

# ELUSIVE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR US CHILD CARE

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### Abstract

Most U.S. parents are in the paid labor force (Department of Labor, 2013). Using a purposive non-probability sample (N= 415) of primarily upper-middle class, married White Democratic women, this study explores support for government regulation, funding, and provision of child care and the factors and context that may shape their beliefs. Although some respondents held reservations about government involvement, over 80% of our respondents indicated that government should play a role in regulating care for children in all age categories (0-3, 4-5, 6-12). Eighty nine percent supported some form of government financial support for child care, and 58% and 61% saw a role for provision of child care for children age 0-5 and 6-12, respectively. Logistic regression and qualitative responses indicated that Support for a government role was influenced by parents' own difficulties finding affordable and sufficiently comprehensive child care, and the number of children they had. We provide recommendations for how best to target these groups to support child care advocacy campaigns, tapping into their own struggles as a source of empathy for others as well as an impetus to shift toward a more universal notion of government support which would benefit all regardless of income level.

200 words

4-6 keywords

Child care policy; parental leave; child care subsidy; child care advocacy; role of government

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The US has a patchwork of federal and state laws that provide partial care for some children, such as family leave policy, early education, subsidies for low-income children, and tax breaks for the middle class (Alstott, 2004; Cohen, 2001; Palley & Shdaimah, 2014; Zigler, Marshland & Lord, 2009). Some of these policies, such as paid leave, are not specifically designed for child care, but are part of a broader family policy. None of the policies that support care for young children cover all U.S. families, nor do most of them support ongoing, regular care. In this article, we use the term “child care” to include all forms of care, including parental care for their own children.

In 2000, the International Labour Organization developed an international standard for maternity leave including fourteen weeks of paid leave, with at least two-thirds pay. By 2007, all Western European countries other than the United Kingdom and Norway exceeded the standard. The United States did not (Russell, 2011). Even countries with economic and social policies relatively similar to the United States, such as Canada (Halfon, Russ, Oberklaid, Bertran, & Eisenstadt, 2009) and the United Kingdom (Criscione, 2011; Waldfogel, 2010) have moved far ahead of the US in providing parental leave and child care. According to a 2013 report from the Center for American Progress "the United States currently lags behind other countries in terms of investment in and access to early education" (Herman, Post, & O'Halloran, 2013). The majority of U.S. parents with young children are in the paid labor force (US Department of Labor, 2013). Most are cared for by non-parental care providers (Mulligan, & Brimhall, & West, 2005). Despite the ubiquitous need across class, race, and geography, there is a dearth of affordable quality child care in the United States.

According to the most recent estimates, the cost of child care in the United States is astronomical. Adjusted for inflation, it rose approximately 70% between 1985 and 2011

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(DeSilva, 2014; Laughlin, 2013). While families with monthly incomes of \$4,500 or more spend approximately 6.7% of their incomes on child care, families making less than \$1,500 a month spend approximately 39.6%. Across the US, single mothers spend between 25-65% of their monthly income on child care (Child Care Aware, 2014).

Despite the huge expense of child care for most families, U.S. federal and state support for child care is largely limited to programming designed to enable income-eligible parents to enter the paid labor market regardless of the safety, quality, or accessibility of child care settings (Authors, 2011). Advocates perceive a lack of political openness to policies that support universal care (i.e. regardless of income) and the fear of unwarranted intrusion into the family. They fault a climate hostile to government intervention, a fractured government, and a movement split by strategic and ideological divides (Authors, 2014). As noted by the famous political scientist, E. E. Schattschneider, 1960, “The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper class accent” (p. 35). Since child care is generally not a problem for the rich, without sustained outrage from a larger segment of the public we are unlikely to see change (Piven & Cloward, 1977).

