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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Marilyn E. Bruckman entitled "A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Welfare-to-Work Mothers in Selecting Child Care." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Human Ecology.

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES OF WELFARE-TO-WORK MOTHERS IN SELECTING CHILD CARE

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Marilyn E. Bruckman
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons

Chad R. Bruckman
and
Justin B. Bruckman

and my mother

Gwenyth C. Bruckman

who have inspired me to pursue my dreams.

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There are several people I am thankful to for supporting me in the completion of this research. I am grateful to the single mothers that participated in the interviews for sharing their personal experiences about selecting child care. They provided insiders' views of the many issues faced by low-income mothers rearing children alone. These women have my utmost respect for the commitment they have made to provide their children with a better life.

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ABSTRACT

In this phenomenological study, 10 low-income working single mothers were interviewed. The in-depth interviews focused on issues related to selection of child care. The overarching theme was the demanding nature of being a low-income single mother. Eight of the mothers were never-married and this contributed to no contact between them and the children's fathers or the children and their fathers. Despite the demands they experienced these women were aware of their growth and gratification in being a mother. The mothers experienced contextual constraints and related issues that contributed to the child care selection process. These themes included: (a) the constraints related to the choices available to the mothers, (b) resources the mothers used in making child care choices, (c) concerns about child care and previous experiences, and (d) characteristics of child care that contributed to the mothers' satisfaction with the care they arranged. Policy implications include the mothers' needs for financial support and access to quality child care programs with staff trained to work effectively with these families.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

As growing numbers of women have entered the workforce over that past 50 years, American child-rearing practices have undergone a multitude of changes (Chadwick & Heaton, 1999; Cryer & Harms, 2000; Scarr, 1997). Today 60% of women with children under age 6 are working outside the home. The number of infants and toddlers younger than 3 years of age cared for by someone other than their parents during work hours also has risen. Several factors contribute to parents' selecting child care for young children. These factors include (a) financial needs, (b) changes in welfare policies, and (c) perceived need to provide an enhanced educational environment for children (Cryer & Harms, 2000). Organized child care centers, some employer-sponsored, provide care for 30% of children. The other 70% of children are cared for in a home setting, either in a family child care provider's home or in the child's own home by a relative, friend, neighbor, nanny, or au pair (Chadwick & Heaton, 1999; Hack, 1998). Historically, mothers always have worked either in the home or tending crops or livestock. Children once were present while mothers worked or were cared for by extended family members (Maccoby, 1997). However, receiving care outside the home by an adult other than one's parents or relatives is a standard experience for many children today (Scarr, 1997).

Working Mothers, Child Care, and Child Development

The shift in caregiving from a parent to another adult has been lauded as a necessity for working women and as a strategy for promoting child development for children, especially those with disabilities and those living in poverty (Cryer & Harms, 2000). Child care is seen as a vital resource for children and their families when mothers work outside the home regardless of income, race, or family composition (Curtis, 1997). Critics of child care argue that care by someone other than parents may be detrimental to children's development and especially harmful in poor-quality care settings. According to Maccoby (1997), "This is obviously a time of very rapid change with respect to the care of children" (p. 72). The primary child-care arrangements for preschoolers in families with employed mothers in 1993 were 30% in child care centers, 21% with nonrelatives, 17% with grandparents, 16% with fathers, 9% with other relatives, 6% with mothers at work, and 1% with other care arrangements (Chadwick & Heaton, 1999). According to Jones (1997), "There is no simple solution for child care" (p. 78). It appears that flexibility and variety are essential if all parents are to find care that is not only of high quality, but also accessible and affordable.

During the past 30 years, an amazing amount of research has deepened our understanding of infant development. Children's rapid neurological development during the first few years of life lays the foundation for future learning and experiences (Huston, 1997). In the United States, about 60% of women with children age 1 or younger work at least part time and select some type of nonmaternal care for children while they work (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1995). The child care environment

during early childhood is especially important as a major factor contributing to children's development. Particularly important are interactions with caregivers and their responsiveness and sensitivity to the child. "We have learned that low-quality care affects a child's intellectual development, readiness for school, capacity for attachment to parents and caregivers, ability to form relationships with other children, and willingness to be socialized" (Huston, 1997, p. 73).

Recently researchers have begun to recognize the importance of child care selection in the lives of parents and their children and have begun to investigate factors that influence parents' decisions (Finneran, 1997; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1997; Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 2000). According to Pungello and Kurtz-Costes, prior literature concerning child care choice behaviors has indicated that mothers have the primary responsibility for arranging and maintaining nonparental care arrangements in most families. Mothers who are married have had greater access to father care. The availability of an alternate caregiver has been especially important for mothers working non-day jobs (Hofferth, Chaplin, Wissoker, & Robins, 1996). These mothers have been less likely to choose center-based or home-based programs and more likely to choose relative or father care. According to Fuqua and Schieck (1989), fathers were not as active as mothers in visiting prospective child care programs during the search process. A later study by Atkinson (1994) found that fewer than 2% of respondents reported fathers making the decision to use child care alone. However, more than half of the mothers in the same study reported that their final choice about child care was a joint decision with their spouse. It appears that among married couples

fathers do not visit child care programs to the same extent as mothers do during the search process, but they do participate in the decision-making process with their spouse.

Substantive Frame and Purpose of the Study

Child care is an important resource for working families. Previous research has indicated that parents' choices about child care are linked to family characteristics and maternal beliefs.

Family Characteristics and Quality of Child Care

Each year more mothers enter the workforce and are faced with finding and paying for what they hope to be high-quality child care (Curtis, 1997). According to the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (1997), which studies care provided in child care centers, "Children from both low- and high-income families received higher quality care than those from moderate-income families" (p.389). This situation was attributed as due in part to child care subsidies for low-income families and tax credits for child care for higher income families, both of which contributed to the families' ability to afford better care. In the same study, family income was found to be positively associated with quality of care for children whether in their own homes or in family child-care homes; regardless of setting, children from higher income families received higher quality care.

Quality of child care is defined as including quality of both structure and process (Howes, 2000). Structural quality relates to aspects of care, including adult-child ratios, group sizes, and caregiver characteristics such as education and training--characteristics

that can be regulated. Process quality relates to children's experiences in care, especially whether social interactions with the teacher are positive or negative. However, family and child care influences on children's development are not independent. It appears more affluent and better-educated parents generally use higher quality care arrangements for their children than low-income families (Howes & Hamilton, 1993). According to Kontos, Howes, Shinn, and Galinsky (1995), the influence of income and educational level are evident in other child-care arrangements such as unregulated family child-care homes and relative care. "This lack of independence makes it difficult to compare the differential influences of family income and child care on child development" (Howes, 2000, p. 92).

Mothers' Beliefs, Constraints, and Child-Care Arrangements

Maternal, child, and familial characteristics that pre-exist before care begins (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1997) may affect family decisions about nonmaternal care. Therefore, it is difficult to measure the influence of quality of child care on children's development without knowing the nature of parents' decision making in selection processes. Given that mothers of infants and toddlers often assume a much larger influence in decision making about care, especially in low-income single-parent families in which fathers may be unavailable, the focus of the present study was on maternal influence in the selection process. Pungello and Kurtz-Cortes (1999) have proposed a theoretical model identifying three types of influences on child care search and selection behaviors: (a) maternal beliefs (attitudes toward child care), (b) child characteristics (age of child), and (c) environmental constraints (need to work and

flexibility of work schedule). The relationships of these beliefs and contextual factors are believed to be bi-directional with mothers changing features of the work environment to accommodate particular belief patterns and attitudes and vice-versa. Also, it is likely that care selection influences mothers' beliefs and these changing beliefs are part of an evolving process as mothers monitor the care arrangement (Pungello & Costes, 2000). Mothers' beliefs remain important over the course of the next several years as the child enters school and continue to influence care choices made for before- and after-school care for children.

Low-Income Working Mothers and Dimensions of Well-Being

How mothers from low socioeconomic backgrounds face the challenge of making child-care arrangements for their infants and toddlers in the face of welfare reform is yet another concern. The 1996 federal welfare reform law allocated nearly $3 billion in child care funding to support the states' efforts to help low-income parents meet new work requirements and remain off welfare benefits (Groginsky & McConnell, 1998). According to Brayfield, Deich, and Hofferth (1993), the types of child care used most often by families with incomes below $15,000 were consistently linked to family structure (i.e., single-parent versus two-parent households) and employment status. Single employed mothers with incomes below $15,000 tended to use nonrelative care (family child-care homes and centers) and multiple arrangements (Chung & Stoney, 1997). Findings from the national Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team (CQCO, 1995) indicated that quality ratings for infant and toddler centers were poor to mediocre. In fact, of the centers rated, 40% were rated as providing poor quality care,

52% were rated as providing mediocre care, and only 8 % were rated as providing developmentally appropriate care (Helburn, 1995). Although many low-income mothers do receive child care subsidies to help pay for child care while they work, the reality is that there is a lack of available good quality programs for infants and toddlers. An additional concern is that "there is limited research available reflecting consumer evaluation and assessment of child care services" (Curtis, 1997, p. 768). Also related to this issue is a lack of information about the level of consumer satisfaction or preferences toward publicly funded child care programs. Contextual constraints, including the limitations of high quality care options, also may impact how low-income working mothers define their preferences and decision making in the selection process.

The Welfare to Well-Being Framework for Individuals and Families by Bauer, Braun, and Olson (2000) provides useful information to consider when investigating child-care arrangements for poor mothers moving from welfare to work. According to this framework, dimensions of individuals' and families' well-being can be placed on a continuum from crisis to thriving based on differentials of family functioning in six key areas: (a) state of family economic functioning, (b) types of welfare assistance received, (c) poverty level or below, (d) food security, (e) transportation, (f) availability of child care, and (g) housing. Within this welfare-to-work framework, families achieving the higher dimensions of well-being were those with several child-care options available to them that were both affordable and of high quality. There also may be a connection between the dimensions of well-being that low-income mothers are experiencing within this framework and their personal testimonials as to their preferences and decision

making in the child-care selection process. For example, low-income working mothers reporting satisfaction with their present child-care arrangements very well may be located at higher levels of the continuum (i.e., in the range of safe or thriving).

Purpose of the Study

Although researchers have examined rational choice models based on types of child care selected (Hofferth, Chaplin, Wissoker, & Robbins, 1996) and measures of child care quality (Blau, 2000; Holloway & Fuller, 1999; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000), descriptions of the lived experiences of low-income working mothers' role construction, child-rearing preferences, and decision-making strategies and constraints concerning early child-care selection are notably absent in the scholarly literature. The day-to-day realities that low-income working mothers face in selecting care for their infants and toddlers need to be described in their own words. Decision making about nonparental care for children presents difficulties for most parents. Although there is an abundance of information providing tips on selecting quality child care, relatively little is known about how low-income working mothers experience and describe their own process of early child care selection for infants and toddlers. According to the U.S. Child Care Bureau (2000), parents may (a) feel isolated in looking for child care, (b) not know what they are looking for at the outset, and (c) not be able to afford quality care. The essential meanings that mothers ascribe to the decision-making process in determining whether to work and who will care for children could offer insights into the care selection process. The present study examined these experiences through in-depth interviews with 10 low-income working single mothers of

infants and toddlers who had recently selected child-care arrangements in the Early Head Start program or the New Beginnings Child Care Center in a Southeastern city with a population of 180,000. The resulting information has implications for child-care providers, parents, and policy makers. Child-care providers need to be more aware of and sensitive to low-income working single mothers' concerns about their roles and their children's well-being. This is especially true in infant and toddler care where the roles of the caregivers and parents overlap substantially due to the nature of caregiving. Parents may benefit from gaining a deeper understanding of how personal values, decision-making strategies, and emotions are involved in preferences and selection of early child-care arrangements. Developing a better understanding of low-income working single mothers' experiences in selecting care arrangements is useful for policy makers as they make decisions for allocating scarce resources to increase the availability of child-care options for low-income families.

Research Question, Issues, and Topical Questions for the Study

To investigate the lived experiences of low-income working single mothers in choosing child care while trying to meet welfare-to-work requirements several research questions were constructed. These questions guided the research process.

Central Question

Many infants and toddlers in the United States receive extensive nonmaternal care with varying degrees of quality of such experiences for them (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1997). Absent from many early child care selection studies are

(a) portrayals of low-income working mothers' perceptions of their role, (b) descriptions of their satisfaction and problems with the arrangements, and (c) specific decision-making strategies employed to make the selection (Curtis, 1997; Kerry, 1997; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1997; Pungello & Kurtz-Cortes, 1999). The intended purpose of the present study was to fill the gaps. The study examined maternal preferences and decision-making strategies in the selection process and from the mothers' perspectives. The central question for the study was what the nature of experiences that are essential for low-income working single mothers' preferences and decisions about nonmaternal care for infants and toddlers are. A phenomenological study was designed to describe the essence of these experiences and generate implications for answering this question (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Issue Questions

1. What does it mean to low-income working single mothers to make decisions about nonmaternal child care for their infants and toddlers?
    a. What are the meanings that mothers ascribe to the child-care selection process for their infants and toddlers?
    b. What are the underlying contexts that contribute to the selection experience?
    c. What are the universal structures that bring about mothers' feelings and thoughts about nonmaternal child-care arrangements?
    d. What are the invariant structural themes that facilitate a description of preferences and decisions about child-care arrangements for infants and toddlers as mothers experience it?

Topical Questions

2. Tell me about being a single mom.
3. How did you decide about infant and toddler child care?
4. Tell me what things were most important to you in deciding about child care.
5. Who did you talk to about child care and putting your child in child care? What things did they say?
6. How did things other people shared with you play into the choices you made?
7. What was difficult about selecting the child-care arrangement your child is in?
8. What was easy about selecting the child-care arrangement your child is in?
9. What do you think are the best things about your child's care arrangement? What worries you?

Theoretical Perspectives

The theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology are rooted in symbolic interactionism. In the phenomenological investigation the researcher's goal is to allow participants to give an oral account of an event in their own words.

Phenomenology

"Phenomenolgists believe that the phenomenon of interest, regardless of what it is, should be studied where it naturally exists and from the actor's own perspective" (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996, p. 84). The phenomenologist attempts to see and describe things from other people's points of view. Human behavior, what people say and do, is seen as a product of how people define their world. The task of the phenomenologist is

to capture this process of interpretation (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). According to Moustakas (1994), in the process of reflecting on what one has seen, one comes to an understanding of the meanings that may have been concealed. "In the process of recalling an experience, for example, shadings are clarified; details are added; refinements bring new voices, sounds, and visions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 72). The essential meanings mothers described offered insights for understanding their interpretations of role, preferences, and decision making in regard to infant and toddler child care.

Symbolic Interactionism

According to Blumer (1969), people act toward things and situations based on the meanings that they have for them. Blumer's theory of symbolic interactionism views meaning as coming from the interactions that individuals have with others as well as an internal process of self-reflection. People develop and modify the meaning of experiences through an interpretive process. "The way in which qualitative researchers go about their investigations is guided by the assertations that meaning is both individual and shared, that it comes from interaction with others, and that it is contextual" (Taylor, 1994, p. 267).

According to Klein and White (1996), "Symbolic interactionism posits that humans are motivated to create meanings to help them make sense of their worlds" (p. 92). Symbolic interactionists assume that the actors think and act according to the meanings they attribute to their actions and context. The process of identifying preferences and making choices about early child-care arrangements involves self-

reflection and interpretation of contextual options and constraints. The meanings low-income working single mothers ascribe to these experiences informed their decision-making strategies.

According to Klein and White (1996), "The general focus of symbolic interactionism can be summed up to be the acquisition and generation of meaning" (p. 92). In considering the key assumptions and concepts of symbolic interactionism, one must remember that people are motivated to create meanings that make sense out of their world. Symbolic interactionism's key assumptions and concepts include the following:

1. Humans live in a symbolic world, and the explanation of human behavior is not possible without knowing the meaning that this behavior holds for the actor (e.g., our language structures, our perceptions, and thinking).
2. Since humans live in a symbolic world, the context in which we live is both physical and symbolic. The way we define problems and situations helps us to choose among possible solutions.
3. Humans have minds that include memory and willingness to act. The mind acquires, integrates, and processes information. Through reflection, it is possible for the individual to develop a sense of self (i.e., both as actor, the "I" who did an act, and the "Me" who was acted on. According to Mead (1934), the self, mind, and symbol develop simultaneously.
4. Since symbols are shared and we cannot conceptualize the world without them, society precedes the individual mind and self. According to Mead (1934), the mind

of an individual is the result of society and is contingent upon the individual taking the social act into himself--therefore, the mind is social.

To understand the concept of role, it is necessary to look at the rules that the person (actor) is expected to follow (Klein & White, 1996). The concept of role from such a perspective takes on the following dimensions: (a) Both the actor and others have expectations about the performance of the role, (b) the clarity of role expectations is related to how well the actor is able to perform the role, and (c) role strain occurs when the actor does not have sufficient resources to enact the role(s).

Nominal Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following concepts are defined. The structure of low-income working single mothers' preferences and the child-care selection process for infants and toddlers is captured through mothers' descriptions of this process. The guiding question for the present study is: What is the nature of low-income working single mothers' experiences in terms of preferences and decisions about nonmaternal care for infants and toddlers? Mothers' role constructions, preferences, and decision-making strategies were defined by mothers in their descriptions (Creswell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994).

Child-care arrangements: Formally arranging for care of child by another individual(s) while parent is working or involved in some activity where direct supervision of child by them is not possible. **Choice:** The act of coming to a conclusion about an issue after weighing alternative options. **Decision-making**

strategies: Processes by which understandings, beliefs, and values are employed to weigh options and choose among alternatives. **Infants and toddlers:** Children from birth to less than 3 years of age. **Low-income working single mothers:** Mothers who (a) are either employed or involved in other activities outside the home (e.g., pursuing an education) for at least 20 hours per week and (b) meet the federal guidelines as low-income (e.g., with an annual gross income of $16,875 or less for one parent and child). **Nonmaternal care:** Care provided by a person other than the mother herself for infants or toddlers while the mother works or is involved in other activities outside the home. **Nonparental care:** Care provided by someone other than the parents of infants or toddlers while the parents work or are involved in other activities outside the home. **Preferences:** Greater liking; the right, power, or opportunity of prior choice or claim (Guralnik, 1970). **Quality Child Care:** While child care environments vary in their ability to enhance child development, quality is defined by (a) features that can be regulated (i.e., structural quality), such as adult-child ratios, groups sizes, caregiver education and training and (b) process quality, or children's experiences in care such as social interactions with the teacher (Howes, 2000). **Values:** Deeply internalized convictions that guide behavior and direct action; thus values relate to the choices we make. **Well-Being:** The state of well-being classified along the dimensions of the Welfare to Well-Being Framework for Individuals and Families (Bauer, Braun, & Olson, 2000) ranging from crisis at one extreme to thriving at the other.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Many families have left the welfare rolls; in fact, the decline is as much as 43% since 1996 (Kuttner, 2000). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1999), despite the healthy economy of the last several years, the proportion of children in poverty (14.7 million, or nearly 21%) has changed little over the past decade. Many women who no longer receive welfare benefits face serious problems such as low wages, inadequate child care, and a lack of health care benefits. The dilemma of work and welfare for single mothers often encompasses issues of child care, education, and training (Pearce, 2000). Yet, we have little information about how these families are faring after they no longer receive welfare benefits. Furthermore, parenting becomes extremely stressful under these circumstances. For many low-income working mothers, limited options exist for high quality infant and toddler care. Similar to the chronic problems that poor mothers faced on welfare, low-income working mothers frequently find limited access to the child care resources necessary to sustain a viable family life (Brayfield, Deich, & Hofferth, 1993).

This literature review discusses the (a) the nature of welfare reform and its impact on single mothers, (b) issues related to women's economic well-being in Tennessee, and (c) characteristics of women's early child care search and selection behaviors. The review illuminates contextual constraints confronting low-income single mothers moving from welfare to work in Tennessee. The backdrop is also set for

understanding the struggles these women face in selecting child care and their realities in rearing children alone.

Single Mothers and Welfare Reform

The lives of low-income single mothers once dependent on welfare to survive have been forever changed. The most significant overhaul of the United States welfare system in history has entered its fourth year. The enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 ended entitlements for federal cash assistance or the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. It was replaced with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The intended purpose of welfare reform was devolution, or placing increased decision authority at the state and local level. Welfare funds now are distributed to the states in the form of block grants, and states are free to devise their own eligibility rules and related policies.

Whereas AFDC provided minimal guaranteed income, TANF benefits are contingent on finding work after a 24-month period and carry a 5-year lifetime limit on the receipt of federal income assistance. Single mothers who are now required to participate in the workforce head many of the families eligible for TANF benefits. In 1993, never-married women headed nearly half (48%) of AFDC households (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1995). Public opinion about never-married mothers was different than that of widows, the group originally intended to be helped by AFDC through the Social Security Act of 1935. The desire to discourage

unwed motherhood while encouraging self-sufficiency are important features of welfare reform.

The intentions of policy makers supporting the legislation were to increase self-sufficiency among the poor. However, almost half of the women facing the new employment requirements are ill prepared to enter the workforce (Burtless, 1997). Two major hurdles to employment for them are low educational attainment and limited skills. At the same time, child care responsibilities and costs make it difficult for them to work.

