

Child Care in Rural Areas: Needs, Attitudes, and Preferences¹

Sarah M. Shoffner²

Department of Child Development and Family Relations, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

The purpose of this research was to assess the needs and preferences for child care services in rural areas. We examined data from interviews with 525 mothers of children up to 12 years of age in two southeastern states. Results indicated that, while rural mothers expressed a desire for more child care services, many were ambivalent about other-than-mother care. On the one hand, they had limited knowledge about and experience with a variety of child care arrangements; on the other hand, they could identify their preferences for types and specific features of day care they desired. These preferences were summarized to form a hypothetical "ideal type" of child care for rural mothers.

The need for child care services in urban areas has long been identified. But the rapid growth of labor force participation by women, including women in rural areas, points to a growing need for child care services in rural communities. "As more rural mothers spend greater amounts of time outside the home in the labor force, and as more young families move into rural areas, the need for planned, supervised child-care alternatives will become increas-

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²All correspondence should be sent to Sarah M. Shoffner, Department of Child Development and Family Relations, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina 27412-5001.

ingly critical" (Smith & Coward, 1981, p. 227). The topic of rural consumers' attitudes and preferences about child care services has become an important issue in today's society, Yet, for the most part, the issue has been ignored.

Researchers have focused almost exclusively on the employment patterns and concerns of urban women (Bescher-Donnelly & Smith, 1981), despite the fact that labor force participation rates of rural women very nearly parallel those of urban women. In 1984, 46.7% of farm women in nonmetropolitan areas and 51.5% of nonfarm women in nonmetropolitan areas were employed outside the home, compared to 54.3% of women in metropolitan areas (U.S. Department of Labor, 1984, p. 66). The rural family, as well as the urban family, can no longer be characterized as the traditional, nuclear family group (Smith & Coward, 1981). Old patterns of behavior, practices, and policies no longer fit. Only 17% of American families fit the employed husband plus housewife plus one-or-more children model (Crawford, 1982). Families in both urban and rural society reflect a wide range of patterns and can perhaps be characterized best by their diversity. Farm families have become a minority in rural areas as their numbers have dwindled steadily (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1983).

Despite changes, certain social and geographic characteristics of rural America— isolation, poverty, underemployment— limit the range of role options for men and women. These problems are perhaps more salient for women than for men (Bescher-Donnelly & Smith, 1981). Traditional sex-role attitudes are more prevalent in rural than urban areas (Glenn & Hill, 1977), posing problems for rural women in the work world. Traditional values have been linked with rural women's dissatisfaction with a two-earner family (Bescher-Donnelly & Smith, 1981). Rural women have to deal not only with their own ambivalent attitudes towards employment but they have to deal with those of their husbands too. Many men do not have supportive attitudes toward their wives' employment (Young & Willmott, 1973), nor do they respond positively to the pressure to take on increased family role responsibilities when their wives do work (Pleck, 1977). The limited occupational achievement of rural women may also be affected by lack of child care services. Clarenbach (1977) found that many rural areas lack the services, such as child care, necessary for women to maximize their employment options.

Data are needed on the availability of child care services in rural areas as well as on parents' needs, preferences, and attitudes. Planning efforts for child care services in rural communities must begin with a realistic appraisal of parents' needs and preferences and with the recognition that these may differ from their urban counterparts. Moreover, policy and program planners need to be sensitive to differences within the rural population of the United States.

This study provides information about child care services and needs based on a representative sample of rural mothers from two southeastern states. Information is presented on families' current child care arrangements and on mothers' preferences and attitudes about different types of child care.

METHOD

Subjects

The sample consisted of 525 mothers with 951 children ranging in age from birth to 12 years. (More detailed information on the sample and sampling procedures is available from the project technical report; Shoffner, Boyd, & Covington, 1979.) Mothers' ages ranged from 14 to 63³ with 48.5% at age 30 or younger, 38.1% between 31 and 40, and 13.4% age 41 or older. The racial composition of the sample was two-thirds white and one-third black.

The total number of all children in each family ranged from 1 to 7, with an average of 2.26; for children under age 12, the average was 1.76. The ages of children under 12 were distributed evenly by individual years except for the under-1-year-old category which constituted 14.1% of the total; 48.4% were 5 years old and under, and 51.6% were 6–12 years of age.