### **Background/Literature**

According to the most recent report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics (U.S. Department of Labor, 2014), in 2013 74.8% of mothers with children between the ages 6-17, 64.7% of mothers with children under the age of 6, and 62.1% of mothers with children under the age of 3 were in the paid workforce. Despite the work of early education and child care advocates (Palley & Shdaimah, 2014), there has been little appreciable progress toward expanding the availability of affordable quality care for children under 4. As we noted earlier, one way to provide quality care for young children is to support parents to care for their own children. However, only 11% of

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US mothers who give birth or adopt children receive any paid family leave (Van Giezen, 2013). According to the Project on Global Working Families' scale of family support policies (Heymann, Earle & Hayes, 2007), as of 2007, the U.S. was one of only 5 countries out of 177 without paid leave to women bearing children. In 66 of the countries surveyed, fathers were entitled to paid parental leave; in 31 of these countries fathers were eligible for 14 or more weeks of such paid leave. In other words, not only is there limited or no support for most of families in the U.S. who seek care outside of their homes, there is limited government support to enable parents to care for their own children.

Some survey data suggests that many parents believe that young children should primarily be cared for at home by their mothers (Bostrom, 2002; Robison, 2002; Sylvester, 2001; Wang et al., 2013). However, these beliefs seem to be changing. A bi-partisan representative telephone survey conducted by Hart Research and Public Opinion Strategies from July 8-11, 2013 found that 70% of Americans supported federal involvement in helping states and communities to provide better early childhood education. This included 60% of Republicans, 64% of Independents and 84% of Democrats. Eighty nine percent said that it was important to make early childhood education more affordable for working families and 86% wanted the federal government to help states and localities do that (First Five Years Fund, 2013). One survey ([National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies \[NACCRRA\]](#), 2009) indicated that 60% of parents with children believe that they should not bear full financial responsibility for their children's care.

Paid leave is another mechanism by which the public can support child care. There also seems to be some populist support for paid leave. Paid leave legislation has been enacted in California, Washington State, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and New York (Authors, 2014;

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A.1793-B / S.4742-B, March, 2014). A random telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of approximately 1,200 people following the 2012 presidential election found that 73 percent of Republicans, 86 percent of Independents, and 97 percent of Democrats supported national legislation to support paid family leave and sick days (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2012). None of these studies reported detailed information that might indicate why people support government involvement in child care. We address this gap in knowledge by: 1) examining working parents' support for U.S. government's involvement in the regulation, provision and funding of child care and 2) determining whether parents' ~~work and~~ child care experiences influence their attitudes towards government involvement in child care policy. We discuss the implications of our findings for advocacy.

### Methods

#### Sample

This cross-sectional study used a web-based survey methodology to collect qualitative and quantitative data from parents and legal guardians (hereafter referred to only as parents) of children up to the age of 12 (N=416) regarding whether they support a role for government in regulating, providing, and subsidizing child care. Parents were recruited for this study using a non-probability, purposive sample (Hussey, 2010). Eligibility criteria included that the person was a US resident primarily responsible for the care of at least one child age 12 or under.

Participants were recruited through a survey sent via email to our respective professional and personal networks. We also employed snowball sampling, asking respondents to forward the survey link to any of their own correspondents which resulted in a posting of the link on three parenting listservs (in Brooklyn, NY, Baltimore, MD, and Philadelphia, PA). The study protocol was approved by both authors' Institutional Review Boards.

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While non-probability sampling yields results that are not generalizable, we used a purposive sample that targeted a demographic likely to support a role for government in child care. Individuals from our chosen demographic also have higher voting rates than the general public (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2006). As such, this is an important group to focus on when exploring popular support for government involvement in child care.

### Measures

#### **Independent variables**

***Demographic factors.*** The independent variables race/ethnicity, and gender were open-ended to elicit respondents' self-descriptions. We recoded race/ethnicity into three groups: White; Hispanic, Latina, and Mexican American; and "other," which was comprised of self-described categories Black, African American, multi-racial, Asian American, South Asian, Indian, Jewish, and Irish/Italian. Gender was recoded as women and men, also using self-described categories.

Respondents were provided with four choices to describe their political affiliation (Democrat, Republican, No Affiliation, Other). Population density was measured by respondents' choice of rural, urban, or suburban. For annual household income, respondents choose from among 5 options: less than \$20,000, between \$20,001-40,000, between \$40,001-60,000, between \$60,001-100,000, and over \$100,000.

***Factors related to child care needs.*** In order to examine whether people's own experiences with child care might be relevant to their beliefs about the role of government in child care policy, we questioned respondents regarding their own families and child care experiences. Specifically, we assessed whether number of children, children's ages, and whether parents shared caregiving responsibilities. We compared respondents who had one child with

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those who had more than one child because so few respondents had more than 2 children.