In 1992, close to half of the children supported by AFDC were under age 6; 25% were under age 3, and 22% were ages 3 through 5 (U.S. House of Representatives, Ways and Means Committee, 1994). A barrier to work for low-income single mothers is locating quality child care that is available and affordable. The shortage of quality child care programs has been documented in several national child care studies (Gable & Cole, 2000). The Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team (CQCO, 1995) in their assessment of child care centers based on developmental, economic, and workforce perspectives found 70% of preschool programs to be rated as mediocre and that 40% of infant and toddler classrooms offered unsafe conditions. In fact, they found that only 8% of infant and toddler rooms provided developmentally appropriate care and 14% of preschool classes fostered children's healthy development. Similar findings have been evident in extensive studies of home-based and relative care. According to Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, and Shinn (1994), 56% of programs have provided adequate care and 35% offered potentially harmful care.

Images of Welfare Families

Many Americans have felt that the welfare system trapped families in poverty and dependency and these beliefs have helped to create a less than favorable image of the welfare family. However, what many failed to recognize is that two-thirds of AFDC recipients were children (U.S. House of Representatives, Ways and Means Committee, 1994). According to Cherlin (1998), welfare recipients are assumed to have severed family ties and to be malingers with many children dependent on the government. To the contrary, governmental data indicated that the average AFDC family consists of a mother and two children (U.S. House of Representatives, Ways and Means Committee, 1994). According to Cherlin, "notably absent from the debates about welfare during this period were the voices of the recipients themselves" (p. 119).

Rank (1994), through his intensive study of 50 welfare families, helped to dispel some stereotypes. The randomly selected caseload sample of welfare families consisted of 41% female-headed families comprised of 3 to 4 members. Most of those interviewed reported having children at an early age and/or marrying young. Many also gave accounts of serious family problems during their own childhoods, including alcoholism, abuse, and family breakups. Many of these welfare recipients came from working-class homes just barely getting by financially. Given the lack of financial support from their families, higher education was not possible for those rearing children at an early age.

In regard to the welfare recipients' own children, they indicated that their children did enrich their lives even though they were frustrated in not being able to fully

meet their needs. These parents emphasized to their children the importance of education and developing independent lives of their own. These parents whose own childhood's offered them few life options continued to struggle as adults. According to Rank, their marriages did appear to be weaker and there were more incidences of separation and divorce than in the general population.

The Reality of Going to Work for Low-Income Women in Tennessee

The economic issues for single-mothers in Tennessee leaving the welfare rolls are magnified by restrictive state policies for the receipt of TANF benefits and the low-wage work that many are qualified to find. According to the Economic Policy Institute (1999) for single women with children, more than one in three earn less than $7.50 per hour yielding an annual salary of $15,600. These women must also arrange child care so they are able to work. The absence of high quality infant and toddler child-care options along with low-wage work makes the transition from welfare to work especially difficult for them. These realities coupled with low education attainment, means many will continue to struggle financially just as they did while receiving welfare.

Women's Well-Being in Tennessee

According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2000), Tennessee women face insurmountable obstacles that make their equality with men and equal standing to other women in the United States impossible. The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) report was designed with the support of an advisory committee consisting of state researchers, policymakers, and advocates. It is in an ongoing

research project conducted by the institute to establish baseline data for women in all 50 states and the District of Columbia The report was designed to inform "citizens about the progress of women in their state relative to women in other states, men, and to the nation as a whole" (p. 1).

Women in Tennessee face several barriers to achieving gender equality. In fact, among the 50 states and the District of Columbia, Tennessee ranks near the bottom third for reproduction and family planning, at 34th, and in the bottom 10 for all other IWPR composite indices. In regard to women's status, Tennessee ranks 39th in health and well-being, 44th in employment and earnings, 45th in economic autonomy, and 46th in political participation.

For low-income single mothers making the transition from welfare to work the struggle is even more difficult. Nationally, parents who received AFDC for longer periods of time tended to be never-married mothers with infants, no high school diploma, and little work experience when they first enrolled (U.S. House of Representatives, Ways and Means Committee, 1994). Tennessee's TANF program, which went into effect on September 1, 1996, is among the most restrictive in regard to limits placed on recipients. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research (2000), many of Tennessee's policies are unsupportive of low-income women. For instance, Tennessee does not extend TANF benefits to children born or conceived while a mother receives welfare.

Families First

According to IWPR (2000), Tennessee's time limits on receiving TANF of 18 months is more stringent than those required by the federal legislation. The average number of months for receipt of TANF benefits for all states is about 46 months. In Tennessee and 20 other states, nonexempt residents are required to engage in work related activities immediately. There are a few exemptions such as the policy that individuals with below ninth grade reading levels are required to enroll in adult education and high school equivalency courses. It appears that Tennessee's policies do little to help low-income women bolster themselves to new levels of economic sufficiency. Education will play a key role in elevating them from minimum and low-wage employment.

Another unfavorable factor for low-income families in Tennessee is the way earnings are treated in determining TANF eligibility. According to IWPR (2000), "the state disregards less than 50% of earnings for a full-time, minimum-wage job" (p. 13). For a family of three the income eligibility limit is $799 per month with a maximum grant of $185 per month. This means net earnings are allowed up to $614 without impacting the amount of the grant (State of Tennessee, Department of Human Services, 2000). For Tennesseans, the average monthly benefit ($169.71) was less than the amount of the national average for cash assistance benefits of $358.08 per month (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 1999). According to IWPR, "when low benefits are combined with stringent earnings

disregards, welfare recipients can have more difficulty moving out of poverty and achieving an adequate standard of living" (p. 14).

Earnings for Single Women with Children

The IWPR report indicated that low-income women in Tennessee are particularly disadvantaged with single mothers experiencing higher levels of poverty than other family types. The proportion of female-headed households with children under 18 years old, at 20.4% is just slightly more than the national proportion of 19.5%. Earning a living wage in Tennessee is not a reality for most women. In fact, nearly two-thirds of all working women in the state heading families earn less than $10 per hour (Economic Policy Institute, 1999). According to Knapp (1998), in Knoxville the living wage for one adult supporting one child is $11.37 per hour and is slightly less in Memphis at $11.19 per hour. In comparison to Tennessee's cost of living, single women with children's earnings do not enable them to achieve economic autonomy (IWPR, 2000).

Child Support

An additional hurdle for many low-income, single mother families is the receipt of child support. In regard to child support, the national average for female-headed households receiving some level of support is 34%. Tennessee is near the national average at 33%. However, Tennessee is below the national average of 39.2% for actual collection of child support in all cases with an order at 25.9% (IWPR, 2000).
The institute's research indicated that receiving child support makes an important economic difference for single mothers with children. An earlier report indicated that

poverty rates would increase by more than 30% for nonwelfare, low-income families without their child support income. Child support is an important financial supplement to single mothers striving for self-sufficiency. However, the likelihood of actually receiving court ordered child support is much lower than in other states.

Welfare to Well-Being Framework

According to Braun, Bauer, and Olson (2000), individuals and families may be classified by dimensions of Welfare to Well-Being on a continuum of economic functioning as: (a) crisis, (b) at-risk, (c) safe, or (d) thriving. The framework is intended to be a model to assist others in understanding the comprehensiveness of welfare assistance policies contributing to the economic well-being of families. The continuum is based on six key concepts: (a) types of welfare assistance, (b) poverty level, (c) food security, (d) transportation, (e) child care, and (f) housing. For example, the Welfare to Well-Being classification for those living below poverty is crisis, and these mothers would be classified as having few available child-care options, that consist of poor quality arrangements. In contrast, mothers considered to be thriving have incomes 200% of poverty and multiple child-care options of desirable quality.

Child Care

According to Parcel and Menaghan (1997), mothers who work long hours for low pay have less time to spend nurturing their children by interacting with them. In Tennessee, almost 68% of working mothers have children younger than 6 years old. High quality and affordable child care is an important policy issue in Tennessee and the nation. In regard to TANF regulations and child care, Tennessee provides 18 months of

support to families transitioning from welfare to work. All states extend a minimum of 12 months support for child care. Under the new TANF guidelines, states are required to provide child care assistance to several types of families (a) those receiving TANF, (b) those making the transition from welfare to work activities, and (c) those at risk of becoming dependent on TANF (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, 1999). According to Kisker and Ross (1997), most parent do find child care but worry about the quality of the care they find. Mothers of infants are especially fearful since babies cannot complain about mistreatment (Porter, 1991). In a study of participants in a welfare-to-work program, those that reported little trust in their child-care arrangement were most likely to drop out of training or stop working one year later (Meyers, 1993). Mothers who stop working because of problems with child care risk termination of their welfare benefits under the new TANF regulations.

Early Child Care Selection and Family Characteristics

Despite the large number of American mothers who participate in the labor force, the United States remains the only Western nation whose government does not fully fund child care for families (Cryer & Harms, 2000). In fact, nearly 60% of mothers of infants and toddlers in the Unites States work at least part-time (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1995). Many researchers have focused on the effects of child care on children's development. However, much less is known about why and how mothers choose early care (Pungello & Kurtz-Cortes, 1999).

Working Mothers of Infants and Toddlers

Many mothers, including low-income mothers, leaving the welfare system must work. To a certain extent, an American ideology exists that says the mother's primary role is that of caregiver for her infants and toddlers. In contrast, welfare-to-work mothers are faced with another ideology; they are restricted from caring for their infants and toddlers themselves and instead are required to enter the labor market. The disparity between the reality of work outside the home for necessary income for mothers of infants and toddlers and the ideal designating mothers as full-time caregivers may lead to ambivalent and guilty feelings for mothers who place their children in early care situations.

Factors Influencing Selection of Early Care

Typically, when parents have a child care need, they seek information from others and combine it with their own needs before making a decision (Gable & Cole, 2000). Mothers making child-care choices must consider the options available to them while weighing the risks and benefits of the care they choose. Initially, most parents use informal sources (word-of-mouth, family, and friends) to gather information about child care (Kontos et al., 1995; Powell, 1983; Powell, 1997). According to Kisker and Ross (1997), low-income families tend to rely more on word-of-mouth than families with higher incomes. To most parents the quality of child care is an important consideration as they decide about entrusting caregivers with their children. Availability and affordability are yet some other concerns. Research in regard to child care selection behaviors helps to shed some light on these issues

Selection behaviors. Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (2000) recently put forth a theoretical model identifying three types of influences on "mothers' child care search and selection behaviors: (a) environmental constraints (e.g., need to work for income, work schedule flexibility); (b) maternal beliefs (e.g., attitudes toward child care); and (c) child characteristics (e.g., child's age)" (p. 245). In light of these characteristics, these authors proposed that care selection decisions may well lead to mothers altering aspects of their environment to accommodate their beliefs about infant care. Those selections in turn impact not only the care arrangements chosen but also maternal beliefs about care. A bi-directional relationship between maternal beliefs and care selection as well as care selection and work accommodations was evident. The sample for this study consisted of a homogeneous middle-class group of mothers, limiting the utility of its findings for being generalized to low-income mothers' early care selection behavior. However, it was prospective in nature and contributed to an understanding that constraints and attitudes that mothers hold before the birth of their babies may later influence their early care selection behaviors.

Child's age, availability of care, and choices related to development. Singer, Fuller, Keily, and Wolfe (1998) examined which families are most likely to select infant and toddler care and at what point in the child's life selection takes place. They looked at several factors including: (a) when children from different families enter care, (b) access to early child care and its distribution across the United States, and (c) early child-care selection and its potential impact on center-based and early intervention choices as they related to children's development. In the first 6 months after birth, "an

estimated 29% of children in the South and 25% of children in the Midwest enter care versus 16% of children in the Northeast and 18% of the children in the West" (Singer et al., p. 1135). However, as children become older, the regional differences diminish. Since so many children in the South enter early care during the first year of life, the median age at placement is 20 months, whereas the average age for entry in the other regions is 40 months in the Midwest and 43 months in the Northeast and West. By this time, almost two-thirds of children in the South have entered care.

Maternal age and its implications for placement of infants and toddlers in early care are less clear. Mothers with higher levels of education also begin families later in life and, thus, are the least likely to place children in care. However, working-class mothers with more than two children also were found to be more likely to stay home with their children. The odds for entry into early child care for children in single-parent families are nearly twice those for two-parent families. Mothers who work during their pregnancy with their first child are four times more likely to place infants in early care. Later-born children in larger families may be less likely to be placed in early care. In regard to race (Black, White and Latino families), Black children are 1.3 times more likely to be placed in care as compared to peers from White and Latino families sharing similar demographic characteristics. There is a need for additional information about psychological and cognitive processes that parents employ to make selection choices. According to Singer et al. (1998), it remains unclear as to how mothers' education level, child-bearing preferences, and gender roles enter into decisions about child care.

Predictors of the amount and type of early care selected. The NICHD Early Care Research Network (1997) investigated which family, economic, and psychosocial factors acted as predictors of nonmaternal infant care related to age of initiation, amount, type, and quality of care. The study consisted of a sample of 1,281 children in 10 locations across the United States enrolled in the study at birth and observed at home and in child care at 6 and 15 months. Findings were that family economics, rather than other demographic characteristics, accounted for the largest amount of variance in the kind of care that infants of working mothers received. Timing for nonmaternal care not only was contingent upon economic variables but was related also to mothers' personalities and beliefs concerning the benefits of work. Several family characteristics impacted the amount of nonmaternal care infants received once they started regular child care. These characteristics were the mothers' work schedule, her earning power, the family's total income, ethnicity, family size, and mothers' level of education. For children receiving coparental care as the primary form of care, mothers tended to be less educated and earned lower incomes. These mothers also tended to be very concerned about the risks of maternal employment for their children (NICHD, 1997).

According to the NICHD (1997) study, the quality of care infants received varied depending on a range of family, economic, and child characteristics. However, children at the lowest and highest income levels received the highest quality of care. The authors of the NICHD report suggested that this reality might be due to federal child care subsidies for low-income families and families with higher incomes receiving

subsidy in the form of child care tax credits. If this is the case, then children from moderate-income families that do not qualify for subsidies may be placed in the lowest quality care settings.

The nonmaternal care settings investigated in the study included coparental care, grandparental care, informal family based care, family child-care homes, and child care centers. Opportunities for messy play, reading books, and active exploration were less available in all settings of care except for centers attended by primarily ethnic minority children. This finding may be influenced by differences in the values and goals for caregiving. However, observed positive caregiving did not differ by ethnicity of children. Gender of the child was also a significant influence on quality of care. According to the NICHD report, "A startling finding with regard to quality of nonmaternal care was that 15-month-old boys received less responsive care than girls in both child care homes and centers" (p. 405). These differences were observed with nonrelated caregivers but not with relatives such as fathers or grandparents. This may suggest that fathers and grandparents respond more sensitively to the unique characteristics of the children in their care, whereas nonrelated care providers may be responding more stereotypically to boys and girls in their care.

Demographic variables outside of income accounted for only 3% of the variance in the amount of nonmaternal care children in the study received. The effects of ethnicity were small. At 6 months of age, children in African-American families tended to receive more nonmaternal care than other families. These mothers also tended to be less well educated and may have needed to work more hours. Among those families

with mothers capable of earning more in the labor force, the likelihood of using nonmaternal care was greater. However, when there were other adequate forms of income available outside maternal income, families were less likely to use nonmaternal care for infants.

These findings also suggest that children who begin nonmaternal care within the first 2 months of life differ in that their mothers are less educated, earn less on the job, have fewer available resources, and believe that maternal employment is beneficial for children. In comparison, children who entered nonmaternal care between 3 and 5 months of age tended to have mothers who were more educated and better paid, had extroverted personalities, and had smaller families (NICHD, 1997). Families selecting family child-care homes chose those with qualities resembling those of their own homes.

In regard to the quality of care in child care centers, there were no clear connections related to ethnicity, family size, mother's education, family income, or mother's attitudes. These findings may mean either that children receive more equal treatment in centers or that centers are not sensitized to variation in the family's socialization goals. According to NICHD (1997), since infants receive extensive nonmaternal care of varying quality, it is important to examine parental choices regarding nonmaternal care. Although this study looked at demographic, economic, and psychosocial factors that work together to predict selection of nonmaternal care for infants it should be noted that parental preferences, decision-making strategies, and perceptions are additional areas requiring investigation.

Summary

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 has paved the way for overhauling the nation's welfare system. In 1994, two-thirds of AFDC recipients were children. Never-married mothers headed almost half the families receiving welfare. Low-income single mothers in Tennessee making the transition from welfare to work experience more extreme economic hardships due to the state's restrictive welfare policies and low-wage work. The circumstances of low-income working mothers are further complicated by the economic constraints involved in finding and paying for good quality early child care. According to Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (2000), three influences are significant in the search and selection process for working mothers: (a) environmental constraints, (b) maternal beliefs, and (c) child characteristics. There also appears to be regional differences for age of entering into early care arrangements. Children residing in the southern U.S. enter child care at much earlier ages and in much greater numbers. It is important to note that only 3% of the variance in the amount of nonmaternal care children received has been attributed to demographic variables outside of income, according to the NICHD (1997) report. This report also indicated that children entering nonmaternal care within the first 2 months of life tend to have mothers whom are less educated, earn less on the job, have fewer available resources, and hold beliefs that maternal employment is beneficial for children. In addition, for low-income working mothers availability of appropriate child care is an important indicator of well-being on the

Welfare to Well-Being Basic Framework for Individuals and Families put forth by Braun, Bauer, and Olson (2000).

Researchers have focused on the effects of child care on child development, but this process cannot be fully understood without learning more about the influence of maternal child care selection behavior in determining how specific care settings are chosen. Additional investigations are needed to explore behaviors related to how low-income working single mothers make decisions about early-care arrangements. In light of recent welfare reforms, it is important to investigate how mothers describe the experiences of seeking early child care for their infants and toddlers.

CHAPTER III

Methods

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of low-income single mothers selecting child care while trying to meet welfare-to-work requirements. Quantitative studies have identified influences of maternal and family attributes that contribute to the child-care selection process for working mothers. These attributes include (a) child's age, (b) mother's need to work and flexibility of schedule, (c) maternal beliefs, (d) ethnic membership, (e) household income, (f) maternal education, (g) number of children, and (h) levels of social support (NICHD, 1997; Pungello & Kurtz-Costes, 1999; Singer et al., 1998). However, there is limited qualitative evidence on how low-income working single mothers view their options and the criteria they consider in the child-care selection process (Mensing, French, Fuller, & Kagan, 2000).

Rationale for Selection of a Phenomenological Approach to the Study

We cannot understand fully how low-income working mothers transitioning from welfare to work make choices about infant and toddler child care without uncovering the meanings that these experiences have for them. Brayfield, Deich, and Hofferth (1993), Pearce (2000), and Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (2000) all noted limitations in the existing scholarly literature related to the selection experience of these mothers. The influence of income and education in the selection process also makes it

difficult to differentiate between the impact of family versus child care on child development (Howes, 2000). According to Weiss (1994), "Research aims should dictate research method" (p. 9). To this end, a phenomenological perspective and an in-depth interview process were used to capture the essence of the child care selection experience for low-income working mothers of infants and toddlers. The mothers' day-to-day realities in choosing infant and toddler child care while they work are described in their own words. These personal accounts offer much in the way of understanding how mothers interpret their role, preferences, and decision-making.

Salient Aspects of Phenomenology Related to the Study

"Postivists and phenomenologists take on different kinds of problems and seek different kinds of answers; thus their inquiry demands different methodologies" (Boss, Dahl, & Kaplan, 1996, p. 91). Historically, those using a phenomenological perspective for studying families have challenged the notion that the quantitative scientific method is the single way to accumulate truth and knowledge about families (Boss et al.). Postivist researchers use the quantitative method of investigation to search for measurable causes that can be analyzed statistically. In contrast, phenomenologists use in-depth interviews or participant observations as they seek to understand participants' experiences by asking questions about meaning. "The phenomenologist is likely to ask participants to define the phenomenon in question rather than defining it for them" (Boss et al., p. 91).

Postivists use the scientific methods of deduction (e.g., reasoning from general principles to specific conclusions) and induction (e.g., reasoning from specific facts to general conclusions), whereas phenomenologists use the method of reduction. In this process, the phenomenologist begins with a hunch about the phenomenon under study. Reduction allows them to move closer to the essence of the experience for the participants. Boss et al., likens this process to "peeling away the onion." (p. 88). The phenomenologist begins with a generalization or a hunch and peels away (like an onion) until he gets closer and closer to the meaning of the lived experiences for the research participants. For the phenomenologist, the most important reality "is what individuals, couples, or families perceive it to be; their 'real world' most likely is not found in the laboratory or clinic but where they naturally interact in their daily lives" (Boss et al., 1996, p. 85).

Qualitative methods such as ethnography, grounded-theory building, critical theory research, feminist perspectives, case studies, and focus groups may be used with phenomenology. However, this is true only if the researcher accepts certain assumptions. According to Boss et al (1996), phenomenological inquiry is shaped by several philosophical assumptions:

1. Knowledge is socially constructed and incomplete, therefore truth is relative.
2. Since social inquiry is influenced by the researcher's point of view, the researcher is not separate from the phenomena she or he is studying. Subjectivity is recognized as the researcher's reality.

