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**Instability in Child Care:
Ethnographic Evidence
from Working Poor Families
in the New Hope Intervention**

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The authors welcome comments and discussion.

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Introduction

Stable and flexible child care can aid low-income women sustain their employment (Hofferth and Collins 2000). Stable child care in academically enriching settings might also significantly help children from low-income families perform better in school (O'Brien-Caughy, DiPietro, and Strobino 1994, Fuller, Kagan, Caspary, and Gauthier 2002: pp. 98-101). Of course, some changes in child care are expectable; however, frequent, unexpected, unwanted, disruptive and reactive changes that do not fit into families' lives are not good for children or parents.

There have been few longitudinal studies of the characteristics of family life that can affect the *stability* of child care arrangements (e.g., Blau and Robins 1991, 1998; Hofferth and Collins 2000). There are even fewer studies that specifically examine instability in child care arrangements for low-income working families (e.g., Scott, Hurst, and London 2002). Instability is more likely for mothers who work in low wage occupations because low-wage work is often episodic, has few benefits, can be inflexible, often requires shift and part-time schedules, and seldom provides on-site child care or allows children to come to work with a parent.

In this paper we draw upon longitudinal ethnographic information from a sample of Milwaukee families living with welfare reform in their state. We focus on the degree of change and instability in child care arrangements for our sample and what led to these changes over the course of the study. Three years of longitudinal data on an ethnographic sample permits an unusually close look at the experience of child care change and choice.

Half of these families were part of a larger group who participated in the New Hope experimental intervention designed to support the working poor from roughly 1995 to 1998 (Bos et al., 1999). The other half were among those randomly assigned to a control group. The New Hope intervention is an important experimental study and relevant to the subject of stability of care because of the program's strong impacts on families' use of center-based child care. This care seems to have been more stable over time for those enrolled in the New Hope program when compared to controls (Gennetian, Crosby, & Huston 2001; Crosby, Gennetian, & Huston, 2001).

We frame our discussion of child care stability in the context of the "cultural ecology" of working poor families (e.g., Weisner 1984, Lowe & Weisner, in press). In other words, we examine the role of financial and material resources, social network supports, interpersonal balance in the family, family goals and values, and the stability of the daily routine in the dynamics of child care arrangements over time. We also take into account the role of subsidy programs like those offered by Wisconsin's welfare to work program (Wisconsin Works, or W2) or the New Hope program.

Background and Historical Context

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) welfare reform law passed in 1996 reorganized the various federal child care support programs for low-income families into a single funding source called the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). Through block grants from the CCDF, and with the addition of discretionary state funds, states could set up child care programs designed to help low-income families with children and early adolescents with their child care needs so parents were better able to find and sustain their engagement in paid work. A percentage of these funds are also earmarked to improve the quality of child care settings available to these families. These funds, then, are intended to aid low-income families stay employed while also improving the settings their children occupy while their parents are at work.

In the years leading up to and following the passage of PRWORA interest among academics and policy makers in the ways non-maternal child care supports low-income families while also promoting child development has been intense (e.g., Phillips, 1995; Yoshikawa, Rosman, and Hseuh, 2001; Huston, Duncan, Granger et al., 2001; Fuller et al., 2002). Changes in the federal funding of child care programs targeting low income families that were part of PRWORA have allowed states greater flexibility in designing child care support services that offer greater quality and target more low-income families than was the case under the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) system (Blau, 2001). However, the actual improvements in quality and availability of care targeting low-income working families are highly variable among the states (Long, Kirby, Kurka, and Waters, 1998; Fuller, Kagan, and Loeb, 2002).

In designing their child care subsidy systems, most states have emphasized child care as a support for low-income working mothers (Long, Kirby, Kurka, and Waters, 1998). Less emphasis is placed on finding care environments that might better prepare children for entry into school. For example, most states allow eligible women to place their children into any state or county licensed care setting, regardless of the overall quality (defined as enhancing school readiness) of the setting. Often, the main effort is to help women find a child care setting that fits their employment schedule and personal preferences not in helping them find a setting that will necessarily provide a socially or academically enriching environment to the child. However, there is growing evidence that many children, particularly the most disadvantaged children, can benefit from improved school readiness when placed in child care centers and pre-schools (e.g., Fuller, Kagan, and Loeb, 2002).

The design and implementation of child care support programs for low-income families can make a difference. For example, a recent synthesis of findings from a number of experimental antipoverty and make-work-pay interventions shows that programs that offer child care support services above and beyond those typically offered by most welfare programs, tended to raise the rates that parents place their children in child care centers and, in many cases, also in-

creased the length of time children were enrolled (Gennetian, Crosby, and Huston, 2001; Crosby, Gennetian, and Huston, 2001). These “expanded” child care services could include one or more of the following: programmatic promotion of formal care, on-site child care, direct reimbursement to providers, resource and referral agents in the program office, and easier transitions between child care funding streams when people left assistance (Gennetian, Gasman-Pines, Huston, Crosby, Chang, and Lowe, 2001). New Hope was a program that offered many of these expanded child care supports.