Ages of children was categorized by group: 0-3, 4-5, and 6-12.

We also asked about the level of difficulty of finding reliable child care, and level of difficulty finding affordable child care influenced parent's attitudes towards government involvement in child care. Level of difficulty finding reliable child care and level of difficulty finding affordable child care was measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1=no problem finding care, to 2=some difficulty finding care, to 3=very difficult, to 4=unable to find child care. We created dichotomous independent variables for "difficulty finding affordable care" and "difficulty finding reliable care by grouping respondents who reported some or no difficulty together and comparing them to respondents who reported great difficulty and inability to find care.

**Dependent variables.** Beliefs about the role of government regarding child care were measured using two binary (yes/no) variables: 1) "Should the government *regulate* child care?" and 2) "Should the government *provide* child care." A third dependent variable, "Should the government pay for child care," was measured using three possible responses: yes, no, or depending on income (means-tested). All questions were repeated for the three age groups (0-3); (4-5), and (6-12)<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>We divided our analysis into these age categories based on differences in public policies: infant/toddler care; pre-kindergarten/kindergarten; and school-age. Care and education for children ages 0- 3 requires higher teacher-student ratios and, except in some instances where parents are income-eligible, is not publically funded (Shulman & Blank, 2015). In recent years, there has been an expansion of public funded pre-kindergarten, mostly for children ages 4 and up (NWLC, 2013). However, in most states attendance in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten is optional and publically-funded programs may not be available for a full day. As of 2015, most

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Regarding government *funding* of child care, in addition to yes and no responses, respondents were also provided with a third option: that government should fund child care based upon income. The reason for including this third option was to enable us to ascertain support for universal funding (regardless of income) versus support for means-tested funding (based on income). Respondents were asked this question separately for each of the three age categories (0-3, 4-5, and 6-12). Finally, in order to elicit qualitative data that might include additional factors deemed relevant by study respondents, we included one open-ended question that asked “Is there anything else we should know?.” A copy of the survey is in Appendix A.

Measures developed to assess government attitudes toward child care were pilot tested with a sample of 40 respondents, all of whom were caring for at least one child from birth to age 12. Based on the results of the pilot study, we refined questions and response options.

### **Data Analysis**

In order to ascertain whether people’s own experiences might impact their support for a government role in child care, we conducted binomial logistic regression analyses to examine whether children's age, number of children, difficulty finding affordable child care, and difficulty finding reliable child care were predictive of our respondents attitudes toward:

1. government regulation of child care;
2. government provision of child care; and
3. government funding of child care.

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states require children age 6 and up<sup>1</sup> are required to attend school and publically funded education for a large portion of the day (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

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We did not run logistical regression analysis using the independent variables of political affiliation, socio-economic status or race/ethnicity, three additional variables of interest, because of insufficient variation in the sample.

To examine the dependent variables “support for government regulation of child care” and “support for government provision of child care” as compared to non-support, we conducted multivariate logistic regression analyses. For each of these variables we calculated risk ratio (RR) and 95% confidence interval (CI) after adjustment for all other selected factors. For the dependent variable “support for government funding of child care,” we calculate risk ratio for support of means-tested funding versus support for universal programming and support for means-tested funding versus no support for funding for a specific reference group with corresponding reference group after adjustment for all other selected factors. All statistical tests were 2-sided, and were performed using Stata 14 (StataCorp, 201636). A P-value  $\leq 0.05$  was considered statistically significant.

In response to our open-ended exploratory question, thirty nine percent of respondents (N=161) provided feedback. Thematic analysis was conducted to seek trends in the data (Maxwell, 2012). Initially, both authors read through all of the responses and coded using emergent codes (Padgett, 2011) and sensitizing concepts (Bowen, 2006). The authors met to develop a unified coding system through discussion, revision, and consensus, which was then applied on a second reading of the data. Coded data were sorted according to major themes: cost of child care, mismatch between need and available child care, alternatives to paid child care, government regulation, and concerns about and for child care providers. In order to enhance inter-rater reliability, the authors reviewed a portion of the data before the first author completed the final coding (Maxwell, 2012). Qualitative and quantitative findings are presented together in

the section that follows.