3. Knowledge is gained not only through science but art as well. Scientists and phenomenologists may depict the same phenomenon, representing a reality of people they study. The difference is that researchers using each approach accomplish this goal through their own experiences and within their own mode of expression.
4. Bias is inherent in all research methods, and the researcher should be explicit at the beginning of a study as to their values and beliefs.
5. The phenomenologist assumes everyday knowledge is shared. There is no hierarchy as to who is the expert. Therefore, the phenomenologist considers research participants as co-researchers in the study.
6. Language is the primary symbol of human interaction and should be studied where it takes place naturally. The study of everyday family life highlights how language serves to assign meaning to objects and social conditions.
7. Experiences, events, situations, and objects mean different things to different people; therefore, it is important to hear multiple perceptions of the same event.

The phenomenologist attempts to interpret human behavior from the perspectives of the individuals who have experienced the event. During the in-depth interview process, informants are engaged in personal reflection and recall about their experiences. This process affords the informants the opportunity to clarify and define what the experiences mean to them. Phenomenologists interpret meaning from the informants' reports by capturing the essence of shared experiences.

The present study was designed to describe the decision-making process for low-income working single mothers who were making choices about infant and toddler child care. It attempted to capture the mothers' interpretations of their roles and preferences in the selection process. From the mothers' points of view and in their own words, selection behaviors are described using in-depth interviews. By getting the fullest reports from low-income single mothers who are transitioning from welfare to work and making early child-care choices, it is possible to integrate and interpret commonalties among their accounts. Describing these decision-making strategies can provide a useful tool for informing parents, child-care providers, and policy makers about the selection process.

Rationale and Description of Sampling Procedures

According to Moustakas (1994), there are five essential criteria for selecting and locating research participants for a phenomenological study. These are research participants who (a) have experienced the phenomenon, (b) are interested in understanding the nature and meanings of the experience, (c) agree to participate in a lengthy interview process, (d) grant permission for the interview to be audio- or videotaped, and (e) permit the data to be published in a dissertation or another publication. The sampling procedure for qualitative research involves purposeful sampling, or selecting research subjects whom the researcher deems may provide good data for the study. The range of sampling for a phenomenological study is narrow; therefore it is essential that all participants have experienced the phenomenon being

studied (Creswell, 1998). This sampling strategy is criterion sampling, meaning all cases meet a specific criterion contributing to quality assurance in the sample (Creswell). In-depth interviews provide the primary data source, and generally only a few informants (10 or fewer) provide accounts about their experiences.

Phenomenology focuses on the meaning individuals create for themselves in relationship to an experience (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To understand the nature of experiences that are essential for low-income working single mothers' preferences and decisions about nonmaternal care for infants and toddlers in Tennessee, 10 mothers making the transition from welfare to work were interviewed. Since recruiting for the study mothers who have experienced the phenomenon was of primary importance, a criterion sample was selected from mothers who have infants and toddlers enrolled in either Early Head Start or the New Beginnings Child Care Center in Knoxville, Tennessee. In addition, two family child-care homes in Knoxville also were selected to participate. The researcher had interviewed parents for a previous study at Head Start and established rapport with staff members. A contact with the director at the New Beginnings Child Care Center also was established. The researcher had an established relationship with the two family child-care homes and had met with them previously during child care in-service training sessions. Many of the mothers making use of these four child care programs were single parents transitioning from welfare to work, which was an additional criterion for participation in the study. Both centers and the two family child-care homes agreed to participate and make initial contacts with mothers about the study. According to Maxwell (1996), a systematically selected small sample

of homogeneous members provides more confidence that conclusions drawn will adequately represent average members of the population than the same size sample of heterogeneous members. For the sake of quality assurance among sample members in the present study research sites shared similar characteristics (i.e., these child care programs served low-income single mothers of infants and toddlers).

Description of Participating Child Care Programs

The child care programs contacted for the study included two inner city family child-care homes and two child care centers: (a) the Early Head Start Center and (b) the New Beginnings Child Care Center. These programs served primarily low-income parents and a number of single-mother families. Many of these mothers were making the transition from welfare to work and were participating in Tennessee's Families First initiative. The two family child-care homes served African-American families in the inner city. One program was licensed for 12 children and the other program was registered and served 4 children. The operators have participated in child caregiver training conducted by the Child Care Resource Center in Knoxville.

The Early Head Start Center began enrolling children in 1999 and serves children from 3 weeks to 3 years old. The program is housed in the Head Start Center located on the north side of the city near public housing and other low-income neighborhoods. The early program serves 32 children, and single mothers headed 8 of the 14 families served by the program. The program offers comprehensive services to families, including full-time child care for working parents, parent education, and related social services. The program's philosophy is based on respect for parents as

their children's first teachers. The curriculum encourages parent-and-child interactions and offers children learning-based preschool experiences. Teachers and assistant teachers are required to hold a Child Development Associate credential. In addition, by the year 2003, all Head Start teachers must have a minimum of an associate-level degree in Early Childhood Education. Parents are eligible for a child care subsidy to cover the costs of child care and make a co-payment for child care on a sliding-scale based on their income.

The New Beginnings Child Care Center serves children 6 weeks to 12 years old. It is located on the south side of the city near public housing and other low-income neighborhoods. The program is considered a learning center and many of the teachers/caregivers are parents from the local neighborhoods. At the time of the present study, the infant classroom served eight families, and the toddler rooms served 18 children, among which single mothers headed eight families served in the infant and toddler age rooms. All but three of the 45 children who were attending the center at the time were eligible for child care subsidies. Of the families served by the two family child care homes eight were headed by single mothers of infants or toddlers.

Preliminary Steps

The directors at the selected centers and the owners of the family child-care homes were approached and given a description of the study. Each of these individuals provided a letter of cooperation to the researcher, agreeing to make initial contact with their single-mother parents and provide them with a description of the study. The child care programs did make the initial contacts with appropriate parents and gave them each

a copy of the study's description provided by the researcher. Single mothers who were interested then provided contact information to their child-care provider, and the researcher called them to set up an interview appointment. The researcher told the participants that the interviews would be audiotaped and that they would receive a $5 WalMart gift card in appreciation of their participation.

Among the four child care programs that agreed to participate, eight mothers from Early Head Start, six mothers from New Beginnings, and no mothers from either of the family child-care homes provided contact information to the researcher. The researcher contacted the owners at the family child-care homes several times over a 5-week period, and the providers indicated that none of their mothers had volunteered to participate. For this reason, the researcher made a decision not to include this group in the study. Among the 14 mothers who volunteered to participate, 5 interviews were completed at each of the two child care centers. At the Early Head Start Center, two mothers were no-shows twice for their scheduled times, and another mother could not be reached by telephone. At the New Beginnings Child Care Center, one mother was a no-show twice for her appointment and one mother missed her appointment but later completed the interview. In total, the researcher scheduled 17 appointments for interviews, made reminder calls to participants, and completed 10 interviews which were conducted over a 6-week period.

The Sample

The sample consisted of 10 low-income single mothers of whom 2 were enrolled in an education, 8 were working full time, and all were making the transition

from welfare to work. The mothers who worked full time did not receive a cash benefit (i.e., monthly stipend) from welfare. Ten of the mothers were eligible for or received housing subsidies, food stamps, TennCare (state insurance), and child care subsidies. However, one mother eligible for housing assistance chose to live elsewhere and did not use the subsidy available to her. Those mothers who worked earned $7 to $9 per hour. Of the two mothers who received cash benefits (i.e., monthly stipend) from welfare; 1 received $128 monthly for herself and one child and the other received $185 per month for herself and three children.

The mothers ranged in age from 20 to 32-years old. One mother was African American and the other mothers were Caucasian. The mothers' average age in the study was 25 years. The average age for the women when they first became mothers was 19.2 years. Four of the mothers reported being parents of biracial children. In regard to educational attainment, 5 mothers had completed their GED and the other 5 mothers were traditional high school graduates. One mother who had completed her GED was in her second year of college and working toward a computer science-related degree.

The focal children (toddlers) in the study ranged in age from 16 months old to 3 years old at the time of the interview. The ethnic composition of the sample's focal children consisted of five Caucasian, one African-American, and four biracial children. Of the toddler focal children, the average age of entry into child care was almost 7 months old. Among these children, four were 3 weeks to 6 weeks old, five were six to 12 months old and one was 15 month old when beginning child care. Four of the

children had attended two programs including the present one and six children had attended only their present program. On average, the stay in their present program was 11.4 months. The age range for all children in these mother-headed families was16 months to 11 years old. The gender of the focal children in the sample were four girls and six boys. The ethnic composition of the siblings represented in the sample consisted of eight Caucasian and six biracial children. In regard to family size, the mothers each had one to three children: 2 mother had one child, 2 mothers had two children, and 6 mothers had three children. The composition of the 10 families-by children's gender was 12 girls and 12 boys. All the families except one that had recently moved lived in low-income neighborhoods.

Among the mothers, 2 had been married (1 was separated from her second husband) and 8 were never married. Two of the mothers lived with at least one of the fathers of their children. The 2 mothers who had been married had child support orders in place, and 1 was actually receiving child support payments. The other mothers did not receive child support but had limited help from the fathers in purchasing clothing for their children. Among the 8 mothers not living with their children's fathers, 1 mother who was previously married reported regular visitations by the fathers of her children. Among the 10 sample mothers, there were 24 children of whom 21 had different fathers. One mother's former boyfriend was in prison, and another mother's father was in prison. See Table 1, for a listing of several demographic characteristics of mothers in the study.

Table 1. Listing of mothers' demographic characteristics

Mother	**Age**	**Education**	**Marital Status**	**Number of Children**	**Income** (before taxes)
Joanna	31 years old	High school graduate	Never married	2	$128 monthly
Amber	24 years old	High school graduate	Never married	3	$1,160
Susan	25 years old	GED	Never married	3	$185 monthly
Lisa	32 years old	High school graduate	Separated	3	$1,200 monthly
Sarah	25 years old	GED	Divorced	2	$1,280 monthly
Kathy	20 years old	GED	Never married	1	$1,200 monthly
Tamera	21 years old	High school graduate	Never married	1	$1,120 monthly
Jessica	23 years old	GED	Never married	3	$1,120 monthly
Stephanie	23 years old	GED	Never married	3	$1,120 monthly
Allison	27 years old	High school graduate	Never married	3	$1,440 monthly

Data Collection Procedures

The process of collecting information for a phenomenological study relies primarily on in-depth interviews (Creswell, 1998). According to McCracken (1988), the in-depth (or long) interview is a powerful method in qualitative research studies. This method gives the researcher insights into the mental world of the individual. It also reveals to the researcher patterns of daily experiences for the individual.

The In-Depth Interview Process

For the purposes of this study the researcher conducted face-to-face an in-depth interview lasting 1 to 2 hours with each participant. Eight of the participants in the study were interviewed at the child care sites their children attended in the afternoon, prior to picking up their children. Two interviews were conducted during the evening in the mothers' homes due to their work schedule.

To be successful in the one-on-one interview process, the researcher needs to speak with individuals who are not hesitant to speak and share their ideas (Creswell, 1998). The setting is crucial for establishing participants' comfort and rapport with the researcher. Therefore, selecting a familiar setting such as the child care program or the mothers' home was helpful in putting the informants in the study at ease.

The Interviews

For the purposes of audiotaping, the interviews within the child care center were conducted in a quiet location. An office in each child care center served this purpose. The two interviews in the mothers' homes were conducted at 8 p.m. in the evening in their living rooms. The researcher introduced herself as a single mother of

two grown-up sons. She told the participants that her desire to learn more about how low-income working single mothers chose child care grew out of her own personal experiences in selecting child care when her sons were quite young. The researcher informed the participants that the information they shared could be beneficial to other parents, child-care providers, and policy makers.

Participants were asked to complete and sign an informed consent form (Appendix A) giving their permission for the interview to be recorded and information from it subsequently published. Participants were assured that any personal information they gave would be held in strict confidence. Furthermore, measures would be taken to conceal their identity in personal quotes used in the final report and any publications coming from it. However, mothers were told that, if they divulged information concerning child abuse during the interview, the researcher was required per Tennessee law to make a report of the incident to the Department of Children's Services. After the introductions and background information was given to the participants, the researcher asked them biographical information about themselves (see Appendix B). The researcher recorded the information on the form.

The interview then moved to the next stage with an interview protocol consisting of eight open-ended questions (see Appendix C for the form used):

1. Tell me about being a single mom.
2. How did you decide about infant and toddler child care?
3. Tell me what things were important considerations to you in deciding about child care.

4. Who did you talk to about child care and putting your child in daycare? What things did they say?
5. How did things other people shared with you play into the choices you made?
6. What was difficult about selecting the child-care arrangement your child is in?
7. What was easy about selecting the child-care arrangement your child is in?
8. What do you think are the best things about your child's care arrangement? What worries you?

Creswell (1998) recommended memorizing each of the questions to minimize losing eye contact during the interview. During the first interview the researcher noticed that the interviewee appeared self-conscious when she read from the interview protocol or took notes during the interview. In subsequent interviews, the researcher did not read from the interview protocol or take notes during the interview and these participants appeared less self-conscious during the interview process. A short informal warm-up period was planned to put participants at ease. The researcher asked each mother to talk about her youngest child (the focal child for the interviews). The participant was then asked each of the eight questions, and the researcher's role was that of listener. The mothers seemed to talk freely during the interview process and were willing to share their beliefs and concerns about early child care. Contrary to what is believed about this population of women, they did not seem to be verbally inaccessible. Only one mother remained anxious during the entire interview and required extra time to express her thoughts. Prompts such as repeating the interviewee's last phrase to obtain clarification were used as needed. After each interview was completed, the

researcher made field notes on the interview protocol in case of recording failure and to facilitate later recall of significant statements and body language used by the interviewee. Upon completion of the interview, each informant was thanked and asked if she may be contacted for further information if necessary. Closing comments in the form of reflective memos were recorded on the interview protocol by the researcher. Each interview was transcribed from the audiotapes and stored on computer diskettes. The transcriptions were printed on various colors of paper (a different color paper was used for each participant's transcripts) to facilitate the analysis process. Color coding transcripts made it possible to cut apart and file significant statements into excerpt files without losing the identity as to which transcript the data originally came from.

Bracketing Out Preconceptions

Prior to data analysis it is essential that the researcher sets aside, or brackets, as much as humanly possible all preconceived experiences to better understand the experiences of the participants in the study (Creswell, 1998). Moustakas (1994) termed this process as the epoche. According to Moustakas, "The challenge of the epoche is to be transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naive and completely open manner" (p. 86). Self-reflection serves the purpose of coming to know things as they truly appear and freeing oneself of bias or prejudice. During the bracketing process, the focus of the research is placed in brackets with everything else being set aside so that the entire research process is rooted only on the topic and question at hand (Moustakas).

Suspending presuppositions allows the researcher to set aside personal biases and focus on what is real (Creswell, 1998). To accomplish this bracketing process in the present study, the researcher participated in a bracketing interview with her major professor to better understand personal biases that could be brought to the research process. This interview was completed before meeting with the participants. The researcher discussed her past experiences with searching for and selecting child care for her sons. She revisited the experience and described difficulties she encountered in finding appropriate care due to financial constraints. The researcher also discussed her biases related to the inferior quality of care available for many infants and toddlers.

The researcher also met with her major professor and discussed her personal feelings about the information the participants shared after the completion of each interview. The focus of these meetings was to reflect on the participants' reports and bracket out as much as possible the researcher's own personal biases. The researcher's goal was to focus more clearly on the essence of the participants' lived experience in selecting child care.

Data Analysis Plan

Creswell (1998) proposed the data analysis spiral as a method for engaging the qualitative researcher in the analysis process. This approach requires that the researcher move through analytic circles, as opposed to fixed linear stages.

The Data Analysis Spiral

Data management is the first loop in the spiral and involves organizing the data into physical file folders or virtual computer files. At the same time, files are converted into text units, such as words or sentences, for analysis by hand or by computer. In the present study the researcher used physical file folders and the files were converted into text units by hand. The amount of data at this point is voluminous, making it important that one sit down and immerse oneself in the details to make sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts (Creswell). Writing memos in the margins of field notes and transcripts at this point was very beneficial.

The next loop in the spiral was to describe, classify, and interpret. This was accomplished by reflecting on the major thoughts presented in the data and formulating categories to classify these into. Interpretation of the data involved seeing the data in terms of the shared meanings that interviewees ascribed to their experiences for selecting infant and toddler care. The process of phenomenological data analysis is recursive in nature meaning that the researcher moves back and forth between the data and the categories in which significant statements or text units are sorted. During this process, the researcher considers whether the identified categories fully portray the meaning of the lived experiences to the participants. Text units are then clustered into themes. In the final loop of the spiral, the themes identified through the data analysis process are formulated and represented.

Phenomenological Data Analysis in the Study

Upon completion of interview transcriptions, the researcher's task was to consider how low-income single mothers transitioning from welfare to work experienced decision making about infant and toddler child care. Each interview was then read three times in its entirety before segmenting out significant statements. The goal was to revisit the experiences of the participants and uncover overall meanings the participants discussed during the interview process.

Horizonalization, is the second step in the phenomenological data analysis process, and comes after the bracketing interview. In this step, the researcher extracts and lists significant statements from the data giving each equal value (Creswell, 1998). The goal in this step was to develop a list of nonoverlapping statements about how individuals experienced decision making about infant and toddler child care. Then statements were grouped into meaning units (e.g., listed along with a description of the experience or textural description for each individual). Supporting quotations from the data were given to illustrate each meaning unit. Themes that were evident from the data were clustered together at this point. An excerpt file was maintained for this purpose and significant statements were coded and filed accordingly. Alternative meanings attributed to mothers' decision making about infant and toddler child care (structural description) were used to construct a description of how the phenomenon was experienced. An account of how low-income working mothers experienced decision making about infant and toddler child care was constructed by describing the overall meaning and the essence of their shared experiences. In the present study, the themes

identified are (a) the experience of being a single mother, (b) constraints related to the child-care choices available to the mothers, (b) resources that mothers had available to use in making the choices, (c) concerns about child care and previous experiences, and (d) characteristics of child care that contributed to the mothers' satisfaction with the care they arranged. The themes are presented in Chapter IV.

How the Final Narrative Report is Presented in Chapter V

According to Weiss (1994), the diachronic report describes how an experience or event begins for an individual and proceeds from beginning to end. This format is also appropriate for explaining how individuals such as low-income working single mothers transitioning from welfare to work make choices about infant and toddler child care. Themes that emerged from the data in the present study were examined in relationship to previous research and in terms of implications for future research, practice, and policy. Conclusions are drawn as to similarities and differences in early child care selection behaviors among mothers in this study in comparison to that of other mothers reported in the literature. Limitations of the present study are explored. According to Moustakas (1994), it is important to discuss also "the outcomes of the investigation in terms of social meanings and implications as well as personal and professional values" (p. 155). Implications for parents, child-care providers, and policy makers about the selection of infant and toddler child care by low-income working single mothers are provided. From this phenomenological investigation implications for future research also are proposed.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Each of the single mothers, who participated in the study, had a unique story to tell about their lives and the process of selecting infant and toddler child care. Their stories unfold within the context of their lived experiences. These experiences include being the recipient of welfare benefits and related subsidies either presently or at some time in the past. All the mothers interviewed are now receiving some food stamps, subsidized or public housing (all except one mother), state insurance, and a child care subsidy. Two of the mothers who are not working receive a monthly cash grant (i.e., monthly stipend) from welfare. The focus of the interviews were on the selection of child care for their youngest child. Since all but 2 of the mothers had older children they also described making child-care choices for multiple children.

Biographical Sketches

To better understand the context of the participants' experiences, a biographical description follows for each mother. All names used are fictitious to protect the privacy of the respondents and their families.

Joanna

At the time of the interview, Joanna was a 31-year-old mother of two children ages 2 and 8. She lived in public housing with her son and his father. Her daughter from a previous relationship was living with her parents. Joanna completed high school

and planned to soon begin computer training. Presently, she was in counseling to help her set goals for herself and to cope with family issues that were stressful to her.

Joanna's children are biracial. She reported that this fact has placed a strain on her relationship with her father. She described her family context while she was growing up as "supportive." However, due to instability in her relationship with her son's father, she has been homeless in the past. Joanna said that this man has been abusive to her but that he has never been abusive to the children. Joanna mentioned that she does not receive child support for her daughter. This child's father is now incarcerated. Joanna's son was 6 weeks old when he first entered child care at the homeless shelter where they were living, and he has attended two different programs including the present one.

Amber

Amber was a 24-year-old mother of three children ages 2, 4, and 6 at the time of the interview. Amber had completed high school and was employed full time as a food services worker. She also had completed a home correspondence course for paralegal training. The children's fathers were not involved with them. Amber stated that she received no child support and no other assistance from the children's paternal family members. She reported that two of her children are biracial.

Amber said she was very close to her brother but had limited contact with other immediate family members. She had saved enough money to relocate to another state to be closer to her brother and was very concerned about finding appropriate child care

at her new residence. Amber's daughter was 15 months old when she first entered child care, and she has attended two different programs including the present one.

