centers serving non-White or mixed-race populations, minority race groups experience more of the negative consequences of expulsion. Given these processes, organizations that have the capacity to offer a buffer to children against volatility may play an important role in reducing racial and socioeconomic divides.

**Data Note:** All statistics produced for this report come from the 2005 Child Care Center Director Survey Wave II collected by the Survey Research Unit of the Social Science Research Center for the Family and Children Research Unit under a grant from the National Center for Rural Early Childhood Learning Initiatives. To explore the contours of student expulsions among child care centers, we examine the percentage of centers that have expelled at least one child in the past 12 months. These findings are based on a sample of 807 child care centers. These centers were randomly selected from a sample of child care centers participating in a general survey of child care centers in Florida, Mississippi, New Mexico, Ohio, and Vermont.