## Findings

### Sample Characteristics

Four hundred and sixteen people responded to the survey.<sup>2</sup> Respondents were overwhelmingly White and Democratic (see Table 1). The vast majority also shared caregiving responsibilities for the child or children in their home. Most worked in the paid labor market.

[TABLE 1]

Most of our respondents shared caregiving responsibilities for children between the ages of 1-5. They came primarily from urban and suburban counties, and had relatively high household incomes. Table 2 below provides a breakdown of these household characteristics.

[TABLE 2]

**Beliefs about the Role of Government in Child Care.** Most participants believed that government should play a role in *regulating* the quality of child care, *paying* for care, and *providing* care for children (see Table 3). The level of support people had for all areas of government intervention (regulation, funding, and provision of care) varied by the age of children (0-3, 4-5, 6-12).

[TABLE 3]

In order to shed light on the descriptive statistics illustrating support for government involvement in the field of child care, in the next section we turn to our logistic regression analysis and analysis of qualitative data on each specific area: regulation, provision, and financial support.

**Regulation of care.** The majority of respondents were supportive of government regulation of

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<sup>2</sup>Most questions were answered by over 405 out of the 416 respondents. Where answers were missing, not all reported figures add up to the full 416 respondents.

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child care, with slightly more support for regulation of child care for children between the ages of 0-5 than for school age children (see Table 3). None of our independent variables (number of children, age of the children, difficulty finding affordable child care; difficulty finding reliable care) were statistically significant predictors of parental beliefs regarding whether government should play a role in regulating care for children in any of the age groups (0-3, 4-5, 6-12).

Qualitative responses provide some insight into the kind of regulation that respondents envision. Proponents of government regulation sought the provision of minimum standards, monitoring mechanisms, and training of child care workers. People who did not support greater government involvement in child care worried about government intrusion into the family or child care choices and alienation of families. One respondent who favored increased regulation worried that it could raise the cost of child care

It is difficult to find quality daycare for children under 2 because of staffing requirements -- I agree that there should be more staff for younger children, but there are just not enough places that offer care for kids this age.

Three respondents raised concerns that government regulation would inappropriately intrude on certain types of caregiving. Two respondents distinguished between institutional and home settings with babysitters or nannies: "I don't want the government to be able to regulate me or any nanny [who] works for me. But I do believe that child care centers should be regulated." One respondent explained her rationale for not wanting government regulations as equating these with restricting child care alternatives. Four respondents raised concerns about government generally, with one suggesting that she was more comfortable with families having oversight of child care due to her distrust of government motives. Another respondent noted "to put child care in the hands, or under the control of, the government is to dissociate families."

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Another form of regulation that arose in the qualitative responses was creation of workplace policies. Nine respondents compared US child care policy with international policies or perspectives, including France, Sweden and Canada; some did not specify particular types of regulation, but rather spoke about government responses more generally. One respondent pointed to workplace arrangements such as “incentives to employers to provide flexible work arrangements, e.g., job sharing is common in Australia.” Eight respondents specifically noted the importance of workplace policies to support work life balance.

### **Provision of child care**

Fifty eight percent of respondents felt that the government should play a role in helping to provide care for school aged children, and sixty one percent felt that this should be true for children 0-3 and 4-5 (see Table 3). Twenty nine percent of respondents felt that government should not play a role in helping to provide care for children 0-5 and 32% felt this way regarding the care for school aged children. None of our independent variables (number of children, age of the children, difficulty finding affordable child care; difficulty finding reliable care) were statistically significant predictors of parental beliefs regarding whether government should play a role in providing care for children in any of the age groups (0-3, 4-5, 6-12).

Eighteen responses from the qualitative data shed some light on respondents’ views on government provision of child care. Seven of those called for universal child care. Most indicated a particular age group as the target, such as extending the existing school day for school age children, or universal child care for children from ages 0-2 or universal pre-kindergarten. Two respondents liked the *idea* of government provision of child care, but did not

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have faith in government to carry it out well.<sup>3</sup> One respondent compared her personal experience, having lived in a country that provides child care: “I come from France where daycare is public and affordable. Coming to the USA was really stressful because healthcare and child care are privatized and thus, really expensive for a middle class household.”