Susan

Susan was a 25-year-old mother of three children ages 3, 4, and 6 at the time of the interview. She was a full-time college student completing business-related training. She lived in public housing with her three children and her mother. Susan was very focused on finishing her education. Her mother did assist with child care. She described her relationship with her mother as "close;" however, during an argument a year prior, her mother had punched her in the mouth and broken her jaw.

Susan described the children's fathers as "uninvolved," and she received no child support from them. She described physical abuse by a boyfriend in her past. Her mother's boyfriend did provide a car to her so she could take the children to child care and attend classes. Susan's son had entered child care when he was 1 years old and has attended the same program for 2 years.

Lisa

At the time of the interview, Lisa was a 32-year-old mother of three children ages 19 months, 6, and 10. She had completed high school and worked full time as a food services worker. Lisa was separated from the middle and youngest children's father and divorced from the oldest child's father. Lisa received child support and mentioned that the children's fathers do visit with them. She received some help with child care from the paternal grandparents. Lisa's mother had died two years earlier, and her brothers and sisters had moved away.

The past fall their house had been destroyed by fire. Lisa now lived in subsidized housing with her three children. She recently had completed the required training to qualify for a home loan. Lisa planned to purchase a home in the near future. Lisa's son was 3 weeks old when he first entered child care and he has attended the same program since then.

Sarah

Sarah was a 25-year-old mother of two children ages 2 and 5 at the time of the interview. She had her GED and worked as an office employee. She was divorced from the children's father. Sarah stated that her family was supportive and very involved with her children. She felt very close to her two sisters.

The children's father did not pay child support or visit regularly with them. Presently, she was taking legal action to enforce the child support order. Sarah reported that she regularly sets goals for herself and recently had moved to a better apartment, subsidized by Section 8 of Knoxville. Sarah's daughter was 9 months old when she first had entered child care and had attended two different programs including the present one.

Kathy

At the time of the interview, Kathy was a 20-year-old mother of a 16 month-old daughter. She had her GED and worked as a caregiver in the child care center that her daughter also attended. Kathy was seeking child support from her daughter's father. He was uninvolved with the child.

Kathy mentioned that her mother and brothers watched her daughter for short periods of time. Otherwise, she was alone with the responsibility of rearing her daughter most of the time. Her daughter began child care at 6 weeks old and has attended the same program since then.

Tamera

Tamera was a 21-year-old mother of a 2-year-old son at the time of the interview. She was a high school graduate and worked as a caregiver in the child care center that her son attended. She lived in subsidized housing with her son and the child's father. She reported that her son's father did assist with child care.

Tamera had enrolled her son in his present center when he was 6 months old. She began to work in the program a few months later. Tamera said she would like her son to attend Head Start when he is old enough.

Jessica

Jessica was a 23-year-old mother of three children ages 19 months and 6 and 7 years at the time of the interview. She had completed her GED and also some computer classes at the subsidized housing program where she lived. She received no child support from the children's fathers. They were not involved with the children. Her mother and sister were supportive and cared for the children when they were sick. Until her father was sent to prison, he also was involved with her children.

Her daughter began child care when she was 8 months old and has been enrolled in the same program since that time. Jessica recently had begun working as a caregiver

in the same program her daughter attended. The older children also attended the center's after-school program.

Stephanie

Stephanie was a 23-year-old mother of three children ages 2, 3, and 4 at the time of the interview. She had her GED and had completed some computer classes at the subsidized housing program where she lived. She reported that her children are biracial, and the paternal grandmother provided child care for the middle child due to the child's health condition. She received no child support.

Stephanie's youngest son was a year old when he had begun child care. He had attended two child care programs and began the present one just 3 weeks earlier. Recently, Stephanie had become employed as a caregiver in the program he now attended. Her son had attended two programs including the present one.

Allison

At the time of the interview, Allison was a 27-year-old mother of three children ages 16 months, 9, and 11. She had graduated from high school and worked full time as a customer services representative. She reported that her children were biracial and the children's fathers had limited contact with them. Allison received no child support, but the children's fathers did buy clothing and shoes for them occasionally. Her grandfather took care of her middle son during school vacations, and her sister assisted with child care on the weekends.

Allison's youngest son was 6 weeks old when he first entered child care. He had attended the same program since then. Although she was eligible for subsidized

housing, she had chosen to live elsewhere due to concerns about who might be her neighbors. She hoped to arrange her work schedule so that she could attend the necessary budget classes to purchase a home through Habitat for Humanity.

Summary

Among the 10 mothers interviewed, 8 were never married and 2 were divorced. These mothers experienced varying degrees of social support from family members. Eight of the mothers reported having support with child care from either their children's fathers (in two cases) and extended family (in eight cases). Joanna and Amber reported limited support from family members. Among these 10 moms, there were 24 children and 21 of these children had different fathers. Lisa was the only mother not living with her children's father who reported that she received child support and that her children's fathers regularly visited with them. Several of the mothers had been involved in interracial relationships, and 4 of the mothers had biracial children. Two of the mothers where living with at least of one of their children's fathers, but they were unmarried. Lisa had been divorced before and was the only mother in the study who was currently married. She was separated from her husband and going through a divorce at the time of the interview. Sarah also was divorced from her children's father.

Making Choices About Infant and Toddler Child Care

The experience of being a single mother and having limited access to social and financial support for selecting child care is the overarching theme derived from the interviews in this study. Under this umbrella, several factors contributed to the choices

the mothers made for infant and toddler child care. These factors are (a) constraints related to the choices available to the mothers, (b) resources that the mothers had available to use in making choices, (c) concerns about child care and previous experiences, and (d) characteristics of child care that contributed to the mothers' satisfaction with the care they had arranged.

Among the 10 mothers in the study, 2 received cash assistance (monthly stipends) from welfare and other types of government subsidies. Among those that worked, all 8 reported having their monthly cash grants terminated. All the mothers, even the mothers employed full time, continued to live in subsidized housing except in one case, received some food stamps, relied on state-supported insurance, and received a child care subsidy. As their benefits are terminated over time, it is difficult to envision how these mothers will meet their families' needs.

The Experience of Being a Single Mother

When asked about being a single mom, several mothers reported that it is hard. These mothers were never married, and several had failed relationships with more than one partner. For the most part, this group of mothers reported limited financial support from their own families, their children's fathers, or his family. The mothers did get some assistance with child care, and the extended families of most of the mothers were seen as emotionally supportive. Susan reported the most help because (a) her mother lived with her and (b) she had access to her mother's boyfriend's car for transportation.

Two of the mothers were living with their children's father. One of the divorced mothers reported receiving child support from the fathers of her children.

Joanna, when asked about her experience in being a single mom, said, "It's hard. Being a single mother anyway. It's just me for them. For my daughter, it's my parents. Both of my children are biracial, but my daughter lives with my parents." She talked about why her daughter lives with her parents and said:

> We had a lot of problems when I was pregnant with her. Then my mom and dad wanted to take care of her, which is good. I chose that because, at the time, I couldn't take care of her. So she's with them because they can take care of her a little better than I can. My son, on the other hand, is darker than my daughter so he's not allowed in their home.

In regard to child support, Joanna said, "The only money I got from my daughter's father was $225 when he was jailed. Now he is in prison, and I get no money for her from him." In talking about her financial situation, she said, "We get $128 a month from welfare and $170 in food stamps....My son doesn't get the things his sister gets because she lives with my parents." Joanna went on to say, "My mom says I am in this position because I choose to be in this position....I had everything growing up. My parents bought me everything growing up." In regard to her relationship with her father, she said, "I started dating black guys, and my daddy turned away from me....My son's daddy is black and we are still together to this day." Joanna then talked about her son's father:

He has a drinking problem....He had a drug problem but he fixed that....He does what he can, and he gives my kids a lot of things they need....I want my kids to judge people by what's in their heart. Not by what they buy, not by what they have....And if they do something, that doesn't mean they are bad."

In response to the same question, Amber said, " It's hard. It really is. It's a struggle. Both, financially, emotionally, mentally, all of it. I mean, it really is. Because my older twos' dad was never around and my youngest one's is sometimes, whenever he feels like it." Amber went on to say, when questioned about child support, "I get no help from none of them. So, I mean I do it all on my own." When asked if members from her family or the children's fathers' families help out, she said, "Not really." When she was asked if they are far away, Amber said:

No, they're here, but I mean, if it really came down to them helping, no. So, I basically do it on my own....It's not actually the money because money can't buy love. They don't show no attention, it's just whenever it's a good time for them. No, I don't choose to go there. I take care of my kids myself. I don't need no help. Sometimes I think I do, but I get through it....I don't want to take them from their father, but it's just that- whenever it's convenient for him don't work for me. You can't be a part-time daddy. Just like I can't be a part-time mom. I can't get up and say, "Well, I don't want to take care of you today." I can't do that...I'm momma and daddy. I do it all.

When posed the question about being a single mom, Susan gave a mixed response. She replied:

> Oh yeah, I love being a mother. It's hard. It's very hard. Not being able to get them what they want. I mean they always have what they need, most of the time. But there's times that, they'll look at me "McDonalds, McDonalds." Sorry baby, we ain't got the money. He'll say, "You boke." "Yeah, baby, I'm boke." It's just $185.00 doesn't go far.

Similarly to the other mothers, Kathy said, "Yeah, it's hard. I don't get to like, go anywhere by myself. I have to take her. I've really no free time."

> Jessica described her personal experience of being a single mother by saying: It's hard to be a single mother....They've all got three different fathers. But with my oldest, her dad, I was 15 when I got pregnant with her, and her father was gone before she was even born. So before I even had her, I was with my son's daddy. And he stayed with us for about 4 years. And I had my son, and then he stayed about maybe 2 years after I had our son. And then I was by myself for a while. And then I met my youngest daughter's father, and he helped for a while. And he stayed with us 3 and a half years, and he just left back in November. Since then, I've been on my own completely.

Jessica then talked about her experience in trying to get child support from the children's fathers:

We go to the SSA, and they are supposed to help you, but I been going to the actual courthouse myself and tried to make him pay, but nothing so far. I mean I've gave them addresses, phone numbers, work--I don't know what the problem is. I guess they're backed up. I don't know, but they haven't helped me yet. I'll have to harass them to even get them to.

Jessica then talked about her feelings in regard to having the children's fathers involved with them. She said:

> Well, as far as the money, it's not really about money to me. I would rather them to just be around, you know....But I just wanted to see him, you know, "Get them this weekend or get them Saturday night when you don't have to work" and he'll dodge me all weekend long so, I just....I mean it would be nice to have some financial help, but that's really not my main concern.

Jessica went on to say, "I'd rather them be around, you know. To be around, especially for my son. He needs a man around, and there's not one. So I don't know what to do about that."

Stephanie, another never-married mother, described her experience as a single mother by saying, "Sometimes it's hard, sometime it's stressful, and sometimes they kind of get on my nerves, but other times they are good....Sometimes you don't know which way to turn."

Tamera, who lives with her son's father, described her experience as a single mom in regard to her responsibilities. She said, "The most important responsibility is me taking care of my child, having food to put on the table, clothes to put on his back, being there for him."

Allison described her experience in being a mom by saying, "It's hard first and foremost....But I love my kids. So it's worth it." When asked if she gets to do anything on her own, she responded, "I go to work!"

Two of the mothers described their experiences as single mothers somewhat differently. However, both of these mothers were either separated or divorced from their former spouses. One of these moms is not receiving child support. These mothers also reported having support from their families or their former in-laws. Sarah has worked with the law enforcement system to issue several warrants to enforce her child support order. In describing this process, she talked about her ex-husband's flight to another state to avoid the order.

> He calls every week but he won't tell me where he is....My daughter doesn't remember him. She wouldn't know him if she fell over him....He hasn't seen them since September. My son misses him terribly....I'm sure he thinks it's something he has done.

Sarah, when asked about what she felt being a Mom was like, said:

> I enjoy being a mother, but if I could, I would do everything different. I would have just now even be thinking of marriage and children. My senior year I was married. I am extremely grateful for my children. Out

> of everything that I've been through, look what I have to show for it. I have two gorgeous children that I love with all my heart. I wish for them that I had done things differently so I could give them more and that I could give them better. I always heard how being a mom was so hard and other mothers told me, "I just hate to have to get up with them in the middle of the night. You never get any sleep, and oh it's such a pain." I don't know, I love getting up in the middle of the night with my kids....That was my best time.

In response to asking about the amount of in-put she gets from her ex-husband, Sarah said:

> He has none. So I run the show. I mean I can do things my way, and that way it's easier. In a lot of ways, it's harder. Of course, I don't have the second income. I don't have support for when I'm sick.

Sarah went on to describe her experience as a mom by saying:

> I'm surprised at how much you can love a child. I can't imagine being without them. I'm young and I've made plenty of mistakes, but I've learned from every one of them.

Lisa was separated from her husband and divorced from the father of her oldest son. She received child support and help with child care from both her family and her former in-laws. When asked about being a mom, Lisa said:

> I think it's the best thing that I've ever done--to have my kids. I probably wouldn't have amounted to anything if I didn't have them. I'd

probably have been just running around, you know, enjoying. It made me get a job and made me get what I have and stuff.

The two mothers who had been married received more social and financial support than their never-married counterparts. These mothers also presented their experience of being a single mother differently in regard to their description of being a mom. It is likely that these two moms experienced more gratification from being a mother due to their greater access to social and financial support. However, both of these mothers remained dependent on government assistance to support their children. The mothers also talked about their desire to have the children's fathers involved in parenting in addition to providing financial support. Those mothers who were never married not only lacked the support of the fathers but also that of his extended family members.

All of the mothers who participated in this study described their experiences of being a single mother as hard for the most part. The demands of being a single parent that they described primarily related to financial strain and the time and energy required to care for their children. Although they experienced strain in providing for their children, the mothers also experienced gratifications from being a mom. The mothers emphasized a high degree of care and commitment to their children along with a sense of fulfillment in mothering.

The Constraints and Choices Available for Selecting Child Care

The experience of being a single mother with few resources available to them proved to be significant in the child-care choices these mothers made. In the context of this overarching theme of their single-parent experience were additional factors related to choosing infant and toddler child care. The mothers' perceived constraints impacted them in making child-care choices. The constraints the mothers described were the child care program's location, hours of operation, and cost. All the mothers were receiving a child care subsidy. However, they were required to make a co-payment to the child care program based on their income. Within the limitations created by the child care program's location, hours of operation, and cost, the mothers described their decision making.

Child Care Program's Location and Hours of Operation

An additional constraint for 8 of the mothers was arranging care for multiple children and coordinating the location of the centers. It was important for the mothers to coordinate child care due to the cost and time involved in transporting children. The mothers were concerned in their search process as to whether the child care programs were conveniently located to their work and residence. The fact that not all child care programs accepted a subsidy was an additional concern in the search. The mothers experienced the constraint of searching for child-care options that accepted the child care subsidy and that were in proximity to their work and home.

The mothers based their choices in selecting child care in part on (a) the availability of a child care program that was nearby, (b) whether transportation was

provided for the children, and (c) the center's hours of operation. An additional aspect of choosing child care was the cost. All the mothers relied on a child care subsidy to pay for their children's care. The mothers also made a co-payment, the amount of which, depending on their income, to the child care program.

Joanna described her experiences with placing her son in the child care center available to her while living in the homeless shelter. She said, "It really wasn't my choice; I had to take what I could get." Amber talked about her experience in selecting child care for her children. The youngest child had been 15 months old when she moved her to the Early Head Start program. When asked whether there were other things she felt were important in making this decision, Amber said, "The security of Head Start's going to be here and that it was not a private daycare." She went on to say, in comparing her daughter's present arrangement at Early Head Start with the previous one at a family child care home, that her experience with the Early Head Start program was an improvement:

> It was not just somebody in a family who so happened to have a daycare and she was closed when she wanted and open when she wanted to be. There is the security of Head Start's going to be open Monday through Friday.

She also talked about her experience with her present arrangement in relationship to her job at another Head Start Center. When asked what was easy about the choice she had made, Amber said, "Well, as easy as it is, it didn't interfere with work hours. I mean it was the same." In regard to the previous arrangement she had at the family child-care

home, she was asked if they had tried to work with her hours. Amber said, "Not really. They tried but half the time it didn't happen. I mean, it's like I said: They're open when they want to be open and they're closed when they feel like closing." In response to whether this affected her work situation, Amber replied, "Yeah, I mean I lost a job I had." After being asked if this was because she couldn't get someone to care for the children, she went on to say:

> Right, or it would be like a day's notice, they'd say, "Hey, we're going to be closed tomorrow." Well, I mean most jobs say "You let us know 24 hours ahead if you're not going to be here tomorrow," and you can't. I mean if you go and pick your kids up at eleven at night and they tell you then , "Well, we're not going to be open tomorrow so."

Another advantage for Amber was that the Early Head Start center also housed the same preschool program her son attended.

Susan lived in public housing near her son's Early Head Start program. She described her issues with transportation by saying:

> I don't have a car myself. The car that I'm driving is my mother's boyfriend's. And the frame's cracking on it. So I don't have my own car. I had a car in May, and the master cylinder went out, and I hit a brick wall head on. It was just me in the car. My head went through the windshield, but no big thing.

Susan talked about the help she's getting from a specialist at Early Head Start to find a car. Susan said:

> She's really great. She's doing everything she can to help me find a car that I can find at a halfway decent price. That's not going to cost me an arm and a leg to put me in debt, you know. It's just, with me not working and me getting $185 a month, it's just really hard to find a car. 'Cause she's been looking around. I found a car. I found a Mustang, and it's only $150. It was a repo, and it sat at a pawnshop for $150. It runs good, it looks good. I mean, it needs to be painted. But if it gets me from point A to point B and back to point A, that's all I am concerned about though.

Susan, in talking about her son's present child care arrangement, said, "I just wish they would pick them up so I wouldn't have to bring them. But they won't do that." In response to my question about if she had to borrow a car, she said, "Well, when my mom's boyfriend's car is not broke down I drive his car."

Lisa had this to say in regard to her children's previous child care center's location:

> It was convenient. They went, you know, to pick up my children from school. And then another thing was, you know, I'm, you know, how you're supposed to get off at a certain time, and they're like, 'Oh, can you stay just 30 more minutes, 30 more minutes and I'll be okay and you can go ahead and leave?' So that was right there by the house so I could hurry and pick up, and then we'd be home--so that was another big thing. It was just right there at the house.

Sarah also talked about the importance of finding a child care program near her home and work:

> I did not have a car. I was fortunate to get a job near my home. I could catch the bus right up from my apartment. I was fortunate to have an older sister stay with me for a while who had a car. I would take my daughter to daycare on the bus. Then I would catch the bus to work. In the afternoon, my sister would pick me up from work and we'd go get my daughter from daycare....We learned how to time manage really good.

Kathy described the benefits of working at the same place her daughter was enrolled for child care. She said:

> Well, at the same time, I don't have to worry about dropping her off at daycare and then rushing off to be somewhere else at work. And if that ever happens, like if she ever is not feeling well or gets hurt, I'm right here so I can check on her and be right there with her.

When Tamera was asked how many other programs she had looked at, she said, "This is the only one because I stay near here, so this was the only one." Jessica placed her youngest child in the same center and also used the after-school program for her older children. In regard to location of the program and her need for care for her older children as well, she said,

> Yeah, I have a car. If I didn't have a car, that'd probably be even something. 'Cause I know some people, they have had somebody come

and get them. You know, and bring them back. Which is if I didn't have a car, that'd probably have to be the case for me, and I couldn't do it either. So, but as long as they pick them up from school, that's all I need.

When asked about her difficulties in selecting child care for her 19-month-old daughter, she said:

> Just basically having everything come together as far as the hours that they're open. The whole transportation thing and just her getting along with the caregivers basically. But like I said, if my older two children weren't already here, it would have been a lot harder. I don't know what I would have done.

Stephanie experienced similar problems in finding child care programs that worked with her schedule and transportation needs. In comparing her present arrangement with the previous program, she said:

> Here they're more lenient....They allow the children to be there for 10 hours...Sometimes if I was working late I would have to have somebody else to go get my kids from daycare. Just so I could work.

When asked if she experienced transportation problems, she said:

> At the last daycare they went to, I didn't have a vehicle at the time. So I had to pay the daycare bus to come and pick them up and bring them home every day. So that was more money out of my pocket that I had to pay for....The subsidy doesn't cover transportation.

Stephanie now worked as a caregiver in the same child care program her children attended. In talking about the best things about her present arrangement, she said, "The hours. They can come into work with me and I take them home with me....Instead of having to rely on somebody else to help me."

> When asked about putting her then 6-week-old son in daycare, Allison said: Of course, nobody wants their kids in daycare. When you're in my position, I had no other options. It was like you either do that or sit at home and not have any money. I really didn't have any other choice but to do that.

Allison described her experience in searching for child care by saying:

> I just had to go back to work. But I had a friend whose little girl went to the daycare he's at now....So I went there and talked to them, and they were really nice. And I like it. I may have to move, but I really don't want to.

In talking about trying to coordinate her work schedule with the child care center's hours, Allison said:

> I offered to come in to work at 7 a.m. because the child care center opens at 6:30 am. I just couldn't stay late because the daycare closes at 6:00 p.m. I was having to pay somebody else to pick them up....A girl at the daycare would take the baby home with her, and I was paying her $20 a week.

When asked what was easy about the child care arrangement that she had made for her son, Allison responded, "It's convenient to where I live. And we both like the people there, and they try to work with your schedule."