Of the 525 households, 81.7% were nuclear in composition; 13.7% were single-parent families with the mother serving as the household head; and the rest were single-parent homes in which someone other than the mother was household head. Almost half (47.9%) the mothers had lived in their areas of residence 10 years or longer (25.4% for their lifetime). Only 15.3% had a residence history of less than 2 years, and 36.8% had resided in the sample areas 2–10 years.

As for the mothers' educational status, 35% had not completed high school, 35.2% had completed high school, whereas the remaining 29.8% had varying amounts of post-high school trade or vocational training to graduate degrees. Of the employed mothers (49%), over half were classified in clerical/sales or operative occupational categories, and over one-quarter were service workers or laborers. The remaining sixth were either in professional/technical or managerial-type jobs. The primary source of family income was salary or wages (78.7%), followed by government welfare (10.1%), and farm income (4.9%).

³Seven of the "mothers" over 50 years of age were actually grandmothers and one was a foster mother, but all were assuming the mother role.

Sample Selection

A stratified cluster sampling technique was designed to insure a representative sample of rural communities⁴ across the two southeastern states (of the total sample, 51.6% were from North Carolina and 48.4% from South Carolina) included in this study. Counties were stratified into the states' natural geographical regions (mountain, piedmont, coastal, and tidewater in North Carolina, and piedmont, Pee Dee, and Savannah Valley in South Carolina). From these regions, 12 communities (6 in each state) were selected randomly (a proportionate number was drawn from each region, based on updated 1970 census population figures). Aerial photographs and detail maps of these areas were used in identifying sampling units within selected census enumeration districts. All households in these units were canvassed, and all women who had children under 12 were interviewed in their homes. Less than 5% of those eligible to be interviewed refused.

Questionnaire

A survey schedule of 177 items was developed or adapted from multiple sources.⁵ The following kinds of information were obtained: demographic data; familiarity with types of day care and perceived availability of each; provisions made and needs for child care services (Kimbrell, 1973; Learning Institute of North Carolina [LINC], 1974; Zamoff, 1971); attitudes toward the practice of other-than-mother child care; preferences for specific features of day care centers; interest in different kinds of day care arrangements; and a measure of how mothers and families would use their time if involvement in child care were reduced (Edwards, 1974; Wright, 1971). Items to measure attitudes toward the practice of other-than-mother child care were developed for this study using standard procedures for scale development (Thurstone & Chave, 1929; Edwards, 1957).

Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed with the use of the computer program *Statistical Analysis System* (Barr, Goodnight, Sail, & Helwig, 1976).

⁴A rural community was defined as an incorporated county seat town of 2,000 to 5,000 population not within 25 miles of the center of a small metropolitan area (50,000-200,000) or not within 25 miles of the outer boundary of a large metropolitan area. Atypical towns, such as those with heavy industrial concentrations, were eliminated.

⁵Copies of the questionnaire may be obtained by writing the author.

The varimax option for factor analysis and the stepwise option for multiple regression were used.

Preferences for specific features of day care centers, as indicated by mothers, were factor analyzed. Seven factors describing specific preferences for features of day care centers were identified. These factors,⁶ and the three factors describing mother's attitudes, were used as dependent variables in stepwise multiple regression equations. The individual factors are named in the Results section.

Regression equations were constructed to analyze the role of the following 13 independent variables in accounting for variance in preferences and attitudes: mother-met proportion of child care (proportion determined by the ratio of demand for child care met by the mother to the total household demand); care plan generally followed (daytime care of children, both in and away from home); household demand for child care (all children in household); mean household demand for child care; race; mother's age; mean of educational level for mother and father—or other head; household head's occupation (as defined by the U.S. Census classification); income from government welfare; mean length of residence for mother and father—or other head; family type (nuclear or mother as household head); household size; and mother's employment status by hours worked. Throughout the presentation of results all variables reported are significant at $p < .05$ unless otherwise specified.

RESULTS

The results are presented around four organizing themes. The first, influences on needs for child care, includes reasons for using other-than-mother child care, the number of mothers employed or planning to seek employment, their proximity to relatives, the availability and accessibility of care services, as well as the number of mothers who desired to participate in personal, family, and community developmental activities. The second section of the results examines the child care arrangements used by the sample respondents. The third section deals with preferences of the respondents for other-than-mother care. The final section describes the attitudes held by respondents toward other-than-mother care.

⁶The rationale for and advantages of using factor scores as variables in multiple regression procedures are comprehensively discussed by Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1973).