Interestingly, half of these caregivers saw government provision or subsidization of child care as mutually exclusive making it possible for a parent to stay home with children, particularly infants, through incentives, tax credits, or wage subsidy. There was no clear pattern or common belief among the seven respondents who explained their rejection of government provision of child care. Two of the seven believed parents should care for their own children with no government help.

Many of the qualitative comments called for child care that would better match their work schedules. The mismatch existed in a number of different areas. Several raised concerns about the lack of child care during “non-standard work hours”, which have become more common, particularly among low wage workers: Most of the comments, however, focused on insufficient child care options during the regular working schedule. These included complaints that afterschool and summer programs either did not exist, that they provided insufficient coverage, or that they were too expensive. This may explain why, even among this high-earning sample, 65% reported difficulty finding reliable care and 2.7% reported that they had been unable to find reliable child care. Only 31.8% of the survey respondents reported no trouble

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<sup>3</sup> Seventeen referenced the need to change government policies in ways that did not implicate actual government provision or regulation of care but through other policy changes. Twelve called for maternity and/or paternity leaves or a stipend for parents providing care. Five explicitly called for tax credits or incentives to parents and one suggested providing incentives to businesses to facilitate child care.

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finding reliable child care.

Respondents criticized the dearth of options for children in particular age ranges, such as older children, “These are times when they are in full day school programs, but still too young to be left alone at home while their parents remained at work when the school day finished as early as 3 PM in some cases.” Others cited the lack of programs for infants and toddlers:

The options for child care for children under two is very limited in my city (Baltimore).

There are very few daycare centers that take infants. Most parents must rely on a nanny or nanny-share for infant care.

Several saw existing child care options as outdated and not responsive to current social realities. In this vein, one respondent criticized school-year schedules: “school hours should be adjusted to reflect modern working parent availability instead of archaic harvest principles.” Another parent wrote “All public kindergarten should be full day; half day is a joke in this era, in terms of the educational benefit, and full-day would help mitigate child care concerns for working parents.” Her comment alludes to what we now know about the importance of early education in child development as well as the economic realities that require nearly all parents to work, whether they are in single or dual earner households.

### **Funding of child care**

The overwhelming majority of respondents supported some form of government funding, either universal (for everyone) or means-tested (based on income) for child care (see Table 3). When broken down by age category, support for funding was higher for children ages 0-3 and 4-5 than it was for children ages 6-12. An equivalent number of respondents supported income based (means tested) and universal funding for children 0-3 and 4-5. More respondents favored government support for means tested childcare than for universal funding for children ages 6-12.

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Caregivers' own ability to find affordable care was the only independent variable significantly correlated with caregivers' beliefs about government funding for child care for children across *all* age groups (See Table 4). For parents of children 0-3 and 6-12, caregivers who themselves experienced difficulty finding care were significantly more likely than parents who did not experience difficulty finding care to support universal funding versus no funding; while not statistically significant at the .05 level, consistent with that trend, parents of children age 4-5 who themselves experienced difficulty were also more likely to support universal funding. For parents of children 0-3 and 4-5, caregivers who themselves experienced difficulty finding care were significantly more likely than parents who did not experience difficulty finding care to support universal funding versus means-tested funding. While not statistically significant at the .05 level, consistent with this trend, parents of children age 6-12 who themselves experienced difficulty were also more likely to support universal funding rather than means-tested funding.

[TABLE 4]

While we had an insufficient income distribution to analyze the statistical significance of income on this question, the data from univariate analysis (see Table 1 above) as well as the qualitative data shed some light on the affordability of child care among respondents. Although our sample was relatively high-earning and thus would not qualify for means-tested support, 27.9% said that they were not able to find affordable child care. The single largest number of open ended responses centered on the high cost of child care, which one respondent described as “excruciatingly expensive.” Several used the open ended question to qualify their response to the survey question on affordability; as one parent put it: “I had some difficulty answering Question #6. I have to maintain a very tight budget in order to afford child care as a single parent, but I

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wouldn't exactly call it 'affordable.'" Another, criticizing the question as too vague, explained: "Affordable child care in your community"? What is that? Something we can pay for, even though we trade off other necessities?" Several others indicated that while child care was affordable, the high cost was a burden.