Several mothers said they didn't have much choice in placing their children in child care because they needed to work. The mothers reported visiting one to five programs before making a choice. Given the circumstances of these mothers it is commendable that they put so much time and energy into searching for what they hoped would be good quality child care for their children. Their search and selection was based upon the proximity of the program to their home and work. Most had transportation issues and experienced problems in coordinating their work schedule with that of the child care program's hours of operation. Being a single parent magnified this problem, several of the mothers didn't have another person to rely on to transport their children to and from child care. In addition to their cost in the form of a co-payment for child care, two mothers paid someone to pick their children up from child care and to stay with them until they returned from work.

The Child Care Subsidy and the Mothers' Cost

The mothers talked about the constraints in using the child care subsidy to purchase child care. These constraints related to finding a center that would accept the subsidy and then, depending on the program's cost, whether the mothers could afford the co-payment. Amber responded to the question of the subsidy, she said, "I'm paying $16.00 a week for both of my kids to be at Head Start." When asked if the subsidy was accepted by the children's previous child care program in a family child-care home, she

said, "Yeah, but my co-payment was more, it was a lot more. Actually I don't know why it was more. Huh, I never thought about that."

Susan described difficulties in selecting child care related to the subsidy. She said, "Finding something within the price range. I get a Community Action Committee (CAC) voucher. But it's the fact that some daycares charge more than what CAC pays and I would have to make up the difference." Susan also said:

> Like with my oldest daughter's daycare now, I have to pay anywhere from, well right now it's $3.00 extra a week, so I'm paying that at the first of every month. I pay whatever it takes to pay that for the full month. Next year when she goes to first grade it's going to be $14.70 a week extra that I have to pay because what CAC pays and what they charge, it's a $14.70 difference so I'll have to pay the $14.70 out of pocket. And that's hard.

In regard to her son's child care at Early Head Start, she said:

> So, my CAC voucher takes care of everything here. Plus my son, the other daycares that I looked at were not willing to let me bring in his milk that he needed. He's lactose intolerant.

Sarah's son was already attending Head Start when she was divorced. When she started working he went to the full-day program. In regard to choosing child care for her daughter, Sarah said:

> I had no idea where to start looking for child care for my daughter. I looked in the yellow page and just started calling places....So the big

thing for me in choosing a daycare first of all is do they take CAC. I don't have the luxury of paying a $100 a week per child....So that chopped my list probably to a quarter of the total listings.

In talking about her plans to move her children to a new child care center nearer her new job and home, Sarah said:

> The further away from our new area you go, the more child care programs there are that accept CAC. It's hard to find CAC facilities in this part of the city. A lot of church daycares don't accept CAC. I pay $14 a week for my daughter and $19 a week for my son. CAC only pays a total of $77 a week for one child over 2 years old.

When asked about anything she felt was difficult in choosing child care, Kathy said, "I'm on Community Action Committee (CAC) voucher. So I pay $20 a week." Tamera was asked if she received a child care subsidy and whether it was based on her income. Tamera responded, "Yes, I did. Yeah they still help. CAC pays so much of it, and then you have to pay the rest of the fee. Yeah, it's based on your income."

Allison was pleased that her son's center is flexible in accepting her co-payments for child care. She said:

> If I get behind on my payments because I have a bill, they are really understanding....They just seem to work with everybody. A lot of people try to judge you because they have more than you have and you're struggling. They kind of look down on you. I've never gotten that impression from any of them there.

Several of the mothers talked about the child care subsidy and its affect on the child-care choices they made. The mothers stated that many centers did not accept the subsidy or necessitated a sizable co-payment. Due to these constraints, the mothers based their child-care options on the availability of centers that accepted the child care subsidy and charged an affordable co-payment. For at least one of the mothers, the issue became whether to drive 60 miles per day round trip for child care or to move the children closer to her new home and job. The problem in finding a new child care center hinged upon finding a program willing to accept the child care voucher.

Resources and the Decision-Making Process

The mothers used various resources to search for and select child care for their infants and toddlers. Among these resources were center staff, family members, and friends. Mothers who had previous experience in the selection process also relied on this previous knowledge to make choices.

When asked if she talked to some other people in deciding about child care, Joanna said:

> No, only just a little. But at Early Head Start, I came down and I looked and I talked to them. Ms. Carol, she's not here anymore. I loved her to death. And I met Ms. Lynn and Ms. Margaret, and I kind of watched them through the day.

In regard to family influences and whether she got advice in selecting child care, she said, "No. I'm an only child." Joanna went on to talk about the child care staff:

I sort of bonded with Ms. Margaret. And there's Lynn, and I knew, I knew this is where he needed to be. I signed him up, and I said "You know, I'll bring him down here," and I watched him. And I just watched his face, and I knew he needed to be here so he's here.

In regard to people Amber talked to in deciding about child care, she stated that, "Yeah, there was a few people that I talked to. A specialist at Early Head Start and then the person that was going to be my little girl's teacher." When asked if she felt like she had many choices since she had to work, Amber said, "It was really, take what you can get. You know, take what comes first. Not really first, but wait and see things." Amber also talked about the family child-care home where here daughter was before:

I wasn't too satisfied with that because, like I said, there wasn't any other small kids there. They were all older kids. So that was the main reason why I pulled her from there and started bringing her here. Like I really do think children need to be with children of their own age. So that was a big thing. I wasn't really satisfied with the other child care, but I had to work. So, I had to take what I could get. I couldn't be picky.

When asked if family or friends influenced her child care decision, Amber said:

No, basically, I did it own my own. I mean, I didn't say anything else to the other child care. I mean, it was just like I'm poor now and that's it. 'Cause, I mean, I really do think Early Head Start is a good program.

Susan stated that her decision in selecting child care was based on her previous experience with Head Start.

Well, my oldest daughter was here, and then they was informing the parents that they were going to be starting an infant-toddler program. And I seen how well my daughter was doing here with her vocabulary and stuff. Well, let's give it a try, and so they gave me the application and I filled them out, and they started them in when the program opened, and I've been satisfied.

When asked "Who did you talk to about choosing child care?", Susan said that, in addition to the specialist at Head Start, her mother gave her some advice.

Well, she said a little bit. I mean she told me, she said, "You do what you feel you have to do. What is best for your kids." And since we've been down here, she has told me, "You made the best choice."

Lisa said she relied on the advice of a friend in choosing the first child care program for her children:

Well, the first one that I put them, this other person that I knew had their child there, and they hadn't had no problem. And they said, "Oh well, you know it's right down the road from you, and it's great, and you know they're going to pick up whenever she does start school." And that they'd pick up my older boy. So, you know, it was so convenient.

When asked about who she relied on as a resource in selecting child care, Sarah said:

Of course you have to run to mommy with everything. She did not have to deal with child care issues too much. She didn't work until I was in

kindergarten. I am the baby of three girls. She just said, "You know your children. You know your gut." I also relied on my sister....She has worked in child care for 10 years. If she says the program is okay, then it's okay.

Kathy works in the same child care program her daughter now attended. She said:

Well, I used to work at the daycare that she's now enrolled in before I got pregnant, so whenever I had her, I came back to work here. And put her in the same daycare. I was familiar with everything and how everything is.

When asked if there were previous experiences or advice from people that she used in her search, Tamera said:

It was more my own search. Because when I was younger, I wasn't really in like a child care. Someone always kept me, but I went to Head Start--but I never went to, I can't recall going to child care.

Jessica responded in regard to whom she talked to about child care that she got information when enrolled in the job training program for making the transition from welfare to work. Jessica replied:

Okay, when I went to the Department of Human Services (DHS) and got on the program, I think the first program I got on was like the job training program where they'll actually, that's where I got my CNA training. They introduced me to the Community Action Committee

(CAC), and they gave me a big list of daycares and whether they were in homes or centers and will they provide transportation and all that. The lady at CAC talked to me and recommended some places and a couple of centers to see who had openings. And then I would go to the center and actually look for myself.

When asked if the information she got was useful in making the selection, Jessica said:

> She told me to definitely go around and see for myself, you know, how they do things and see if I was comfortable with the caregivers. When I first was looking for my oldest daughter, I was really young and didn't really know. I guess I was naive about how people are with your kids when you leave them.

Stephanie described her search for child care for her then 1-year-old son by saying, "It was hard. I went and looked around at daycares. I went to five or six and finally found the right one." In regard to whether she got advice from other people in the search process, she said:

> I had friends that in the past had kids that went there before. I would ask them, "Did you like this daycare?" and they was like, "No. My son was there and too many mishaps happened and whatever." Or they'd say, "Yeah, that's a good daycare, they're good with the kids, they do one-on-one things."

In addition, Stephanie stated that she also talked to her mom and sister about putting her children in child care: "My mom worked at Head Start for 13 years....I had gone to

Head Start. She went on to say, "My mom and sister said that they seen that my kids need to be with other kids so they'll learn how to share their toys and learn things instead of being home." Stephanie had now moved her sons to the child care center where she had begun working 3 weeks earlier.

Allison stated in regard to her search for child care, "When I first had my older kids, I lived with my mom so she helped me out a lot." She went on to say, "Then I moved. So I just had to find daycare." She relied on a friend's advice to find child care for her youngest child. Allison said, "Her little girl was at the child care where he goes now. She really liked it." Allison described her feelings in leaving her 6-week-old son in daycare by saying, "You are used to at 6 weeks, it'd been just me and him. And then taking him and leaving him was hard. Just worrying, you know, if he's okay."

The mothers used several resources in selecting early care including female family members (mostly mothers and sisters) and friends who were also mothers. Most of the mothers visited more than one center before making their child care choice. The mothers talked about the pressure they felt in finding child care due to their financial situation and the realities of the amount of the co-payment they would be required to make.

Another resource that they described in their child care search was the Community Action Committee (CAC), which was the agency providing their child care subsidy. The Head Start family specialist was mentioned as someone the mothers relied on in choosing the Early Head Start program for their children. The moms also talked about feeling limited in the search due to lacking funds needed to arrange child care.

Several moms talked about the difficulty in locating child care programs where they felt comfortable in leaving their children.

Concerns About Child Care and Previous Experiences

The mothers expressed several concerns about putting their children in child care. Among these concerns were those related to (a) safety, (b) separation, and (c) sick child care. For nearly all the mothers, the issue of safety was expressed. Several moms reported injuries to their children while in previous child care situations, and these experiences influenced their choices. Another concern was the fact that their children were not verbal enough to report their treatment at child care. Mothers talked about feelings of missing out on their children's development and sadness about separation from their children. Lisa and Kathy, whose children were 3-weeks and 6-weeks old, respectively, when they entered care were concerned about sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). A difficult issue for most of the mothers was sick child care and related problems in keeping their job if they stayed home to care for a sick child. Five of the mothers reported that their children had been previously injured while at other child care programs or that they had friends whose children were injured at child care. These previous experiences played a role in the child-care choices the mothers made. The mothers also talked about bad reports on child care that they had seen on the television show Dateline or in newspaper reports that caused them to worry about their children's safety.

The safety of their children was a primary concern for the mothers. Given that these single mothers lived in subsidized housing in low-income neighborhoods, their fears were understandable. Two mothers reported that people whom they trusted had sexually molested their older daughters. One child was molested by a janitor at her child care center. In the other incident the mother reported that a family friend had molested her daughter. Two mothers also reported that a neighbor (in one case) had hit her child and a friend (in the other case) had pushed her child down a flight of stairs. In the case, where a neighborhood woman hit the child while she was playing outside, this mother reported that she beat the woman and went to jail. In the other incident, where the 2-year-old child was pushed down a flight of stairs while being cared for by the mother's girlfriend at the public housing building where this family lived, the child received permanent head injuries that left her with a visual problem. This child's mother filed charges against her friend and the perpetrator is now in prison.

When asked about what was most important to her in deciding about child care, Joanna said, "Safety is the most important. His safety." She also was concerned about how he was treated and went on to say, "I don't want him treated bad. You know he's 2 years old. Don't sit my child in a corner....Don't hurt my child." She responded, when asked if she had this type of experience before, "Yeah, right before he came to Early Head Start. I caught the lady calling my baby stupid. I reported them....He didn't go back." In regard to separation from her, son she said, "The difficult thing is leaving him. But at least here at Early Head Start I know he's okay. They love him. But not as much as I do." In talking about her feelings now that her son was more verbal, Joanna

said, "I'll ask 'How was your day at school?' He'll laugh. But if he acts funny, then he really didn't have a good day. I'll say, 'What's happened?' "

> Amber described her feelings about separation from her 15-month-old daughter: She was little....And then wondering, well, are they going to pay her any attention. Is she going to sit in a seat all day and cry? Are they going to prop a bottle? 'Cause you see all these things on T.V. about kids that are not being taken care of.

In response to whether she had called the family child-care home to check on her daughter, she said:

> I called all day. These people were mad because they can't do anything. That's my child, and I have a right as a parent to do that. Then I sent them to Head Start, I felt a little more at ease. I don't really know why.

Another concern Amber talked about was her lack of a back-up plan for sick child care. She said, "Almost all places aren't really understanding. They really ain't. You just want to get in their face and be like, 'Do you have kids?' " Amber went on to say, "The policy is, if your child's running a temp, a fever, you have to come and get them." In regard to how she managed sick child care, Amber said, "My back-up plan is myself. So I mean, sometimes I have to leave my job for my child....I almost lost my job." She went on to say that, " My children don't have daddy and grandma, and all that all they have is momma."

Susan expressed concern about her son while he was at child care: "The fact that he's just so clumsy....I mean, he's a little behind on his gross motor skills. I'm afraid

he is going to hurt himself badly." Her concerns related to a previous experience when his older sister was injured at school:

> The first time it happened, she had a concussion and broke her nose and cheek bone. She hit the ground and slid on her face. She was bleeding from around her eyes and nose. The teacher didn't call me and sent her to daycare that afternoon.

She went on to say, "The teacher just sent me a note and said it didn't look that bad so she sent her on to daycare. I had to take her to the emergency room, and they put a patch on her face." In regard to her son, Susan said, "Here at Early Head Start if he bumps his head and they have to put ice on it, they call me." She also talked about visiting a potential child care program for her son and discrimination she experienced:

> The one daycare I looked at wouldn't even let a little Jewish girl come in. I said, "You could lose your license for that." They said, 'No this is an all-white daycare.' I said, "Well, my son didn't need to be here because he's got a black grandfather." They said, 'No, we can't have that.'

Lisa used a child care center close to home until her daughter was injured there. When asked how she got hurt, Lisa said, "She fell and hit her tongue and cut her tongue." Lisa went on to say:

> It was a nightmare. They called me at work and told me that she had fell but thought she had just mashed her mouth....The woman on the phone told me that she would wait until my daughter calmed down and then

> call me if I needed to come pick her up. I never did get her phone call. I thought okay everything is fine....I went to pick her up, and the woman said her tongue is really bad. I asked why nobody called me, and she said she didn't know, that she was just the relief from the morning person. I got very upset with that so I took her out of that daycare. I felt like I was abusing my child by staying at work and not coming and getting her when she was really hurt and she needed me.

Lisa then talked about another safety issue in her daughter's new child care center when a teacher pulled her daughter's arm with such force that it dislocated her elbow. She said:

> I thought, well, I'm not going to do the public thing anymore. I'm going to find a church to put my children in, and then I'll feel safe. So I put my daughter in a church daycare and so she got hurt there too....Then I go to pick her up, and she said "Mom, My arm's hurt....Well, the teacher pulled my arm." Then I asked them and they said nobody pulled her arm....When I took her there the next morning, my husband's cousin that works there said, 'I cannot believe that you brung her back. If I had another job to go to, I would not be here after what happened to her.'

Lisa then turned her attention to finding out how her daughter was injured. She said, "I'll tell you the truth. I thought my daughter was lying when she told me. I wouldn't dream of a woman coming over and grabbing my daughter and yanking her off the mat." Next Lisa talked to the director. She said, "I asked her about it, and she said, 'That never

happened.' I said, 'My daughter told me and now a grown up has come to me....So I know it's happened.' " Lisa said, "She assured me she would call the woman in for a talk. So when I called back, she said everything was fine, that they would give her a couple of days off without pay." Lisa was not satisfied with that and went on to say, "I didn't think that's good enough. I think she should have been fired....So I yanked my kids out of that daycare."

In talking about what she feels are her most important concerns about child care, Lisa said, "My kids being safe. Because I didn't have no family member. To me the safest person is like a family member." She went on to say:

> So when I didn't have that....It seemed like every time I thought my kids was safe, well, then they would knocked it down....I was just very frustrated and ready just to stay at home....If I can't work, well then at least my kids would be safe, and that's the reason why I worked is to buy them things.

Sarah described her concerns about choosing child care for her infant daughter by saying:

> I went to visit the center unannounced. The director at the center was very thorough. She knew what she was talking about...She even said, "Come by and visit whenever you'd like." I thought, okay, she doesn't have anything to hide.

In describing her visit to another center, Sarah said, "I just had a bad feeling about it. It was old, run down, had a stench, rooms everywhere. I'd hate to have to get out of there

in a fire." She went on to say, "Really, I was confused. It had high chairs everywhere. I have a real problem with high chairs for every kid at one time, then you have let's stick them all in high chairs. I didn't like it at all." Sarah said what influenced her final decision was "When I walked into the center I chose, they had a lock at their main door. I had to ring the doorbell....It was very clean....Everybody was friendly. I just had a good feeling about it."

> When asked about other concerns she had with child care, Sarah said: I think that my two children are being taken care of well. But inherently with two small kids in child care you always have to be --I keep a level of suspicion. It's always the person you didn't think would do it or the situation you didn't think would happen, and that just scares me. Maybe I watch too much Dateline.

Sarah also talked about the fact that her daughter cannot tell her what is happening at child care. She stated, "It's general worries. Especially with my daughter. Because she's a baby. She can't come home and tell you every little thing." When asked if she will be more comfortable when her daughter can communicate, Sarah said, "Yeah. I was really glad that I got to wait until she was 9 months....I feel for these moms that have to put these kids in daycare especially a 6-weeks-old baby."

Kathy's daughter entered child care at 6 weeks old. In talking about how she searched for child care, Kathy said, "I used to work at the daycare that she's now enrolled. I had her and came back to work there." When asked about the reasons she chose this center for her daughter, she said, "I was working here. It felt safe because I

could go in and check on her." In regard to things she would have done differently than the caregivers did, Kathy said, "They put her in the baby swing, and they didn't never put nothing on her head and her head would just wobble from side to side." When asked if she said something to them, Kathy responded, "Yeah...And they used to put her in the floor with the little older kids that were like crawling, and she was only 6 weeks old so that always made me nervous." Kathy then was asked if she checked in frequently: "Yeah, I was down there every 30 minutes looking in." In describing the experience of having her daughter at the same center where she worked, Kathy said, "It was still hard." Kathy was asked if she felt jealous of the caregivers and the time they got to spend with her daughter as an infant. She said, "Yeah, I felt like that because, when she started walking, I never seen her fall. And she took her first step down in her infant room, and I missed that." When asked about other concerns she had with her daughter's care, Kathy said, "We had some disagreements about what the teacher does with her. Like, whenever she goes to sleep, they put covers over their heads, and I don't like that. I don't think they should do that." In regard to placing the covers over her daughter's head she went on to say, "They did change that. They didn't put a blanket over her head. But they still did the other kids." In response to the question of what else is difficult for her, Kathy said:

> They used to just let her cry. She was wanting to be picked up and loved. She would just be standing there crying, or if another kid had took a toy away. We got into a little disagreement about that.

Tamera began working at her son's child care center 3 months after he started attending. She described her experience in choosing child care by saying, "At first it was scary. I was wondering whether they would give him the same treatment that I would give him." Tamera talked about her concerns:

> It was like kind of hard to just leave him with somebody I didn't know....Like I said no one else can give your child the same treatment as the mother does. That's what I worry about sometimes....He can't really tell me anything."

When asked if she will feel better when he can communicate better, she said, "Very definitely. I'll be glad." When asked about other concerns she had, Tamera said:

> Yesterday, he was restrained for biting. He was put into a high chair. He wouldn't sit down he was in time out. I didn't like that at all. I think we got it straightened out. I told her she should like bring him to me if that happened again. I don't want my child restrained.

Tamera talked about other difficulties, she said, "Just leaving him. He's kind of used to it now. He just goes on about his business but it's still hard on me."

Jessica described her concerns about child care as she talked about the previous program her children attended:

> At first it was okay. The last month I knew something was wrong. Somebody would have to pull them off of me for me to be able to go to work. I just kept asking them "Why they didn't want to stay here?" They told me, 'That at nap time if they don't want to take a nap that

she'll paddle them and that she cusses at them and screams.' So one day I came at an unexpected time....She was outside just screaming at them like they were her kids or something...I don't think that was right....I actually found the paddle.

When asked if her children got paddled, Jessica said, "I'm not sure. The child caregiver never would admit it." Jessica then described reporting the incident and not sending her children back, she stated, "I told the Community Action Committee (CAC), and they said, I could change them to another daycare." Another issue that Jessica faced was the need for sick child care. She described her experience by saying: "I've had a lot of jobs that simply didn't work out. My daughter has problems with her respiratory system. She has asthma. I've lost two jobs just from having to stay home with her." Jessica has recently started working at the child care center her daughter now attends. She talked about her concerns with child care by saying:

> It was my second week, and she got sick again and had an earache, and some kind of an infection in her eye. She was 8 months old when I brought her here. She's started getting viruses and stuff. That's the only problem I have is her getting sick from being around other kids.

