Child Care/Preschool

P/F Rank: 9 (tied)

Educational level: *University, middle and secondary school, community* |
Beneficiaries: *Students, faculty, and staff*

Background

Several university surveys and assessments identify child care as a major need among faculty and staff.[1-3] For example, in a 2002-2003 survey at the University of California, 93% of female faculty parents and 82% of male faculty parents indicated that readily available child care slots would be either very or somewhat useful.[1] Caregiving responsibilities can also pose a challenge to students. Jamaican law requires that girls leave school during pregnancy, and girls at the Pekenene School in Botswana were required to wait one year post-delivery to return to school.[4]

Description

Universities in both high- and low-resource settings offer on-campus child care to students and/or faculty and staff. The University of California,[5-7] the University of Michigan,[8] the University of Cape Town,[9] and the University of Dar es Salaam[10] all operate on-campus child care and early education centers for students, faculty, and staff, while Harvard University[11] is affiliated with independently operated centers on or near its campuses. Harvard's student employment office also keeps a list of students willing to provide parents with occasional babysitting services.[12] The University of Western Cape[13] runs an on-campus center for faculty and staff but not for students. The university's Gender Equity Unit helps students with children to make informal arrangements, such as helping them to find babysitters.[14]

The services provided by these centers vary, including daycare, extended daycare, back-up care, education sessions for parents, referral services, and summer camps.[5-8,15] Several of the centers included in this review are open year-round, except for holidays. Some information was available on the cost of using this service at the University of Cape Town, where fees are determined based on the parents' joint income and can be paid through payroll deductions or student accounts, as appropriate.[16,9]

Other types of educational institutions also offer child care. At the middle and secondary school levels, the Programme for Adolescent Mothers in Jamaica and the Diphalana Initiative in Botswana established on-site nurseries so that student-mothers can attend classes and breastfeed during breaks.[4] The nurseries in the Programme for Adolescent Mothers also work with both young mothers and fathers to teach them good parenting habits.[4] The child care centers operated by community learning centers (CLCs) in Iran[17] and the home-based care services offered by CLCs in Vietnam[18] enable parents to participate in classes.

Results

Reviewers rated this practice as featuring the following gender transformative characteristics:

- Transform family, school, and/or work arrangements so that women are not economically or socially penalized/disadvantaged for caregiving (*critical criterion*)
- Change or attempt to change an imbalance of power or otherwise level the playing field (*critical criterion*)

- Challenge and change common discriminatory gender beliefs or norms (*critical criterion*).

This practice has gender transformative potential for both students and faculty in preservice and other educational settings. Child care, particularly on-site child care, allocates resources that enable students and parents with children to fulfill their professional and personal responsibilities. A 2009 survey of University of Michigan postdoctoral fellows[19] found that postdoctoral fellows with children generally reported being satisfied with child care services. The most cited reasons for dissatisfaction were cost, available hours, and location. Other reasons included safety, stimulation level, and transportation to/from child care. A study of the CLCs concluded that in Vietnam, "[w]omen's participation in CLC activities can be increased through the establishment of a day-care centre for children,"[18] and that in Iran, the lack of child care facilities at some CLCs contributed to their ineffectiveness.[18] Studies of the CLCs in Vietnam and the Programme for Adolescent Mothers also found improvements in completion rates; however, these were general findings that were not attributable to this specific practice.[18,4,20]

Implementation lessons learned
Program planners should consider implementation research and educational outreach efforts that challenge existing norms and attitudes that are not fully supportive of this practice. For example, although teachers' and students' attitudes toward the overall Diphalana Initiative in Botswana changed over time to be generally positive, parents—especially men—and other community members felt strongly against it.[21] Student-mothers preferred to have their families take care of their children, and according to a 2003 evaluation, none of them had used the center.[22] In addition, offering child care may be insufficient to transform arrangements if students or faculty are not able to access or afford it. At the University of California, too few child care slots are available to qualifying faculty members who seek them and those slots that are available are costly. One female assistant professor noted that "the people who are most affected by this are likely to be at the assistant level, earning the least amount of money. Over half of my [pre-tax] salary has gone to preschool in the past two years."[21]

On the other hand, practices that enable student-mothers to complete their education may have a positive cost-benefit. The overall Programme for Adolescent Mothers in Jamaica was found to have resulted in "social and private benefits due solely to increased education of adolescent mothers [of] J$136,915,770. There was an additional benefit in an estimated reduction of 323 births, with an implied savings to the health sector of J$13,840,873."[20] These are equivalent to approximately USD 1.6 million and USD 160,000 in today's dollars, respectively. These figures pertain to the overall program; specific figures for child care were not available.

Summary conclusions
Child care is an important practice for leveling the playing field for student-parents and working parents. However, it can be prohibitively expensive, so its transformative potential

can only be maximized if financial assistance is provided (see next Practice No. 9 [tied]) and/or costs are lowered. Reviewers noted that child care should be offered to students as well as faculty and staff.

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