Some compared the cost of child care to other major expenses, like the respondent who said "It takes up the biggest chunk of our income, second only to mortgage, and it has made us cut most other areas of our budget. It isn't really 'affordable.' Yet we are lucky to have it." Several said that the cost had led them to consider leaving or not returning to work: "We are expecting our second child and I will be leaving the workforce because the cost of quality child care in downtown Baltimore for two children will exceed my annual after tax salary." Other respondents considered the cost of child care in their decisions about family size: "we can afford to pay for child care but it's still a big financial burden and weighs heavily on our choice to have more children." Respondents who indicated their own good fortune expressed concerns about families whose incomes were lower than their own: "[Child care is] much too expensive. My husband is in business and I am a teacher. We make decent money, and it's still difficult for us to pay for child care. I don't know how those who are less fortunate can afford it." Such caveats to responses regarding affordability of child care indicate that some survey respondents may consider even very high costs affordable.

That families "make it work," despite hardships, is clear. Many reported struggling to pay for child care. Some of these attributed financially burdensome child care arrangements to the dearth of alternatives that met their quality standards or work-related needs (such as flexible or non-traditional hours).

I have a babysitter in my home because I was not satisfied with the daycare options in my

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neighborhood. So I do believe it is safe but it's very expensive. If there was good convenient daycare, I would likely opt for that.

Still other respondents provided examples of two-parent tag teaming, tapping into family members such as older siblings and grandparents for care, and creating or joining cooperative parenting groups. Some respondents regarded family and community network solutions as valuable regardless of other options. Conversely, a similar number of respondents described unpaid child care born of necessity. These respondents indicated a preference for more affordable quality care and paid maternity or paternity leave that would not jeopardize reentry into the workforce.

It's difficult to find affordable child care in our region, so our household has split the child care and the work outside the home. One of us works days and the other works nights, so while we parents rarely see each other, we do have our child care taken care of between the two of us.

Others noted the burden of alternative family arrangements: "Family members providing child care without pay is "affordable" for me, the parent, but is a strain on my family members."

Some tied the difficulty of finding appropriate care for infants to the high costs of such care as a result of legally mandated ratios of care providers. Seven respondents noted that child care workers are not respected or well paid. Of these, several recognized that an increase in pay for child care workers would raise the cost of care. They worried that higher costs would make child care further out of their reach; only one linked this to the need for government subsidy:

While it clearly needs to be more affordable, it should also be better paid and more highly respected, thus improving the quality available. If it paid a living wage, and had any measure of respect it would attract better people.

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This is a circular problem, which shows the interplay between government regulation of care and affordability.

### **Discussion and Implications for Practice**

Many of our respondents shared concerns about their difficulties accessing reliable and comfortably affordable care. The majority saw a role for government in the provision of child care, arguably the most intrusive level of government involvement that we examined in this survey. Support for regulating and subsidizing child care, particularly for lower income families, was even stronger.

Our findings are consistent with the recent polls by The First Five Years Fund (2013) and NACCRRRA (2009), mentioned earlier, which indicate growing support for government intervention in child care policy, together with increased support for women working outside the home while others care for their children. Many families struggle to afford child care, often with a measure of sacrifice. There is some indication that those who struggle to find affordable care may be more open to universal funding of child care for children 0-5. Given the income levels of our sample, this group may feel that they will only receive assistance if it is universally available. They may also support universal government assistance out of a belief in solidarity that is informed by their own struggles to find affordable child care (Authors, 2012). This was a highly educated sample, and some respondents noted that other developing nations do a better job of supporting early education and care. This suggests that further educating people about child care needs in an effort to change their opinions about government support may not be the best use of resources, at least for this demographic.

Support for helping lower-income families and universal subsidies for child care were nearly equal. Further studies might explore whether this is a result of Lockean liberal values

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which stress individualism and a limited role for government (Hartz, 1999; Nivola & Rosenbloom, 1999) or whether it is, as many child care advocates indicate, a form of triage where respondents prioritize assistance to the most needy (Authors, 2014). While this liberal voting group widely supports a government role in child care policy, a minority of our respondents harbors reservations about government's ability to provide and regulate early care and education. This concern is likely much greater among people with more conservative views. In a survey of mothers from mothers groups from across the political spectrum and a comparison group of non-affiliated mothers, Jocelyn Crowley (2013) found that the majority supported government encouragement of workplace flexibility, but not government mandates, even those that would simply require employers to consider employee requests for flexible work schedules. Child care advocates may be able to expand their work by becoming part of a larger movement to reframe the potential role for government in creating a fairer society.