Jessica described her concerns for her children's safety by saying:

> In general all I worry about is their safety. Just that they are being taken care of. I've had some things happen with me oldest daughter with somebody that I liked and trusted, and you know would never think that would happen but it did....It was a family member, and so that was kind

of rough. We are still working with that....I'm worried about them being safe. When they are safe, I am happy.

Stephanie has recently enrolled her children at the child care program where she recently began working. In talking about what she looked for in child care, she said, "If they had enough people for the amount of kids. To make sure they had enough time to pay attention to all the kids instead of just a few." When asked about what worries her about child care, Stephanie said, "When I watch Dateline shows and I see those people abusing kids. They have the cameras in the rooms and the baby won't go to sleep, they'll pinch it." She went on to say, "And that relieves me. I'm like, this ain't one of those kinds of places." In regard to sick child care, Stephanie said, "They're healthy kids. But if they have been sick my mom and sister will watch them."

Allison talked about her concerns with child care by saying, "Now I'm older I find myself really missing my baby. I think about them all the time and I wonder if they're okay. I'll call them and just say, 'What are they doing?' " When asked if she felt like she was missing out, Allison said, "I do." In talking about her other concerns she stated, "I worry about if he falls if anybody will notice. Whether they feed him and change his diapers....Just in general you hear reports about leaving babies on the van. I mean you hear horror stories on T.V." Allison described her recent concerns that she may need to find a new child care center because her program was to close. She said, "I was asking people that worked there if they knew anywhere good....Somewhere that's not going to not change his diapers or not feed him. I was like, 'They cannot close.' " Allison then expressed her relief by saying, "And they ended up saving the

daycare. And it went to somebody else, and so they kept a lot of the people that were there before so that really helped."

The mothers described several concerns about putting their children in child care that related to (a) safety, (b) separation, and (c) sick child care. Several of the mothers with older children had bad experiences with previous child-care arrangements. These experiences influenced their later child-care choices. Given that these mothers received a modest subsidy for care and were also required to make a co-payment, this reality limited their access to high quality care situations. Although most of the mothers were now satisfied with the child care they had chosen, they remained vigilant in making sure their children received appropriate care. Even the mothers who worked at the same centers their children attended talked about the need to check in with staff to assure their children's fair treatment and safety. The mothers also expressed regret over missing out on their children's daily experiences while they worked. Most of the moms were concerned by the fact their children are not verbal enough to tell them if they are being mistreated at the child care program. Several of the mothers experienced problems at work because they lacked a back-up plan for sick child care.

The Mothers' Satisfaction With Child Care

The mothers were satisfied with their current child-care arrangements for the most part. They described what aspects of the child care were important them. The mothers indicated several characteristics that were important to them: (a) teachers that cared about them and their children, (b) feeling like being part of a family (c) what their

children are learning, (d) whether their children are happy, and (e) how well the program's operation coincided with adult needs.

Joanna described her 2-year-old son by saying, "He is smart....So I want him to feel that way about himself." In regard to what was important to Joanna in choosing child care for her son, she talked about what she liked about the Early Head Start program where he is now enrolled. She said, "I liked the idea that he had breakfast and lunch here. I liked the idea they taught him values." She also said, "They taught him about pottying. They taught him about cleaning....They taught him feelings....He enjoys being here." Joanna also described her dissatisfaction with her previous child care arrangement for him while living in the homeless shelter. She said, " He would come home wet, he would come home with dry poop on him, he would come home hungry....I wouldn't recommend it at all."

Amber said this about her 19-month-old daughter, "She's funny, she's energetic, she's learned a lot since she's been at Early Head Start....She's learning how to talk. Her father is Arabic." She went on to say, "He taught her Arabic, so I thought she was going to grow up to not understand English." Amber then described her feelings about her daughter's language development by comparing the family child-care home her daughter went to before with her present child-care arrangement at Early Head Start. She said, "At the private daycare, she didn't really know her words. Now she says a lot of words. She can just talk and talk and talk." In talking about what her daughter is learning Amber said, "She just likes to play with other little kids. She hasn't really had the opportunity because at the other place there wasn't smaller kids her age." To sum up

how Amber feels about her daughter's experience in Early Head Start, she said, "I think she is enjoying it....The teachers read books and tell the kids about animals and stuff. She comes home and says the animals at regular daycare she didn't know them." Amber said, "I see a lot of difference between the family day care home she went to and Head Start. Amber also has a four-year-old son enrolled at Head Start. In talking about their life as a family she said, "We keep to ourselves. Who they play with at child care and what they do here that's it. When we go home we don't go outside, and we don't talk to the neighbors, and it's just us."

Susan described her 3-year-old son by saying, "He is becoming more independent. He loves to do stuff for himself." In talking about the Early Head Start staff and their help in potty training him, she said, "They have helped me potty train him so he is almost completely potty trained." Susan also talked about his personality and said, "He is a fun loving little boy. He'll brighten up your day real quick. He was that way from birth." Susan described her son's hearing loss by saying, "He's suffered through four set of tubes. They said, 'If they have to continue to put tubes in his ears he'll be deaf by the time he's 18. He's already 20% deaf.' " Susan's 4-year-old daughter also attended Head Start. In talking about the staff, she said, "They're wonderful. Even though there's days my kids don't want to get ready to go once they start getting ready they want to go. So I know they're doing good things with them." When asked what was important to her in choosing a child care program, Susan said, "I help them at home but when they are away at daycare I wanted them to learn their ABC's, and 123's, and some reading. Here they do that, and at a lot of daycares they

don't." She went on to say in regard to her daughter, "This is the only place she has been at that did this. The other places were just go play." In talking about her oldest daughter who had also attended Head Start, she said, "She was here for three years. Her kindergarten teacher tells me, 'You have got the smartest little girl.' " In making the comparison between the family day care home her children had attended and Head Start, she said, "When my middle daughter was there she was gloomy because they weren't teaching her anything....She never wants to leave Head Start when I go to pick her up." To further describe her feeling of satisfaction with Early Head Start, Susan said, "My son's learned his ABC's, and he'll walk around the house saying '1-2-3-4-5', and just start counting things." In describing her feelings about the teachers, Susan said, "They're friendly. They're nice. They have great attitudes. The other staff, the specialist, the secretary, the cook, the just make you feel welcome and it makes you feel like you're part of a big family."

When asked about her 19-month-old son who attends Early Head Start, Lisa described him by saying, "He loves to be loved on. But he's getting a violent temper. I don't know where he's getting that at, but he likes to hit and throw things now." Lisa also has a 6-year-old daughter who had attended Head Start. In talking about that experience she said, "That child learned more than I think that she could have ever learned by me staying at home. I mean she loved it." In reference to her daughter she said, "Her teacher come to me and she said, 'I cannot believe how much this kid knows.' She just flew through kindergarten like it was no problem." When Lisa became pregnant with her son, she was put on the waiting list for Early Head Start. Since Lisa had already

removed her daughter from a church-based center where she was mistreated before enrolling her in Head Start, she was reluctant to trust someone with her 3-week-old son. She was also concerned about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Lisa said, "SIDS runs in my family." Lisa went on to say, "If Early Head Start hadn't called me when he was born I would have quit my job. Because I was so scared. I knew my daughter had no problems when she was at Head Start." Lisa also said, "I told them what happened with my daughter so they knew I was scared to death to leave my baby the first day but it went great." Lisa went on to say in regard to her experience with Head Start for her son, "I was just so excited that both my children could come. My son is way beyond where he should be when they do the testing. So I love this place." When asked about the best things about her child-care arrangement Lisa said, "Just how well they take care of him and he's learning so much....They are even teaching him sign language....This is like his other home. He just hops through the door." Lisa's home burned last fall and she said, "Head Start has even helped me go through this program where the government is going to help me get a house. I've went through the classes and stuff." She then talked about Head Start as more than just child care, "When our house burned down they got us clothes and food and everything. So that's more than just a daycare." Lisa also talked about the staff as being like family, she said, "My mom passed away about two years ago. So I really don't have nobody. My brothers and sisters have moved away. So this is great how well they treat people here."

Sarah described her 2-year-old daughter by saying: "She is very strong willed. I have never encountered a more headstrong child." Sarah also talked about a problem

at Early Head Start,"My daughter wants her teacher's attention 100% of the time. She doesn't want the other children to have Ms. Jodie's attention." The staff are working on ways to help the toddler deal with sharing her teacher's attention. Sarah then said, "My daughter is very verbal. She's saying big sentences." Sarah expressed her relief about her daughter's language development and said, "She had a lot of ear infections for the first year. She had tubes put in and that made a world of difference. Before this we did a hearing test, it showed significant hearing loss." Sarah's 5-year-old son has attended Head Start for the past 2 years. In talking about choosing child care and moving her daughter to Early Head Start. Sarah said, "At the other child care center my daughter moved from the 1-year-olds' room to a new class, and it was more that I didn't care for the teacher....The teacher got frazzled easy. She seemed like the type to get overwhelmed." In talking about why she moved her daughter to Early Head Start she said, "My daughter starting having little incidences like she fell." Sarah then described her daughter's experience with Early Head Start by saying:

> She adjusted really well and part of that was her teacher Ms. Jodie...I really think the world of Head Start. I just think it's a wonderful program....She has learned some social skills. They teach table manners. They take them out in public....They teach them more than just how to play.

Sarah also indicated some other characteristics of Head Start she found satisfying, she said, "They serve them breakfast....I get a sheet every day that tells me how many times her diapers have been changed." Sarah is now searching for child care because she has

moved to a better neighborhood and needs an affordable center that will accept her subsidy. Sarah talks about finding a new child care center nearer her home and job that both her children can attend. She said, "I will be paying a significant amount more for child care....Some of that will equal out in what I pay in gas and the rest will equal out in convenience." In describing her feelings about her present arrangement with Early Head Start, Sarah said, "I just don't have anything bad to say about where they are at now."

Kathy's 16-month-old daughter is small for her age and this concerned her even though she worked at the same center in which her daughter is enrolled. Kathy said, "She's little and some of the kids are now getting ready to be two. They're getting aggressive. I'm scared she will get hurt or bit." In talking about the benefits of child care Kathy responded: "I think that being in daycare, if you have a good daycare you can trust is good for kids." Kathy went on to say that:

> I think her coming to daycare it's a good thing. I see her copying stuff that other kids do. There's a little boy that bounces up and down, and I seen my daughter at home bouncing up and down at home. I think it's cute that they copy each other.

In regard to Kathy's relationship with her daughter's teacher, she said, "We're pretty good friends..... When I go to pick her up they tell my things like how she was doing and what she did." In summing up her thoughts about child care, Kathy said, "My daughter wouldn't be in daycare if I wasn't working right here with her."

Tamera described her 2-year-old son as active. She was satisfied with his child care-arrangement because she now worked at the same center he attended. Tamera said, "I want him to be around other kids so he will know the outside world." Tamera also expressed her desire that her son get individual attention at child care. In talking about her son's personality and his adjustment to child care, she said, "He's happy and wanting to play all the time." Tamera is now dealing with her son's biting. She said, "It's hard. I don't want to spank him every time he do it because he don't know what he's really doing, you know." Tamera's son's biting has led to some disagreements between herself and his teacher who had restrained him in a high chair when he wouldn't sit for time out. When asked how often he bites, she responded, "He bites someone almost every day." In summing up her recent experiences with child care, Tamera said, "I know his teachers, but I am still wondering, if he's being treated good and fairly."

Jessica described her 19-month-old-daughter by saying, "She is really outgoing for her age. That's my baby. I know she's gong to be the last one I have." Jessica went on to say, "I'm really picky with her....She likes everybody." Jessica's older children already attended the center's after-school-care program when she enrolled her youngest daughter at the center. Recently, Jessica had begun to work at the center as a caregiver. She said, "Before I even brought her in I came in and met the infant teachers. I brought her in to see if she was comfortable with them." Jessica went on to say: "I found out what they do all day. Everybody here is real friendly to me, to her, it's like a big family. I have no questions about bringing her here." In talking about her older

children, she said, "Sometimes they cry when I come in and get them. 'I don't want to go home yet.' They done great here." In comparing the center she chose to other child care programs she visited, she said, "I talked to a couple of people that had daycares in their homes....They've got a lot more here. Some places wouldn't even have a plan for the day. It was the fact that they were just babysitting your kids." When asked about the best things about child care, Jessica replied, "Her being able to be around other people and kids. She's developing. She says her little ABC's and stuff like that and it blows my mind." Jessica continued to talk about her satisfaction with her daughter's child-care arrangement. She said, "They send a paper home and you can see what they ate and what they did that day....They'll say they sung this song with them today....I'll ask her questions to see if she caught on to it." In talking about her daughter's behavior since she has been enrolled at the center, Jessica said:

> Before she came here when it was time to eat, it was just crazy. It was I want to be with momma and daddy instead of being up in the high chair. And sleeping with me. Now she's sleeping by herself where before she wouldn't even think of it."

Stephanie's 2-year-old son had begun to attend the center 3 weeks earlier, and she had begun to work at the center two weeks before that. She enrolled him and his 4-year-old brother there. She described her son by saying, "He's a handful. He tries to be like his brother and he helps around the house. He's not potty trained yet but he sleeps in his own bed at night by himself. He is mischievous." In comparing this center to her

previous child-care arrangements, Stephanie said, "I really like it better here than any of the other ones that they've went to." Specifically, she said:

> Here they're more lenient about things like the other daycares were strict. You had to bring them to daycare at a certain time and pick them up at a certain time. At the other centers if you brought them at 8 a.m. then you had to pick them up at 4:00 p.m. When I worked late I had to have someone else pick up my kids from daycare.

Stephanie also expressed her satisfaction about working at the same center her sons attended: "They come in when I come into work, and then they leave when I go home so things are very easy." Stephanie then expressed her dismay about her sons being asked to leave the Christian daycare where they were previously enrolled. She said, "My 4-year-old son got into a fight with some other children on the playground. So they asked me to take both my sons out. I didn't think that was fair. The other children were fighting too."

In describing her 16-month-old son, Allison said, "He is really sweet. But, he has his moment where he is a handful, to say the least." She also said, "He's spoiled rotten because I have bigger kids and so they are mommy and daddy number two, and he cries and they run." In talking about the staff at the center her son attends, she said, "They're young and some don't have kids but it's like that's what they were put here to be, you know--in child care." Allison continued by saying, "They're really good with the kids and my baby he's attached to all of them so he likes it here." She went on to express her satisfaction with the teachers. She said, "They're good with my son. I

don't worry about him as much as I would if he were somewhere else. Another important characteristic of the center she chose for her son was that it was not just daycare. Allison said: "It's a learning center. They have curriculums, and they really work with the children. They try to teach the children things." She went on to say, "I like everybody there. The children get real meals and the teachers they care. It's not just a job to them." Allison also liked the center's flexibility in accepting her co-payments late if she has an emergency. She said: "I try to let them know what's going on with me. If I'm open and honest with them then they work with me."

The qualities of child care that contributed to the mothers' satisfaction related to several factors: (a) feeling that staff cared about them and their children, (b) being treated like they are part of a family, (c) what their children are learning, (d) whether their children are happy, and (e) how well the program's operation coincided with the mothers' needs. Six of the mothers had used the same child care program for their children since they had first enrolled them in care. Four of the mothers had chosen at least two care settings for their children including the present arrangement. The mothers' satisfaction with child care depended on whether they felt their children were well cared for and if their children were learning new things. The mothers reported being satisfied when their children appeared happy and eager to attend child care. In addition, the mothers desired a supportive atmosphere, and they liked being treated like they were family by staff. They also expressed appreciation for teachers that understood their unique situations and administrators that offered flexibility in center policies. Three of the mothers discussed satisfaction with center policies that

considered their work schedules and also allowed them to make late payments in emergency situations.

Summary

The overarching theme derived from the interviews was the experience of being a low-income working single mother arranging child care with limited social and financial supports. Within the context of being a single mother, these women described the process of selecting infant and toddler child care. The women talked about the urgency and anxiety they experienced because they felt they really had no choice, but to put their children in child care. The demands on them related to parenting alone appeared to be offset by the gratifications they described in being a mother. These mothers talked about loving their children very much and they worked very hard to locate suitable child care for them. This image runs contrary what some have chosen to believe about low-income mothers who had received welfare. The data did not support the stereotyped image of women who are dependent on welfare as being lazy and uncaring about their children. In contrast, these mothers in spite of their life circumstances worked hard to make a better life for their children. At the same time, they did not express much hostility towards the absent fathers of their children. This was surprising since the majority of these fathers provided little or no emotional or financial support for their children. More so, these mothers expressed an interest in having a father figure for their children than wanting money from these men. Perhaps this low level of father involvement was viewed through the context of their own

families or their immediate environments and seen as normal or what they could expect from men.

The 10 mothers who participated in the study had made choices for early care that satisfied them. All but 2 of the mothers had older children that had previously attended child care. The mothers relied on these experiences to make child-care choices. Even the 4 mothers who worked in the same child care program their children attended reported concerns about their children's safety and treatment at child care. The mothers expressed their feelings of pressure to find child care related to the necessity that they had to work. Most said they felt they really had no other choice but to put their children in child care.

Constraints and the Choices Available to the Mothers

The constraints described by the mothers related to the child care program's location, hours of operation, and cost. Four of the mothers reported problems with transportation. Eight mothers needed to make child-care arrangements for multiple children. Two of the mothers worked at least 15 miles from the child care program. Four of the mothers reported that they had problems coordinating their work schedule with the hours that the child care programs were open. All the mothers received a child care subsidy and 8 of them were required to make a co-payment based on their income to make up the difference between the voucher and the cost of child care. This fact was reported as a financial hardship for the moms. In addition, the mothers also had problems locating child care that they were comfortable with and that accepted the child care subsidy.

Resources and the Decision-Making Process

Since all the mothers were involved with the transition from welfare to work they received some child care resource and referral information from the local Community Action Committee (CAC), the agency that provided the child care subsidy (voucher). This information consisted of a list of child care programs that accepted the voucher along with a checklist describing what to look for in child care. The agency staff had suggested that they visit the centers themselves before making a decision for child care. The 5 mothers who enrolled their children in Early Head Start had older children already enrolled in the preschool and were given priority for infant and toddler care when the program opened in the fall of 1999. The Head Start program specialist was the initial contact for these 5 mothers. These moms visited the center and observed the classroom before they made a final choice. The other 5 mothers who enrolled their children in a child care center which primarily served Families' First children were either self-referred or took the advice of a friend. During the search process the mothers got information primarily from female family members (mothers and sisters) and friends who were mothers. Since all but 2 of the moms had older children, previous experiences with child care played a significant role in the types of care they selected.

Concerns About Child Care and Previous Experiences

The issue of safety was the most significant concern the mothers expressed. Given that that 8 of these mothers lived in subsidized housing in low-income neighborhoods they were confronted with safety concerns on a daily basis. Sarah and Allison had moved to other areas in hopes of providing a more supportive environment

for their children. These moms also described financial hardships due to their housing choices. Susan and Jessica reported that their children were sexually molested. The incidence with Susan's daughter occurred at a child care center. A family friend had sexually molested Jessica's daughter. All the mothers voiced concerns about the safety and well-being of their children while they were at child care. They wanted child care staff to contact them when their child was hurt. Several mothers indicated that their anxieties related to previous mishaps and injuries to their children while at child care. The children ranged in age from 16 months to 3 years old. These mothers were concerned because the children could not effectively communicate any mistreatment at child care to them. Bad stories about child care reported to the mothers by family, friends, or on television were another source of anxiety. The mothers also voiced their sadness in being separated from their children as well as experiencing feelings of missing out on their children's development. These mothers attested to the fact that parenting alone is no easy job and they often lacked support for a back-up plan for sick child care.

The Mothers' Satisfaction with Child Care

The single mothers were mostly satisfied with their present child-care arrangements. Sarah was looking for child care closer to her new home and job. Allison mentioned that, due to housing costs, she might need to move and a find center closer to her work. The mothers indicated several characteristics of child care that were important to them. These qualities were (a) teachers that cared about them and their children, (b) feeling like being part of a family, (c) what the children are learning, (d)

whether their children are happy, and (e) how well the program's operation coincided with their needs.