Influences on Needs for Child Care

Reasons for Using Child Care Arrangements

The respondents who used other-than-mother child care arrangements ($n = 281$) checked all their reasons for using such care and then cited their main reason. Employment outside the home was the most frequently cited reason (68.7%) and, among those who cited it, it was the most frequently cited main reason (74.1%). Two additional main reasons cited were needing to be away from home for reasons other than employment (33.9%) and to help in the husband's work (26.1%).

Present Employment Status and Future Plans

About half (49%) of the mothers were employed either full or part time. Over half (53%) of the working mothers were employed 40 hours per week, with an additional 16.3% employed over 40 hours; the rest spent 1–39 hours per week at part-time jobs. Of the nonemployed mothers, 72.5% had worked at some time since the birth of their children, and a third reported having to leave employment because of problems related to child care. Additionally, 40% of the nonemployed mothers said they would seek employment if adequate child care were available.

The nonemployed women did not see themselves remaining in that role; 60.7% indicated definite plans to seek employment when their children were older. Nearly three-fourths planned to seek employment before their youngest children were age 6 (14.8% under 2, 19.8% when children were ages 2–4, and 37% between ages 5–6). Only 15% of the full-time homemakers indicated no plans to seek employment, while another 24% were uncertain.

The results of a multiple regression analysis of mothers' future plans for employment showed only 3 of the 13 independent variables to be significant: mother's age, $p < .0001$; family type, $p < .05$; and number of persons in the household, $p < .05$. These three variables explained 37.5% of the variance. Characteristically, among these rural mothers, it was younger mothers, mothers who were household heads, and mothers in larger households who were more likely to plan to seek employment in the future.

Proximity to Relatives

Only 25.1% of the mothers had no relatives living in their immediate area; another 25% had all their relatives living nearby. Over 30% were near

from one to five relatives, while 21.2% were near more than five of their relatives. This information is relevant to families' choices of child care arrangements.

Knowledge, Availability, and Accessibility of Child Care

Mothers were asked about their knowledge of child care services in their areas. Most of the mothers (61%) knew of at least one day care center, but only 29.9% knew of any family day care home. Only 19.1% knew of more than one day care center and only 15.3% knew of more than one family day care home. Very few knew of any other types, such as group day care homes, industry-sponsored or Head Start-sponsored centers, or cooperative day care centers.

Mothers' recommendations to others of resources for locating child care is another aspect of their knowledge about services. Very few (18.7%) of the women answered that they would recommend specific facilities they knew to others. Most would suggest that a friend ask another women with children (53%) or that she contact the county Department of Social Services (35.2%).

The number of available child care facilities and their accessibility to each of the sample units were determined.⁷ The facilities were located on maps and estimated distance were calculated from sample units to the closest day care center or family day care home. In North Carolina, more than 40% of the sample units (25 of 62) were 7 or more miles from the nearest day care center. Two of the six communities had virtually no accessibility to a day care center. Geographical distribution of centers was also noteworthy. For example, in one county there were 21 day care centers; however, all but one were located in a single community at a considerable distance from the sample unit.

Family day care homes were more widely available. About 83% of the respondents were within 4 miles of a registered day care home. Over half of the sample units were within 1 mile of a family day care home. It should be noted, however, that the number of registered homes was small in relation to the estimated population to be served.

In South Carolina only day care centers were assessed. More than half (60%) of the sample units (29 of 48) were from 1 to 3 miles from the nearest day care center. Only 6 of the 48 sample units were 7 or more miles away from a center.

⁷Further details on the survey of facilities are available from the author.

Potential Personal and Family Development

Our sample mothers were asked what activities they would like to engage in if more and better child care facilities were available. Nine out of 10 mothers expressed a desire for more time to pursue personal and community activities. Respondents cited an average of almost five activities. More than half of the respondents indicated activities in each of these seven categories: education; recreation; social, cultural, and artistic; group organizations (education/recreation); volunteer services; church and other religious activities; and activities regarding community development. Over 35% were interested in developing a child care center.

Child Care Arrangements

Of the 525 mothers in this study, 206 used other-than-mother child care. Even though they used a variety of care-givers, 68.2% stated that child care was provided entirely in their own homes. Only 13% of the mothers were using out-of-home care as the only plan generally followed for the daytime care of children, and the rest used a combination of arrangements both in and away from home.