Some scholars have argued that such a shift in belief about the appropriate role for government has already begun. Many have criticized the Occupy Movement of 2011 (Occupy) as overly diffuse and lacking a political agenda. Others, however, see it as part of a longer trajectory of protests, such as the Moral Mondays movement that began in North Carolina and spread across the country to states including South Carolina, Missouri, Georgia, and Wisconsin (Berman, 2013; PR, 2014).<sup>4</sup> A recent collection of scholarly essays (Welty, Bolton, Nayack, & Malone, 2013) claim that Occupy has spurred discussion on the role of government in increasing the welfare and choices of citizens through regulating economic interests and protecting against

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<sup>4</sup> Moral Mondays, like the Occupy Movement, targets a variety of issues that vary with location and comprises a very diverse constituency. These include public education, taxes, environment, and cuts to social programs, areas where government has been criticized for prioritizing concerns of businesses and wealthy Americans.

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the vagaries of the market. [Building on the work of Judith Butler, Sanford Schram \(2014\)](#) (following Judith Butler) posits that Occupy was a result of a growing sense of “precarity” among a wide swathe of the population, including the upper middle class (“the 99%”). The shared concern that government has abandoned most Americans even as it shores up those who are “too big to fail” has led to debates on the role of government. As we have noted elsewhere (Authors, 2014), the precarious nature of services underlies America’s child care crisis and characterizes our survey respondents’ struggles. Although many can pay for child care, it is often too burdensome to be considered “affordable,” as some of our respondents note. This area of shared concern therefore may be a pivotal rallying point for policy advocacy across interest groups and across people from different socioeconomic strata.

Our findings were limited by our non-representative sample. We chose a purposive sample of individuals who were most likely to support a government role in child care, as these seem the most likely targets for child care advocacy. A possible, unintended bias of this survey is that people who had trouble finding care might be more likely to participate in a voluntary survey about child care. This too might suggest a bias in favor of government involvement and assistance. Further, the majority of respondents did not provide qualitative responses for all questions, and thus the qualitative responses do not necessarily represent the full range of perspectives among our survey respondents. They do, however, provide some insights into what people maybe be thinking. Future research might include a more comprehensive inquiry with a sample more representative of the broader U.S. population.

### **Conclusion**

Lack of government policy for child care affects how many children people have and whether or not parents (generally women) remain in the paid labor force. Low-income women

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often balance a range of limited and often unsatisfactory solutions to meet their child care needs while remaining in paid employment (what Zippay & Rangarajan [2007] refer to as “packaging”). They also forgo potentially beneficial work opportunities, which negatively affect their long-term finances (see Roll & East [2012] on the “cliff effect”). Our data show that even higher earning families report such struggles, albeit with less dire consequences. Many of our respondents engage in juggling acts to provide child care and, like their lower-income counterparts, forgo workplace opportunities that may benefit them over the long term, when considering the immediate costs of child care. Among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, child care policy is one of the strongest predictors of declining birthrates, a concern among developed nations (OECD, 2011). The aggregate of these individual decisions, may begin to concern states when fertility rates do not allow for population replacement (Grant, et al., 2004). Though fertility rates are not currently a concern in the United States, our data suggest that support for child care did influence some decisions around childbearing.

Crowley’s (2013) research on mother’s groups suggests that women are far less judgmental of each other than the so-called Mommy Wars suggest, even if they do not share a vision of government involvement. She notes that political mobilization and identification of government to increase families’ options is a crucial component for a movement. Our data show that child care struggles are common, even for those who can most afford child care and live in locations where child care is relatively available. However, our findings also suggest that current efforts have not engaged those populations who might be likely to advocate for changes to child care policy. Our findings suggest that one of the best ways to garner the support of this group may be to connect child care policy larger social socioeconomic struggles that this population

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faces. Without the support of caregivers from our survey demographic, more expanded child care policy in this country seems unlikely.

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