The single mothers talked about their satisfaction with the child-care arrangements they made and the importance of feeling that the center's staff cared about them and their children. For these mothers the child care programs' staff were among the first adults they said hello to each morning and among the last they saw in the evening. Feeling accepted and cared about were experiences that these mothers indicated as very satisfying to them. One mother liked the fact that the some of the caregivers in her son's program had also been on welfare and she felt they had walked in her shoes and understood her situation. Related to feeling cared about was the feeling of being part of a family. Several moms said that the teachers and other staff were like family to them. The mothers said that they felt very comfortable with the caregivers and more at ease in leaving their children in their care. All the mothers talked about what their children were learning and the pleasure they got from discovering how much their children learned at child care. The bottom line for these moms was: "Are my children happy and are they eager to go to child care?" The mothers described feeling satisfied with the child care arrangement they made when their children were well cared for and eager to attend.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 means that low-income single mothers are now required to work or lose their welfare benefits. In meeting the new work requirements, hundreds of thousands of children now require child care (Norman-Major, 2000). Although these mothers qualified for child care subsidies based on their income, there is still a gap between the subsidy rate and the market cost for child care. For many low-income working single mothers this gap means they have fewer options in selecting quality child-care providers. The child care subsidy that the mothers in the study were eligible for paid up to $87 per week for children younger than 2 years old, and $77 per week for a child over 2 years old. One mother paid $33 a week for child care for two children ages 2 and 5. As this mother said "I make too much to get a whole lot of assistance, but I don't make enough not to need it." Given the low-wage work that most of these mothers were able to get and the lack of child support from the children's fathers these families will continue to need assistance to pay for child care.

Conclusions

According to Kisker and Ross (1997), problems with child care affordability, availability, and quality act as barriers to low-income working single mothers' participation in job training and the labor force. Still less is known about how these

women make choices about child care for infants and toddlers. The present study examined the experiences of low-income working single mothers and how they make decisions about child care for infants and toddlers. Based on the women's personal accounts of making child-care choices several conclusions are drawn from the data.

Parenting Resources

The single-mothers in the study had varying degrees of social support. Some had assistance from family members for after-working hours and weekend child care while they worked. Several reported paying an additional person to pick their children up from child care when they worked later in the evenings. None of the mothers talked about the children's fathers as being active in either helping them search for or select child care. Two mothers lived with the fathers of their children; one mother reported help financially and the other said her son's father did help care for him at home. In one instance, a paternal grandmother cared for a child not attending formal child care due to asthma.

Only one divorced mother reported receiving regular child support and visitation from the children's fathers. More than child support payments from the fathers, although they recognized the need for financial support, the women talked about wanting the fathers to be there for their children and to take them on the weekend. The majority of the mothers reported that they had little free time for themselves outside of work.

Despite the hardships the mothers experienced in being a single parent they also expressed the gratifications of being a mother. It also was commendable the amount of

time and energy that these mothers reported they invested in monitoring their children's child-care arrangements. Although the mothers in the present study lacked many traditional parenting resources (e.g., emotional and financial support from spouses) as single parents they appeared to be very devoted to their children's well-being.

Strategies and Resources Used in Selecting Child Care

In gathering information about child care the mothers consulted informal networks (family and friends) in most cases. The mothers did receive some formal information from the Community Action Committee (CAC) which was the agency coordinating the child care subsidies for their children. However, this information consisted of a list of child care programs accepting vouchers and a checklist for them to review when they visited the programs. The mothers visited one to five programs before making a final decision about child care. Although they thought they had then chosen good quality child care, four mothers later removed their children from initial child care sites due to concerns about caregiving at the program.

The Costs in Going to Work and Paying for Child Care

The mothers discussed their feelings about the expenses they incurred in working. Since several did not own a car when they began working or attending classes, they depended on friends and family for help with transportation. One mother used public transportation until she could buy a car. The mothers reported that buying a car and paying for car insurance so they could work was a real financial hardship to them.

Although these single mothers all received child care subsidies, the 8 mothers who worked full time were required to make a co-payment to the child care provider based on their incomes. Since 5 of the working mothers had three children this meant a co-payment for each of the children including after-school care. The working mothers' co-payments for infant and toddler child care ranged from $8 to $20 per week for each child. The cost of the co-payment for preschool care was between $8 to $19 per week for each child. Those paying for after-school care reported co-payments of $8 to $14 per week for each child. The CAC child care subsidy paid up to $87 per week for a child younger than 2 years old and $77 per week for a child over 2 years old. A gap exited between the amount of the child care subsidy and the market cost of child care. The mothers in the study that worked full time reported the cost of the co-payment as a financial hardship to them and an obstacle to finding child care programs in more affluent parts of the city. In this case, many centers either did not accept the subsidy or charged higher fees making the co-payment unaffordable to these families.

Problems with Child Care Program's Location, Hours of Operation, and Transportation

The mothers considered their own needs such as the child care programs' location and hours of operation and how these factors coincided with their work schedules. Eight of the mothers were making child-care arrangements for multiple children so they also considered options for preschool and after-school care. Not only was the proximity of the child care program important in the choices they made, but also whether they had transportation to get there. One mother drove 30 miles round trip

from home to work and another transported her children 30 miles round trip to child care. Transportation for their children to before- and after-school child care was another consideration. The lack of quality child care settings that were available nearby and that were affordable were of concern to these mothers.

Concerns about Safety, Separation, and Sick Child Care

The single-mothers talked about the urgency to work and the anxiety they felt in being separated from their children. The mothers reported that there were limited child care programs to choose among. For the mothers with older children, the process had been trial and error. Many of the mothers relied on appraisals from their informal network to make a choice. They chose what they thought were good child care programs and when problems arose they moved their children to another program. Since infants and toddlers have limited communication skills, the mothers were concerned that their children could not report mistreatment to them. In addition, 8 of these mothers lived in public housing in low-income neighborhoods. All of the mothers expressed concerns about physical safety for their children. The mothers talked about their concerns related to caregivers that might (a) ignore their children's needs, (b) fail to call them if their children were sick or injured, or (c) mistreat their children. The mothers reported injuries to their children while at previous child care programs and sexual molestation in one case. They talked about finding child care as a scary and stressful experience. The fact that they had to work and make arrangements for multiple children were additional stressors in the search and selection process.

Among the mothers, half reported that that they had problems in arranging child care when their children were sick or if the child care program was closed. Employers viewed their absences to stay home with sick children unfavorably and one mother lost her job for this reason. The lack of a back-up plan and caregiving support for sick child care were stressful to them.

Criteria the Mothers Used to Evaluate Their Satisfaction with Child Care

The mothers indicated that they were satisfied with their present child-care arrangements. Four mothers had moved their toddlers from another child care setting to the present arrangement prior to the interview. Eight of the mothers who had older children relied upon previous experiences in choosing child care. One mother experienced difficulty finding a new program closer to her job and was still searching at the time of the interview. The major problem she faced was that the child care programs in the more affluent part of the city where she now lived in subsidized housing did not accept the child care subsidy or charged high fees making her co-payment unaffordable.

Characteristics of child care that were important to these single mothers and contributed to their satisfaction were: (a) teachers that cared about them and their children, (b) feeling like being part of a family, (c) what their children were learning, (d) whether their children were happy, and (e) how well the child care arrangement coincided with the adult's needs. Several mothers said they wanted staff to call them if their children were injured. These mothers all talked about the importance of being treated like an ally or family member by child care staff. The child care program's

curriculum and the staff's interaction with their children were important to these moms. They also wanted their children to be prepared when they entered kindergarten. The mothers talked about their children's eagerness to attend child care as an indicator to them that the staff was providing good care for their children. Flexibility in regard to center policies and recognition of the individual needs of low-income working single mothers was also important. How well the center was able to accommodate the mother's work schedule and transportation needs contributed to their satisfaction as well.

Significance of Findings in Relationship to Previous Research

According to Kisker and Ross (1997), national surveys indicated that the child-care arrangements chosen for children under age 5 by low-income mothers (those earning below $15,000 per year) are similar to those chosen by mothers with higher incomes. Since single mothers cannot rely usually on another parent to care for children, they rely heavily on centers and family child-care homes for child care (Brayfield, Deich, & Hofferth, 1993). The choices that parents make about child care are limited to the options they know about (Kisker & Ross, 1997). The majority of families rely on informal sources (family, friends, or neighbors) to search for and select child care and only half consider more than one option when choosing their main arrangement (Hofferth, Brayfield, Deich, & Holcomb, 1991). The mothers in the present study reported that they used a variety of child-care arrangements (church-based centers, family child-care homes, and relative care) before selecting their present

arrangement. Only the two first-time moms reported using only center-based care. The other mothers had older children and had experience with a variety of child care programs which may account for their looking at more than one option when selecting care. The mothers primarily relied on informal networks (family, friends, and neighbors) to gather information. Moreover, low-income working single mothers are not only required to work but also feel the financial pressure to go to work as soon as possible. Studies have indicated that it takes from 2 to 7 weeks to find acceptable child care (Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, & Shinn, 1994; Hofferth et al., 1991; Kisker, Maynard, Gordon, & Strain, 1989). Thus, for low-income working single mothers lack of time and information are obstacles to them in finding child care that is affordable, conveniently located, and available during the hours needed. The mothers in the present study talked about the urgency they felt in finding child care so they could work. They also spoke about the obstacles they encountered related to child care cost, location, and hours of operations.

The availability of alternate caregivers are especially important for low-income single mothers who must work. Mothers who are married have more access to father care and 8 of the mothers in the present study were never married. The decisions that the mothers in the study made about child care for infants and toddlers were reflective of the fact that most of them did not have the availability of alternate caregivers on a regular basis.

The mothers in the present study had varying degrees of social support in the form of immediate family and extended family. Since 80% of these mothers were

never-married they also lacked the support of the father and his extended family in over half the cases. However, only two mothers reported extremely limited support from their own families. Most of these women's mothers also worked and this limited their availability to help with child care. The majority of the mothers relied on their own families to care for children if they worked after hours or on the weekend. Some paid someone else to pick their children up from child care if they worked late. None of the mothers indicated that fathers played a role in the child care search or selection process. Earlier research indicated that fathers were not as active in visiting child care programs during the search process (Fuqua & Schieck, 1989; Atkinson, 1994). However, married mothers reported that the final child care choice was a joint decision with their spouse.

Rank (1994) indicated in his intensive study of 50 welfare families that many of those he interviewed reported having children at an early age and/or marrying young. In his sample, 40% of the female-headed families had never been married. In the present study sample, 80% of the mothers had never been married. The average age at the time of the birth of their first child was 19.2 years. Only one mother in the study received court ordered child support. In addition, the mothers had children by multiple fathers perhaps limiting the chance that they would receive parenting support or child support.

Several of the never-married mothers reported taking legal action to get child support. One divorced mother with a child support order in place was not receiving child support payments. Tennessee is below the national average of 39.2% for actual collection of child support with an order in place at 25.9% (Institute for Women's

Policy Research (IWPR), 2000). An earlier report indicated that poverty rates could increase by as much as 30% for nonwelfare, low-income families without their child support income. The obligations of divorced fathers is public record, while paternity must be explicitly established in the case of nonmarital births (Brien & Willis, 1997). According to Danziger and Nichols-Casebolt, (1990) and Wattenberg (1987), paternity is not established for most nonmarital births and this prevents courts from making child support awards. Several never-married mothers in the present study had not legally established paternity for their children and this hindered them in collecting child support. The receipt of child support could be a huge benefit to these mothers who were living on the edge financially.

According to the U.S. Child Care Bureau (2000), parents may (a) feel isolated in looking for child care, (b) not know what they are looking for at the outset, and (c) not be able to afford quality care. The mothers in the present study indicated that they primarily relied on informal sources (family and friends) to make child-care choices. This finding is in accordance with previous findings related to how most parents gather child care information including low-income families (Atkinson, 1994; Hofferth et al., 1991; Kisker & Ross, 1997). Although a few mothers in the present study reported using checklists provided by CAC, more said they relied on their gut feelings upon visiting the child care programs. Some felt they had made good child-care choices, but when their children were injured they began the search process again.

Two important considerations for low-income single mothers in transitioning from welfare to work are the costs of transportation and arranging and paying for child

care. Eligibility for welfare and its related subsidies are figured according to gross income by the Department of Human Services. This policy was mentioned as a financial hardship by the mothers

One mother in the study previously used public transportation but moved to take a better job. She also purchased a car and automobile insurance for the first time to go work. This mother indicated that the costs for transportation were not taken into account in figuring housing and child care subsidies for which she was eligible. Several other mothers mentioned that the availability and costs of transportation had been a problem for them as well. According to Burtless (1997), three-quarters of welfare recipients live in metropolitan areas where transportation is less of an obstacle to them. "Job seekers can use public transportation, and mothers who find jobs can often afford to buy an inexpensive automobile if public transportation turns out to be inconvenient" (p. 42). His statement is in direct contrast to what mothers in the present study said about transportation problems. They reported that owning a car that was reliable and mechanically safe was a financial hardship. In fact one mother said that when the master cylinder went out on her car she hit a brick wall head on. She was slightly injured but now drives a car borrowed from a family friend that has a cracked frame. Even when mothers have access to public transportation cost is still a factor for them. The mothers in the study earned from $7 to $9 per hour and supported one to three children. Their earnings are well below living wage of $11.37 per hour in Knoxville, for one adult supporting one child (Knapp, 1998). The majority of mothers in the present study did not have access to family members who could help them financially.

Most of these moms came from families that were just getting by and this finding is in accordance with the findings of Rank (1994) in his interviews with welfare families.

The ability to coordinate child care in proximity to work or classes was an important issue to these mothers. Eight of the mothers arranged child care for multiple children and this became a juggling act for them. According to Pungello and Kurtz-Costes (2000), environmental constraints including the mother's need to work and work schedule flexibility influences child care selection. For the low-income working single mothers in the present study an additional concern for older children was whether transportation was provided for before- and after-school care. Four of the mothers who worked as caregivers in the same child care programs their children attended talked about the benefit of not worrying about bringing their children to child care and rushing off to work somewhere else. They also mentioned the convenience that the children left with them when they went home from work. Some mothers talked about arranging for someone else to pick their children up from child care when they worked late. These centers did not provide after-hours or weekend child care. Higher income families have more financial resources and access to support services to make child care less inconvenient (e.g., late fees, private child transportation services, temporary nanny services) (Gable & Cole, 2000).

According to Hofferth (1999), working poor families spend up to one-third of their household incomes on child care, as compared to 6% for middle income groups. Cost is the most frequently cited constraint on child care selection by low-income families (Holloway, Fuller, Rambaud, & Eggers-Pierola, 1997; Kisker & Ross, 1997;

Phillips, 1995). In regard to the amount of nonmaternal care infants and toddlers receive, only 3% of the variance has been accounted for by variables outside of income (NICHD, 1997).

A gap exists between the market cost for child care and the child care subsidy's level of reimbursement. Although the mothers made a co-payment based on income, the co-payment was mentioned as a hardship to the working mothers in the study. Finding quality child care that was affordable was a constraint that the mothers described. Although many low-income mothers do receive child care subsidies, the reality is that there is a lack of available good quality programs for infants and toddlers. In fact, findings from the national Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team (CQCO, 1995) indicated that the quality ratings of most infant and toddler centers were poor to mediocre.

Problems with child care quality impacts mothers' decisions not to work or to change jobs or the number of hours worked (Kisker & Ross, 1997). These authors also indicated that most parents do find child care but worry about the quality of care they find. Babies cannot complain about mistreatment and their mothers are especially fearful (Porter, 1991).

The mothers in the present study echoed these concerns about the safety of their children while at child care and several mothers had previous bad experiences with child care and the safety of the neighborhoods in which they lived. A primary concern for all the mothers was whether their children would be well-cared for in child care. According to Mensing, French, Fuller, and Kagan (2000), in a qualitative study of

mothers transitioning from welfare to work and finding child care, mothers were initially concerned with having confidence their children will be safe from harm, and that their basic needs were met. The experiences of mothers in the present study were very similar in nature to those reported in earlier research.

According to Parcel and Menaghan (1997), mothers who work long hours for low pay have less time to spend nurturing and interacting with their children. The mothers in the study indicated that they felt they were missing out on their children's development because they had to work. Often times they said they only had about 3 hours a day to actually interact with their children during the week. One mother talked about missing her daughter's first steps. Most mothers described separation from their children while they worked as accompanied by feelings of sadness and worry even though they trusted their child's caregivers. Maternal guilt and concern related to child care seems to be an equal opportunity experience. However, the mothers in the present study saw few alternatives to their present situation.

Given that most of these mothers participated in entry-level employment positions they lacked access to sick child care or time off to stay home with sick children. Several of these mothers lacked a back-up plan for when children were sick and did not have alternate arrangements if the center was closed. These mothers also reported health issues with their children that required the mothers to miss work. According to Gilbert, Berrick, and Meyers (1992), more than one-third of California's JOB participants experienced problems with sick child care during their first three months in the program. Another one-fourth had problems because the provider was no

longer available to provide care or because the center closed. These problems were a significant part of the experiences of the mothers in the present study.

Most parents indicate that they are typically satisfied with their current child-care arrangements (CQCO, 1995; Hofferth et al., 1991; Kisker & Maynard, 1991) and some believe that these low levels of dissatisfaction may be due to the parents' preferences that are evident in the arrangements they have made (Hofferth & Phillips, 1987). However, low-income parents tend to be less satisfied with their child-care arrangements due to their more limited options (Kisker & Ross, 1997).

The mothers in the present study indicated that they were satisfied with their present child-care arrangements. Four mothers had moved their infant or toddler from at least one other center or family child-care home during the past year to their present arrangement. It appeared that the mothers' satisfaction with child care related to the quality of care their children received. Quality of care in child care is defined as including quality of structure and process (Howes, 2000). Structural quality includes aspects of child care that can be regulated such as adult-child ratios, group sizes, and caregiver characteristics and training. Process quality relates to children's experiences in care, especially whether social interactions with the teacher are positive or negative. The mothers in the present study talked about the importance of the program they chose as being a learning center instead of just playtime or babysitting for their children. They emphasized a desire for their children to learn while they were at child care and later be prepared for kindergarten. Mothers who had older children based their child-care choices on previous experiences and how well their older children were now doing

in school. According to Holloway, Fuller, Rambaud and Eggers-Pierola (1997), low-income mothers' are committed to arranging academically oriented experiences for their children and view this as a mechanism for social mobility. These parental ideals and beliefs are in opposition sometimes to developmentally appropriate practices in child care and preschool programs, which emphasize age and individually appropriateness of early childhood curriculum (Gable & Cole, 2000).

Summary

A reassuring result was that the findings in the present study matched quantitative research findings about mothers' child care selection for infants and toddlers. The accounts given by the mothers also mirrored those from the limited qualitative work on this subject. The benefit of the present study was that it gave women the opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words. Through the in-depth interview process it was possible to give a rich description of the selection experience rather that just reporting group facts.

Limitations of the Study

The philosophical premise of phenomenological inquiry is that the phenomenon of interest is studied from the perspectives of those who have lived the experiences in the natural setting where they function. During the in-depth interview process, participants' recalling of an experience helps to refine the meaning of the event for them. What people say about an experience is seen as a product of how people define

their world. The phenomenologist captures the essence of the lived experience through the process of interpretation. As with any research study there are limitations as to its scope.

The mothers who participated in the in-depth interviews were most likely those who were the most effective in choosing child care which perhaps influenced their willingness to share their stories. Although the researcher attempted to interview mothers from other settings such as family child-care homes, these mothers were not interested in volunteering to be interviewed. This may be in part due to suspicions about professionals and justifiable anxiety based on previous experiences. There are also issues of race and class and perhaps these mothers were less willing to share information with someone they did not know. The present study was retrospective in nature. Mothers were asked to recall earlier experiences in selecting child care for their youngest child. Therefore, it is possible that they may have forgotten to report some information during the interview. In the present study, 4 mothers worked at the same child care program their children attended and this might have impacted their willingness to share information concerning dissatisfaction with the program. However, the mothers that worked in the same center their children attended did not work in their child's classroom, and these mothers did talk about features of the care they disliked or that troubled them. In regard to the mothers' satisfaction with child care, it is also possible they might be reluctant to reveal information about dissatisfaction with child care-arrangements for reasons of social desirability. At the same time, it is possible that mothers could hide feelings of discontent to avoid feeling guilty about the care they

arranged. However, the researcher did not make such an inference given that the mothers had freely talked about bad experiences with child care.

The sample size in phenomenological research is typically small. The focus is on a few individuals meeting a very specific criteria that can give detailed accounts of their experience. The sample was not randomly selected but selected as a criterion sample meaning that all individuals that were interviewed met the specified criteria for being included in the study. In this case, the mothers were low-income, had received welfare, worked, and were single parents of infants or toddlers. In qualitative research the goal is to gather thick, rich data rather than use of a representative sample. Member checks as a standard of verification were not used in the present study. This may perhaps be seen as a limitation as well. However, the education level of these mothers and the difficulty in scheduling times to meet with them were prohibitive. The mothers were asked at the end of each interview if there were questions that they were not asked that they felt were important to consider. Redundancy or saturation was clearly reached, however, after seven interviews had been completed. According to Creswell (1998), "phenomenologists view verification and standards as largely related to the researcher's interpretation" (p. 207). In the present study the researcher submitted the data to an outside reviewer (major professor) for validation of themes.

Implications for Future Research

The intentions of policy-makers in enacting welfare reform legislation was to increase self-sufficiency among the poor. The dilemma of work and welfare for single-

mothers often encompasses issues of child care, education, and training (Pearce, 2000). Yet we have little information about how these families are faring under the new law. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of low-income working single mothers and how they make choices about infant and toddler child care while meeting work requirements under the new legislation. It is evident from their accounts that many questions remain to be answered as to how the impact of low-wage work and child care of varying quality will impact these mothers and this generation of children.