Types of Child Care Arrangements Used and Considered Best

Respondents using other-than-mother child care were asked whether they had always used the same care arrangements or had tried different kinds. Mothers who had used more than one arrangement (42%) were then asked to indicate which types had “turned out to be the best” for them. Care in the home of a relative was the most frequently used arrangement (84%) for this group (see Table I). The second most frequently used arrangement was care by a relative in the child’s own home (64.6%) followed closely by care in the home of a neighbor or friend (53.4%).

Typical Care-Giver Patterns

Child care data were obtained from mothers for a 24-hour day. Mothers gave information for the child’s typical day or for the care schedules most typically followed. Major patterns for both preschool and school-age children are discussed according to the number of hours of mothers’ employment.

Preschool Children. Care arrangement patterns of the mothers employed 40 hours per week ($n = 103$) showed that 25.2% cared for their

Table I. Types Used and Best Arrangement of Other-Than-Mother Child Care

Arrangement	Arrangement used ^a (<i>n</i> = 206)	Best arrangement ^b
Child in home of relative	84.0	52.6 (3)
Relative in child's own home	64.6	63.2 (1)
Neighbor's or friend's home	53.4	25.5 (6)
Day care center	41.3	38.8 (5)
Babysitters	34.5	23.9 (7)
Housekeeper or maid	25.2	44.2 (4)
Family day care home	24.3	62.0 (2)

^aMothers were given the opportunity to indicate all types of arrangements used. The figures indicate the percentage of mothers who used that type of arrangement.

^bNumber in parentheses indicates rank order. Percentages for best arrangement were based on the ratio of the frequency that an arrangement was cited as the "best arrangement" to the frequency that an arrangement was cited as one used by the respondents.

own preschool children during 8–12 a.m. and 21.4% provided care from 1–4 p.m. Of the mothers employed over 40 hours per week (*n* = 44), 56.8% cared for their own preschoolers from 8–12 a.m. and 56.8% cared for them from 1–4 p.m. In comparison to the care provided by employed mothers, day care centers accounted for much less. Of the mothers who worked 40 hours per week, 20.4% used the day care center arrangement between 8–12 a.m. and 16.5% used it between 1–4 p.m. For mothers working over 40 hours per week, it was 18.4% and 13.6%, respectively. Very few fathers (less than 5%) were cited as caring for the children, even during the evening hours. Other caregiving was provided by relatives and baby-sitters.

School-Age Children. An examination of care arrangements for school-age children showed that mothers (*n* = 167) who worked 40 or more hours per week provided more child care (47.9%) during the after-school period than was provided by any other care arrangement. Similarly, of the 128 mothers employed 40 hours, 45.3% provided the after-school care, followed by the 27.3% whose relatives provided that care. Only 7.8% of the fathers provided care after school (cf. Rodman, Pratto, & Nelson, 1985); however, when the mother worked over 40 hours per week, the percentage of father involvement rose to 12.7%. Very few children were reported to be without supervision during the after-school hours; for example, for mothers employed 30 hours or more, only 7.9% reported any unsupervised time.

Preferences for Other-Than-Mother Child Care

In order to assess what mothers preferred in child care arrangements, respondents were asked the type of care generally desired. The specific features preferred in day care centers were also determined.

General Types Preferred

Mothers selected a day care center as the preferred arrangement almost as often (39.6%) as care in one's own home (39.8%). Only 10.9% preferred child care in someone else's home, while the rest either indicated no preference or gave no response. Cross-tabulations of mothers' preferences with employment status and the care plans used showed that 40% of the employed mothers whose children were cared for in their own homes preferred a day care center.

A regression analysis of mother's preferences for day care on the 13 independent variables (see Table II) showed that younger mothers, black mothers, smaller households, and households where children were cared for away from home were those most likely to prefer a day care center versus care in own home or another home.

Features Preferred

The features of child care that the mothers considered important were combined with the types of child care in which they were most interested should such facilities be established in their communities. The group of distinctly preferred characteristics can be summarized best through the description of a hypothetical "ideal type" of child care arrangement. This facility would be either a day care center or a family day care home in which parents would be involved in decision-making processes regarding both the program and operation of the facility. It would be located near the mothers' homes or places of work. Children ages 3 to 6 would be cared for from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and after-school care would be available for children ages 6-12. Flexibility in organization would allow a child to be cared for at this facility for even a few hours during typically nonworking hours. A trained staff would provide a developmentally focused program, including effective discipline, with educational and recreational components. This ideal child care situation would provide medical services and would include arrangements for the care of handicapped children.

Factors Related to Preferences

Factors related to preferences for particular features of day care centers were identified through factors analysis. These factors were then used as dependent variables in multiple regression analyses. The significant relationships between the factors used as dependent variables and the set of 13 independent variables are discussed briefly in the sections that follow. The data are presented in Table II.

Table II. Multiple Regression of Selected Variables on Mother's Preferences, Interests, and Attitudes

Dependent variables	R^2	Household								
		General care plan	demand for child care	Race	Mother's age	Educational ^b	Occupational ^c	Welfare income	Family type	Household size
Preference for day care center	.327	.235 ^f	-	-.194 ^d	-.007 ^d	-	-	-	-	-.031 ^d
Preferences for features of day care centers										
Cluster of general features	.427	.096 ^d	-	.116 ^d	-	.015 ^e	-	.125 ^d	-	-
Discipline for children; inexpensive	.412	-	-	.363 ^e	-	-	-	-	-	-
Subsidy and convenience	.465	-	-	-.095 ^d	-.004 ^d	-	-.013 ^d	-	-	-.046 ^d
Educational emphasis	.437	-.283 ^e	-	-	-	.022 ^d	-	-	-	-
Attitudes toward other-than-mother child care										
Mother favors other-than mother	.276	-	.186 ^d	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.078 ^e
Mothers ought to care for children	.408	-	-	-.406 ^f	.012 ^e	-.032 ^e	-	-	-	-
Independence in children from other-than-mother care	.325	-	-	-	-	-.040 ^e	-.032 ^d	-	-	-

^aOnly significant coefficients were included; (-) indicates omitted data.

^bMean of educational level for mother and father.

^cHousehold head's occupation (U.S. Census classification).

^d $p < .05$.

^e $p < .01$.

^f $p < .001$.

Preferences for Features of Day Care Centers. Items about mothers' preferences for features of day care centers were factor analyzed and seven factors were obtained. The results for the four most salient factors are presented. Each factor was regressed on the independent variables, and those that accounted for a substantial amount of variance (R^2 above .4) are described briefly in the following paragraphs (see Table II).

Mothers from highly educated households, white mothers, those with more child care provided outside the home, and mothers whose incomes were derived from government welfare were more likely than other mothers to prefer day care centers with a cluster of General Features (including recreational and custodial services; location near mother's employment; involvement of children of different ages, incomes, and races; facilities remaining open after 4 p.m.; and involvement of parents in decision making).

White mothers more often than black mothers preferred an Inexpensive facility and one that Provided Discipline. Black mothers, younger mothers, families with lower occupational levels, and families in which the mother was not the household head were found to prefer the Subsidy and Convenience Features of day care which included fees paid for by the government, open on weekends, and transportation to and from the centers provided. Mothers preferring child care in their own homes and families with higher educational levels were those who stressed an Educational Emphasis (trained staff and a variety of educational services).

Attitudes About Other-Than-Mother Child Care

Mother's Attitudes

Rural mothers' attitudes about other-than-mother child care were measured by responses to nine statements which composed three factors.⁸ These factors—Mothers Favor Other-than-Mother Child Care, Mothers Ought to Care for Their Own Children, and Child Care Develops Children's Independence—each represented a different perspective of mothers' attitudes about child care. The factors were used as dependent variables in multiple regression analyses. Brief descriptions of the factors and the significant relationships identified with the 13 independent variables follow (see Table II).

⁸The three factors (each exceeding an eigenvalue of 2.0) included 9 items identified through a factor analysis (varimax rotation) of the 22-item attitude scale developed for this study.

The factor Mothers Favor Other-than-Mother Child Care was composed of the following items: women work better on the job if they know they have someone good to take care of the children, having a reliable place to leave children gives mothers peace of mind, and fathers should help in child care if mothers work outside the home. This factor was associated more strongly with mothers from small households, mothers who were not household heads, and mothers from households with a high demand for child care.

Black mothers, older mothers, and families in lower educational ranges were found to be significantly associated with the factor Mothers Ought to Care for Their Own Children. It included these views: child care is acceptable for working mothers but unacceptable for nonworking mothers; husband thinks the mother should provide child care; paying someone else for child care is foolish since the mother is the best person to do it; and mother should provide all the care during the formative years.

Child Care Develops Children's Independence included the views that independence training often hastened by other-than-mother child care is important for children and care by someone else part of the time prepares children for growing up. Families with less education and households with lower occupational levels were significantly associated with this factor.