Questions for Consideration

There is a need to further explore the contribution of parent's self-selection bias in choosing particular types and of child care (center-based versus family child-care homes, relative care, and home based care) in regard to parent's reasoning and beliefs about these choices. We have learned from research that children's optimal development is contingent on experiences in the family and in related settings. For this reason, we cannot attribute children's developmental outcomes to only one feature of their environment (child care) without considering how children are placed in these settings by parents. We should ask questions such as: What types of early child care are available in low-income neighborhoods? How do mothers consider the quality of child care? Which factors (location, cost, caregiver training, and program philosophy) are most important to low-income mothers in choosing early child care? How do maternal beliefs and values about child care contribute to the choices they make? In the case of low-come working single mothers and their children this is particularly

important since children living in poverty are at a higher risk for adverse developmental outcomes. Some other questions we need to consider include: What types of social and community supports are most beneficial to low-income working single mothers? What is the impact of early child care on the mother-child relationship? How do we get non-custodial fathers involved in helping mothers search for and select child care for their children? Do mothers with more social support select higher quality child care settings for their children? Do moderate income families who do not have access to child care subsidies select high quality care settings? In addition to considering a broad range of research questions research methods are key in expanding our knowledge base.

Research Methods and Sampling Considerations

Although quantitative studies have investigated maternal and family variables impacting parental choices about infant and toddler child care (NICHD, 1997; Pungello & Kurtz-Costes; Singer, Fuller, Keily, & Wolf, 1998) more research is needed to explore parental decision-making strategies, and perceptions (NICHD). Brayfield, Deich, and Hofferth (1993), Pearce (2000), and Pungello & Kurtz-Costes (2000) all noted limitations in the existing scholarly literature related to the selection experience of low-income working mothers transitioning from welfare to work. There is also limited qualitative evidence on how women themselves view their options and the criteria they consider in the selection process (Mensing, French, Fuller, & Kagan, 2000). According to these same authors the issue of child care selection remains under theorized. A major contribution of my study is that it provides a rich description of low-income working single mothers' selection experience in choosing infant and toddler child care. More

qualitative studies are needed to explore low-income working single mothers' perceptions and decision-making strategies in choosing infant and toddler child care.

A sampling issue that should be addressed is how to get mothers from this population that are reluctant to participate in interviews involved in qualitative research studies. In the present study the researcher faced this issue and three mothers who initially agreed to be interviewed were no-shows for their appointments twice. One mother lived in a homeless shelter and did not keep her scheduled interview appointments. The other two mothers became reluctant to participate after scheduling appointments and did not come for interviews. It may be necessary to offer larger incentives to them to encourage participation. Some incentives might include cash stipends, gift certificates, or after-hours child care. This is an important part of the population of low-income working single mothers to speak to and more efforts to encourage their participation may add depth to qualitative research studies on this topic.

Implications for Practice

The findings from the present study provide practical implications for teachers, caregivers, and others who work with low-income working single-mother families. First and foremost, practitioners need to consider the special issues these mothers face in making child-care arrangements so they can work (e.g., transportation, cost, scheduling, and sick child care). They will need to gain an understanding for maternal values and child rearing preferences that may differ from their own (e.g., preferences for academically oriented learning experiences and early development of children's

self-help skills). This is especially important for infant and toddler caregivers since their role overlaps substantially with that of mothers who may view their efforts as in competition with their own. The unique experiences of low-income single mothers necessitates more training on the part of staff to sensitize them to the daily struggles these mothers face. It is important for staff to be aware of other community resources so that they can make appropriate referrals for support services to parents. Referral to resources outside of child care for such basic needs as healthcare, food, shelter, and clothing, were mentioned by the mothers as important forms of assistance they received from Head Start.

Recommendation 1: Facilitate Parent-Teacher Collaboration

The mothers in the study all expressed sadness and worry in being separated from their children even when they trusted the caregiver. It is important for child care teachers to understand the dynamic of the mother-child relationship and respect the role of parents in the lives of their children. The mothers also talked about feeling like they were missing out on their child's daily experiences and development. For this reason, caregivers and teachers should make every effort to share with parents the daily experiences children have in child care while allowing parents to make discoveries about events such as children's first steps themselves. The use of daily notes to parents giving an account of the child's day (e.g., feedings, diaper changes, and moods) is an effective way to deliver this information. Child care providers may also videotape children at the child care program with the parent's permission. These videotapes can then be sent home with the children for parents to view. This is an effective way for

parents to feel connected to their children's experiences while at child care. Since infants and toddlers have limited communication skills it is especially important for teachers to communicate with parents about their child's health and well-being while at child care on a regular basis. At the same time, it is important for caregivers to understand that parents are reluctant to leave their children at child care if they appear upset. Helping the parent to establish a separation ritual with their child (e.g., a kiss from the parent after being placed in caregivers' arms) not only makes the child's transition to the room smoother but it also lessens parents' anxiety about separation from their child.

The mothers also talked about wanting to feel like an ally with their children's teacher. They also reported that they liked feeling as though they were part of the family at the child care center. In the case of low-income working single mothers with limited social supports it may be necessary for teachers to take extra steps to make parents feel included in the child care program's extended network. This can be accomplished through informal conversations with parents as they drop off and pick up their children. The mothers is the study reported that they liked staff that asked them about how they were doing and seemed interested in them as a person.

Of greatest concern to all the mothers was the safety of their young children while at child care. The mothers reported that they liked to be called if their child was injured at child care even if the injury did not require them to come and pick the child up. They felt like if staff took the time to call them about their children's physical well-being this meant that staff really cared about them and their child. Knowing that their

children were well cared for and safe reduced these mother's anxiety about being away from their children while they worked.

Recommendation 2: Facilitate Parents' Access to Child Care Referral Agencies

The mothers in the study primarily relied on informal networks (e.g., family, friends, and neighbors) to gather information about child care. The mothers also reported they received a checklist from the Community Action Committee (CAC) the agency which provided the child care subsidy (voucher) to them. In the selection process, the mothers visited one to five programs and made their final choices based on the physical appearance of the program, perceptions of the staff's competence and friendliness, hours of operation, location, availability of transportation for older children, and cost. For several mothers with older children the selection process was based on previous experiences with child care. The mothers also reported that the selection process was trial and error in the beginning. Some had thought they chose a good program but later moved their children when they were mistreated or injured.

Practitioners involved with child care referral agencies should make more effort to reach low-income working single mothers. It may be necessary for agency staff to work more closely with community organizations in the neighborhoods where these families live. The mothers reported needing more help than just a checklist or list of child care programs. One problem in getting mothers accurate information about available child care is the fact that most referral agencies are not allowed to make child care recommendations to parents. Given the varying quality of the child care programs that are available (especially in low-income neighborhoods), it is important for child

care referral agencies to take extra steps to educate parents about what quality child care looks like. The mothers mentioned that they had heard bad stories about child care in the media and these reports made them hesitant to place their infants and toddlers in child care. Child care referral agencies should make efforts to visit mothers during their job training sessions prior to employment and provide educational workshops to them about choosing child care. Companies with child care benefits for employees often offer similar training to new workers. Developing videos for parents to borrow and providing them with child care information is another effective way to reach these parents before they make child-care choices. Referral agencies could provide this service by cooperating with companies that hire low-income working parents making the transition from welfare to work.

Implications for Policy

According to the Carnegie Corporation of New York's report Starting Points (1994), one of every two infants in this country is vulnerable to compromised development. This research indicated that five factors contributed to infant's compromised development. These factors were: (a) substandard child care, (b) inadequate prenatal care, (c) isolated parents, (d) poverty, or (e) insufficient stimulation. In 1990, 60% of infants and toddlers in low-income families lived in single-parent families (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1994). These data were cause for concern in light of recent welfare reforms requiring low-income single mothers to work and place young children in child care of varying quality.

Even though the majority of mothers in the present study had succeeded in finding work, they continued to struggle financially. After paying for employment expenses and losing some government benefits they continued to live at or near poverty level. Some policy makers believe that exposing poor single mothers to harsh living conditions will encourage them to work and discourage unwed childbearing. Lost in this formula for social change are the children who are dependent on single-mothers for meeting their basic needs for food and shelter. According to Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997), family income appears to be more strongly related to children's ability and achievement than to their emotional outcomes. The same authors indicated that poverty during early childhood might have more adverse consequences for children than poverty during adolescence or the teen years. The ability of low-income working single mothers to meet the basic needs of their children as they transition from welfare to work is contingent upon the wages they earn, costs of food, housing, transportation, and access to quality child care. If mothers are to maintain steady work, child care is of utmost importance. Most low-income mothers will continue to need governmental assistance to cover their living costs due to the low-wage work they are able to get. The devolution of welfare regulations to sate lawmakers gives them added responsibility to consider the vulnerabilities of low-income mothers and children. A number of social and community level supports implemented through thoughtful and responsive federal, state, and local policies are necessary to foster low-income working single mothers' ability to become self-sufficient.

Recommendation 1: Increase the Reimbursement Level of Child Care Subsidies

It has been acknowledged that for single-mothers of young children to work they must be able to arrange child care. More care must be created to meet the needs of parents who live in poor neighborhoods, work odd hours, lack transportation, or have children of varying ages; seldom do these parents find adequate child-care options (Phillips, 1995). Assistance in the form of child care subsidies will be necessary for low-income working single mothers to enter and remain in the labor market. However, a gap exists between the market cost of child care and the reimbursement level of the child care subsidy. The mothers in the present study indicated that the costs of the co-payments were a financial hardship to them and they did not feel they had many options for choosing high quality child care. The majority of these mothers were arranging child care for multiple children placing even greater economic demands upon them. Mothers need to have access to child care that is not only affordable but that is also safe and supportive of their children's development. Generally, high quality child care is more expensive than low quality care settings. For this reason, it is important for policy makers to consider increasing child care subsidies to an amount closer to the market cost of high quality child care.

Recommendation 2: Support Child Care Qualities That Contribute to Mothers' Satisfaction with Child Care

The mothers in the present study indicated that they were satisfied with the care they arranged for infants and toddlers currently. The mothers' described their levels of satisfaction with regard to teachers and staff that were friendly and supportive of them

and their children and programs that were flexible and accommodating to the parents' needs. The mothers also indicated that they wanted their children to be exposed to a learning environment as opposed to just custodial care taking (babysitting). With this in mind, policy makers should consider the varying needs and child rearing preferences of low-income working single mothers. Single mothers may lack social support and the child care setting becomes like an extended family to them in some cases. Policies that support the special care issues related to infants and toddlers are needed to raise the quality of care settings for this age group. More focus is needed on staff training to better prepare them to meet the needs of single-mothers who are parenting alone under stressful circumstances.

Recommendation 3: Increase the Availability of High Quality Child Care Settings

According to Love, Raikes, Paulsell, and Kisker (2000), two common features appear in standard definitions of quality in infant/toddler child care: the dynamics of caregiver-child interactions, and structural or more static features, such as caregiver-child ratios, group size, safety features of the room, and qualifications of caregivers. The mothers in the study indicated that they lacked access to many child-care options meeting this standard definition of quality. Policies are needed that support access to high quality child care for all parents including low-income working single mothers.

The mothers in the present study reported that searching for and selecting infant and toddler child care was a scary experience and a stressful process. Finding and paying for high quality care settings in proximity to the low-income neighborhoods where they lived and worked was a problem for them as well. Policy makers should

consider allocating additional funds to high quality local child-care providers and Head Start to increase the number of infant and toddler child care slots. State and local child care monitoring agencies need to be accountable for monitoring child-care providers to assure that children are afforded safe and nurturing child care experiences. Incentives to child-care providers who make efforts to achieve higher standards of service delivery to families are necessary to upgrade the quality of all child care programs.

In Tennessee lawmakers have just delayed implementing policies for lower caregiver-to-child ratios for infants to 2-year-olds that were to have gone into effect on July 1, 2001 by another 7 months (Miller, 2001). The ratios were scheduled to drop for children up to 35 months old from five children per teacher to four with lower ratios for older children phased in over the next 2 years. An important indicator of child care quality is the number of caregivers available to children and this is especially important for infants and toddlers since their physical needs demand greater amounts of caregivers' time. The new ratio requirements for all children will now go into effect on February 1, 2002. Opponents have argued that the new ratios will require child care centers to hire new staff in turn increasing prices to parents. An additional piece of legislation, the new three-star system, was implemented beginning July 1, 2001. Under this proposal regulated child care programs get a one-star rating by meeting all state standards. Operators can then voluntarily seek two or three star ratings by meeting higher standards ranging from staff qualifications to parental involvement. The center's level of reimbursement for subsidy children is tied to the rating system (i.e., programs

with more stars receive higher reimbursements). Ultimately the goal is to provide the public with a report card of child care quality.

Recommendation 4: Provide Incentives to Employers Who Give Parents Time Off to Care for Sick Children

The mothers in the present study indicated that sick child care was a problem for them and most lacked an alternate provider for this purpose. These mothers indicated that their employers were not understanding of requests for time off to care for sick children. The availability of sick child-care options for these mothers were important for them in maintaining steady employment. Employers can often replace lower-skilled workers more readily when they fail to come to work on a regular basis. According to Galinsky and Bond (2000), "64% of employed parents with young children from low-income households and 63% of single parents with young children do not have access to paid time off to care for sick children" (p. 342). Policy makers should consider incentives to employers who allow employees to stay home with sick children to help offset their losses due to absenteeism. This could be offered to employers by the government in the form of a tax relief or eligibility for special grants.

Recommendation 5: Increase the Availability of Transportation Services

The mothers in the study indicated that transportation was a huge problem for them. Some reported that the cars they owned were not reliable or mechanically safe. To meet the work requirements under welfare reform and to transport children to and from child care reliable transportation is a critical need. One example of local efforts to make transportation available 24 hours a day and supplement the regular city bus routes

has been undertaken by the Knoxville-Knox County Community Action Committee (CAC), the Federal Transit Administration, and the State Departments of Transportation and Human Services fund the program ("CAC offers rides", 2001). The program provides work-related transportation for people living in areas not served by city bus routes. The new service will provide transportation to surrounding counties and also allow riders to drop children off at child care. The cost is $2.50 each way no matter how many side trips are necessary. It is evident from this example that when federal, state, and local resources are pooled transportation issues for the working poor can be resolved. An additional consideration is offering low-income working families a transportation subsidy similar the child care subsidy. This could be based on the market cost of owning a used car with parents paying more of the costs as their incomes increase.

Recommendation 6: Establish Paternity for Children of Never-Married Mothers

A public debate about the large numbers of never-married mothers dependent on welfare was the impetus for welfare reform. The new work requirements for single mothers receiving TANF benefits placed responsibility on these women to become self-sufficient and at some point independent of governmental assistance. An important issue for low-income single-mother families is the receipt of child support. As one mother in the study said: "If I could get my child support payments from my children's fathers I could probably have a house for us to live in."

According to Brien and Willis (1997), "the public interest in promoting self-sufficiency of families that depend on welfare concerns the ability of fathers, as well as

mothers, to support their children through employment" (p. 65). It is important for policy makers to consider the need to establish paternity for the children of never-married mothers as soon as possible after the children are born. Paternity must be explicitly established in these cases in order for mothers to receive court ordered child support payments. Even when absent fathers earnings are minimal at the time of their children's births their earnings from work will likely increase over time. The receipt of regular child support payments would not only reduce the government's share of assistance to never-married mothers but would ease the economic burden placed on these mothers due to the costs of rearing children alone.

Summary of Policy Implications

The passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 brought with it major shifts in social and economic policy. According to Braun, Bauer, and Olson (2000), their Welfare to Well-Being Framework for Individuals and Families provides a starting point for understanding welfare reform in relation to the economic well-being of individuals and families. The framework is based on a systems perspective meaning that to live in a society one part influences the whole. The framework focuses on multiple forms of assistance and the continuum is based on six key concepts related to welfare recipients' ability to achieve self-sufficiency. These concepts are: (a) types of welfare assistance, (b) poverty level, (c) food security, (d) transportation, (e) child care, and (f) housing. As evident from the present study, which described how low-income working single

mothers make choices about infant and toddler care, their decisions were contingent upon interactions among multiple factors related to their economic well being.

The framework further classifies individuals and families functioning on a continuum from crisis (living below poverty level) to thriving (living at least 200% above poverty level). The availability of various forms of social and community supports including availability of child care is an indicator for the dimensions of well-being in the framework. The mothers interviewed for the present study were functioning in the at-risk category meaning that their earnings qualified them for child care subsidies, food stamps, housing subsidies, state supported health care, and Head Start services. Many will slide into the crisis category once the time limits for welfare have elapsed because they have no marketable skills to get better paying jobs. What has been overlooked is the need to increase women's skills to position them to earn a living wage. Most women in the study were not in jobs that would prepare them to develop marketable job skills. The complex nature of societal forces, which shape the lives of low-income working single mothers and their children deserve consideration in terms of the time limits (5-year lifetime eligibility limit for cash assistance) set by the legislation. At the same time policy makers should take measures to reduce the barriers to employment for these women by supporting high quality child-care options for them and all working parents.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

The University of Tennessee

Office of Research
Research Compliance Services

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Welfare-to-Work Mothers in Selecting Child Care

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to describe child-care choices made by mothers of infants and toddlers.

INFORMATION

Mothers who volunteer to be interviewed will be asked questions about how they made choices for child care for their infants and toddlers. Mothers will be interviewed one time for an hour to two hours and the interviews will be tape recorded. The interviews will be held in a private area. A total of twelve mothers will be interviewed. The reason for audiotaping the interviews is to record the data for analysis. After the tapes are transcribed (listening to tapes and typing a record of the interview content) they will be destroyed along with any notes. Your identity will be kept private. The information you give will only be recorded in written form using a pseudonym (false name) instead of using your real name as the identifier. The typed record of your interview will be stored in a locked office for five years and then destroyed.

RISKS

There are minimal risks anticipated in this study. The information that you share will not be revealed to anyone except the researchers. Information that you share will not be revealed to your child's daycare program or anyone else.

BENEFITS

The results of the research will be used to gain a better understanding of mothers' preferences and how they make choices about infant and toddler child care. This information may be useful to other parents, child care teachers, and others who would like to be supportive to mothers making these types of choices.

Participants Initials_____

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the research records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made only available to persons doing the research unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the research. The data will be used for research purposes. The consent form will be stored in a separate locked file cabinet from the interview transcripts and will be stored in a locked office for three years and then destroyed. Data will be prepared in manuscript format (written as a research report) and will be published in the researcher's dissertation and possibly in journals and books. The data may also be presented at professional meetings.

COMPENSATION

For participating in this study you will receive a $5 WalMart gift card. If you withdraw from the research prior to its completion you will not be asked to return the gift card.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study), you may contact the researcher, Marilyn Bruckman, Department of Child & Family Studies, College of Human Ecology, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Knoxville, TN 37996-1900, (865) 974-9963, mbruckma@utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Research Compliance Services Section of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant Name: (print)_____

Participant
Signature:

APPENDIX B

Preliminary Questions

Date:

Place:

Time:

Subject's Code:

Age:

Birth Place:

Residence Pattern:

Born in

_____ till _____ big, medium, little, village, rural

_____ till _____ big, medium, little, village, rural

_____ till _____ big, medium, little, village, rural

Marital Status married____ single___ divorced___

Ethnicity: _____ child support yes or no

Respondent's Education:

Highest level:

Emphasis/specialty (if any)

Occupation:

Transition time for welfare to work:

Work: full-time____ part-time_____ attend college/trade school_____

Children:

(ages, gender, and have they been enrolled in child care and for how long)

			Enrolled in Child Care?	How Long?
name_____	age____	gender__	_____	_____
name_____	age____	gender__	_____	_____
name_____	age____	gender__	_____	_____

Child's age at entry into infant or toddler child care:

Number of child care programs attended:

Other individuals that reside in the household:

(Adapted: McCracken, G. (1988). The long interview. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.)

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of Welfare-to-Work Mothers In Selecting Child Care

Time of Interview: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Interviewee _____

Position of Interviewee _____

(Briefly describe the project)

Questions:

1. Tell me about your child (icebreaker). Tell me about being a single mom?
2. How did you decide about infant and toddler child care?
3. Tell me what things were most important considerations to you in deciding about child care?
4. Who did you talk to about child care and putting your child in daycare? What things did they say?
5. How did things other people shared with you play into the choices you made?
6. What was difficult about selecting the child care arrangement your child is in?
7. What was easy about selecting the child care arrangement your child is in?
8. What do you think are the best things about your child's care arrangement? What worries you?

(Adapted: Creswell, J. W. (1998). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.).

VITA

Marilyn E. Bruckman received an Associate of Arts degree from Kankakee Community College in 1981. During the summer of 1981 she taught preschool children at the Little Star Migrant Head Start Center in Kankakee, IL. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Business Administration in 1987 from Olivet Nazarene University. She began working as Executive Director of the Easter Seal Society of Mid-Eastern Illinois in 1987 and continued in that position until 1995 when she decided to return to graduate school. After completing a Master's of Education degree with a concentration in Early Childhood Education in 1997 at East Tennessee State University, she pursued a Doctor of Philosophy in Human Ecology with a concentration in Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee. She taught several child development courses as an adjunct faculty member for Pellissippi State Technical Community College in Knoxville, TN. In the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, she was an intern supervisor in the Early Childhood Education Teacher Licensure Program and a Graduate Teaching Assistant. The doctorate degree was received August 2001.