Ambivalence in Mother's Attitudes

The mothers in the North Carolina sample ($n = 271$) responded to 22 attitude statements about child care. An analysis of these items indicated that although 90% favored other-than-mother child care as shown by their responses to some of the statements, over half expressed unfavorable attitudes as reflected in other statements. This suggested ambivalence in attitudes, even though mothers had no difficulty in specifying that they needed child care resources or in identifying the kinds of arrangements and characteristics they desired. More than two-thirds of the mothers expressed contradictory attitudes. For example, 94% agreed that "having someone else to take care of children or a good place to leave them is a service that ought to be available to all children and families," and 83% of the mothers thought "caring for children is a mother's place." These apparent contradictions are discussed in a detailed study of attitude ambivalence in this sample (Boyd & Shoffner, 1983). Although we expected mothers' attitudes to be distributed along a range from very traditional to very modern, no mothers with consistently traditional attitudes were identified. More mothers (36.5%) had ambivalent attitudes than mothers (23.5%) who showed modern attitudes (clarity in attitudes favoring other-than-mother child care), and the remainder (40%) were in transition between ambivalent and modern attitudes.

DISCUSSION

When employment factors alone are considered, substantial need for quality child care exists in the rural areas studied. Those who used other-than-mother child care did so because they were employed. Almost half of the sample mothers were employed full or part time at about the same rates reported for farm and nonfarm women in nonmetropolitan areas (U.S. Department of Labor, 1984). Three-fourths of the nonemployed women had worked some since the birth of their children, but a third had to leave employment because of problems related to child care. Of the nonemployed mothers 40% said they would seek employment again if affordable child care were available. This percentage is higher than a Census Bureau report (O'Connell & Rogers, 1983) which estimated that 26% of the nonemployed mothers of children under age 6 in the United States would seek employment if affordable child care were available; for mothers with family incomes under \$15,000, the report's estimate (36%) was even higher. Characteristically, those looking toward future employment were the younger mothers, mothers who were household heads, and mothers in larger households. This rural data corresponds with that for the United States as a whole, where younger mothers (U.S. Department of Labor, 1983) and single parents (U.S. House of Representatives, Select Committee, 1983) are more likely to be working or to plan to work. The labor force participation rate for women with very young children has shown the most growth of any group (O'Connell & Rogers, 1983), particularly for those with children under age 3 (Zigler & Muenchow, 1983). Beside gainful employment, mothers wanted to pursue other personal and community activities should more child care facilities be available.

Nearly 75% of the sample families had many close relatives living nearby and they played a major role in both the child care arrangements used and in the mother's expressed preferences. The most frequently used arrangement was care in the home of a relative and it ranked third as the best arrangement. Next was care by a relative in the child's home which was considered the best arrangement, followed by care in a neighbor's or friend's home ranked as seventh best. The day care center ranked fourth in use and fifth as the best arrangement. Thus, use of an informal arrangement, rather than an organized day care center or family day care home, is important in rural child care. This, however, is not unlike the American population as a whole, where care by a family member or relative (Haskins, 1979) is preferred. Roughly half of the child care used by American families, whether provided by relatives or others, is provided in the families' own home. Fewer than 10% of the families needing child care place their children in a day care center. This percentage may be reflecting the nationwide lack of available, affordable care (Scarr, 1984; Winget, 1982). In contrast, our results show that nearly

40% of the rural mothers selected a day care center as the most preferred arrangement should such an option become available; another 40% preferred care in their own homes. The percentage preferring a day care center is much higher than the current average in the state. Although North Carolina ranks as a leader in the number of day care centers, fewer than 10–15% of the children needing care are actually cared for in centers; the majority are cared for in family day care homes which are not required to meet licensing standards set by the state (North Carolina Assembly on Women and the Economy, 1984).

In addition to the fact that many relatives are potentially available as care-givers, part of the prominence of informal care arrangements may be attributed to awareness and accessibility factors. The results indicated that although two-thirds of the mothers knew of at least one day care center and that some counties had many such facilities, the outlying rural communities were often too far from the facilities for the mothers to use them. Additionally, less than a third of the mothers knew of a family day care home, even though the accessibility measures indicated that half of the sample were within 4 miles of a registered day care home. Thus, geographic distribution of child care facilities, the extended familial networks of support operating in rural communities, and mothers' awareness levels become quite important in assessing needed child care services.

The analysis of child care patterns indicated that many preschool children were primarily in the care of their mothers during all time segments of the day and that very few fathers cared for their children, even during the evening hours. Further, results showed that among mothers employed over 40 hours per week, over half of them cared for their own preschoolers during each of the two daytime segments for which we have information. Likewise, an analysis of school-age children's care arrangements showed that mothers who worked 40 or more hours per week provided more child care during the after-school period than was provided by any other arrangement. Father involvement in caring for these older children did increase by a few percentage points. It appears that mothers often tailor their work schedules around caring for their own children. Many mothers may work second or third shifts in factories and thus are able to be with their children during the traditional work periods. Even though mothers may not have considered fathers as caring for the children during the night, some were probably using the split-shift or tandem-care approach as a strategy for meeting child care needs. Lein (1979) reported that a substantial number of families selected shifts or hours of work that allowed one parent or the other to be responsible for child care the majority of the time.

The literature on role strain indicates that traditional attitudes regarding family life are still quite persistent (Mortimer & London, 1984); and

that even though the debate may be over about whether or not women should work (Kamerman & Kahn, 1981), the debate about mothers as children's chief care-givers continues (Harris and Associates, 1981; Mason & Bumpass, 1970; Scarr, 1984). It is reported that, although rural women have more traditional sex-role attitudes, both rural and urban women experience role conflict. Over time, Bescher-Donnelley and Smith (1981, p. 169) say rural women will become "less conservative in their attitudes and lifestyles." In our data for North Carolina, we found no mothers with the consistently traditional attitude that mothers only ought to provide child care. But there was considerable ambivalence among our sample mothers. Some of our mothers were modern and some were in transition. The transitional state implies that these mothers are undergoing social change which does not come easily in areas involving deeply rooted responses and reactions (Steinmann & Fox, 1974) such as child care.

This ambivalence and transitional strain may also have been evident in the sample mothers' expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with child care arrangements (items that were measured but not reported in this paper). If mothers were with their children all the time they wanted to be away from them more. Conversely, those who worked and let others care for their children wanted to be with the children more. Women caring for their own children had an individual or personal orientation—wanting more time for themselves, their husbands and friends, and for community activities. In comparison, mothers using other-than-mother care had a child-centered orientation—they were concerned over lax discipline, lack of dependability with the care arrangement, and about the child becoming ill while with the care-giver.

Day care centers in rural areas may become important in the future. With proximity to many relatives, accessibility to day care centers may not have been a problem. To a certain extent, rural families seem to be meeting their immediate needs by making use of this extensive network of relatives. But as more women enter the labor force, fewer relatives will be left to offer child care services. Those "grandmothers, aunts, trusted friends, and neighbors" who watched young children in the past are already employed today or need to be paid for their services (Beck, 1982, p. 308; Scarr, 1984). By necessity women will have to look for alternatives to the networks that have functioned so well in rural areas.

Also, as attitudes continue to change over time, more women will be willing to consider formal day care services. Women in our sample may have been indicating this shift in their choices of preferred arrangements. A day care center and care in one's own home were about equally preferred. Employed mothers (40%) whose children were cared for in their own homes, however, preferred a day care center should such become available. Addi-

tionally, mothers identified the features they preferred in such day care facilities. These included components which almost match proposed federal requirements for adequate day care (Scarr, 1984). The fact that these rural mothers prefer what child development experts advocate indicates that they know what they want even though it may not be accessible to them. Thus, the preferences of women for features of day care arrangements, whether in day care centers or other types of arrangements, become important to community planners and service providers.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study suggest several ways in which professionals can assist rural families with regard to their child care needs. First, although rural mothers were, for the most part, using informal care arrangements, they were unaware of the variety of such arrangements that can be designed for child care. Providing families with this type of information would help them evaluate potential solutions to their child care needs.

Second, mothers expressed a desire to participate in the development of local child care programs. The involvement of these mothers could potentially reduce the cost of child care, as well as enhance the likelihood that resulting programs, such as cooperatives, would be tailored to the needs of families in rural communities.

Third, although the mothers interviewed expressed a good deal of ambivalence about their roles, they expressed a desire for more and better child care services and identified some preferred characteristics. Professionals can help individuals and families think through their needs and goals for child care while recognizing the role that attitudes and preferences play. This could lead to innovative plans and programs that meet both the developmental needs of children and the sociocultural and personal needs of parents.

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