When the New Hope ethnographic study started, families in the experimental group were participating in the final year of the New Hope antipoverty intervention. The Wisconsin Works (W2) program (Ehrle, Seefeldt, Snyder, and McMahon, 2001), one of the most highly praised state welfare to work programs, was also underway. Families who had a child under the age of 13 and earned less than 185% of federal poverty level were eligible for Wisconsin’s child care subsidy program called “Wisconsin Shares” (Wisconsin Office of Workforce Development 2002). These families remained eligible for child care support from the state until the family income rose above 200% of the federal poverty limit. This meant that a family of three in 1998 was eligible for child care supports if they earned less than \$23,880 and remained eligible until they earned over \$27,756 (Ehrle, Seefeldt, Snyder, and McMahon, 2001). State funding of the child care program has been generous, tripling from 1996 to 1999 (ibid.). Unlike many other states, Wisconsin does not have waiting lists for child care subsidy support (ibid.). Both New Hope and the state subsidy program allowed families to place their children in licensed centers, in licensed child-care provider homes, or among relatives or friends who were certified by the county as being able to provide child care at a minimum level of safety.

A Cultural Ecological Study of Child Care Stability

In several reports from the New Hope Ethnographic Study, we have examined the various ripple effects of the very broad changes in the meanings and implementation of the “new welfare” (Katz 2001) on the real experiences of working poor families. Our approach in studying child care has been to understand individual beliefs and preferences, actual choices, and the wider picture of the everyday family routine of activities, to inform our understanding of how and why accommodations surrounding child care are made (Lowe and Weisner, in press). In this earlier work, we found that parents organized their child care arrangements based primarily on their family ecocultural circumstances, and only then on public or New Hope child care supports. There are five key features of family ecocultural context that influenced parental adaptations:

- The *material resources* available to the family (income, transportation, housing, etc.),

- *Shared (i.e., 'cultural') values, goals, knowledge, and beliefs* (developmental beliefs, notions of a good parent, parents' life goals, and more mundane daily goals, etc.)
- Family *social support (emotional and instrumental) and social connections* (including awareness of and access to community supports),
- The amount of *congruence or conflict* among family members regarding how to allocate scarce resources and in meeting their often divergent goals and interests,
- And the *stability and predictability* of the tasks that make up family daily routine during a given period of time.

These theoretically important features of family cultural-ecology all are expected to influence child care stability as well as the use of child care supports. Situating the child care practices of lower income families in the context of their daily routines, from parents' points of view, helps describe and account for why change occurs, and how child care policy can be more effective. This perspective also provides a view of child care "quality" through the eyes and beliefs and real choices of low-income families. Although child care quality for most families includes the familiar goals of safety, appropriate stimulation, warmth and attention, and preparation for school success, quality also strongly suggests, from the perspectives of parents, a good "fit" with the daily routine of family life (Lowe and Weisner, in press). To sustain a daily routine, parents need child care that can be adapted to the ecocultural contexts of their families.

The focus on the features of the ecocultural contexts and the daily routine of working poor families that influence child care arrangements come from ecocultural theory in human development (Gibson and Weisner, 2002; Lowe and Weisner, in press; Weisner et al., 1999). Ecocultural theory draws on cross-cultural empirical studies of family life and child development (e.g., Cole 1996; Super and Harkness, 1997; LeVine, et al., 1994; Weisner, 1984; 1997; 2002, in press; Whiting and Whiting, 1975; Whiting and Edwards, 1988). An ecocultural perspective takes account of institutional and structural forces by focusing on their impacts on the everyday activities of families. Low income families, like all families, have to make ends meet and struggle to sustain a daily routine. Parents organize their daily routines and activities to adapt to their material ecology (e.g., income, transportation, household composition, housing, etc.), and the beliefs and practices that family members use to understand and organize their daily lives (e.g., beliefs, goals, motives, and scripts for action).

The family routine, of course, is not static; families make constant accommodations to the shifting circumstances they face. This is true for child care just as for work schedules or making the rent each month. *Accommodations* are the actions family members undertake to

adapt, exploit, counterbalance, and react to the competing forces and conflicting demands that they encounter in pursuing their daily activities (Gallimore, Weisner, Kaufman, and Bernheimer, 1989, p. 218). We view changes in child care arrangements as accommodations to the shifting features of the family ecocultural context. However, given the centrality of child care arrangements in the organization of family activities, particularly for those families with younger children, child care changes also have reciprocal effects on many of the other features of family life (e.g., maternal work activities).

In the present report, we examine the degree to which the five features of the family cultural ecology are associated with the change and instability in child care for the families in the New Hope ethnographic sample. We are interested in more than an assessment of how each of the five features is individually associated with changes in child care over time. We also describe how change and instability in child care reflects the dynamic interaction among the five features. To appreciate the role of each feature of family cultural ecology, as well as the whole, we begin by quantitatively summarizing the patterns of child care change and its association with the various features of the family cultural ecology for the ethnographic families. We then present three extended exemplar cases in which child care arrangements vary from a high degree of stability to instability over a two year period.

Sample

The New Hope Project and the New Hope Ethnographic Study

The New Hope experimental evaluation, based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and active between 1994 and 1998, was an anti-poverty experiment aimed at moving welfare applicants to work and greater self-sufficiency (Bos et al., 1999). Families targeted by New Hope had to meet four eligibility criteria. Participants must have 1) lived in one of the two targeted neighborhoods in Milwaukee, 2) been older than 18, 3) had an income at or below 150 percent of the poverty line, and 4) been willing to work 30 or more hours a week. Those who volunteered for the program were randomly assigned either to New Hope or to a control group. The New Hope program offered a wage supplement (to ensure that their income remained above the poverty threshold), subsidies for affordable health insurance (that gradually phased out as income rose), child care vouchers (that gradually phased out as income rose), and a full-time community service job opportunity for those unable to find work on their own. Members of control and experimental groups were also free to seek out any federal or state public assistance programs. After 2 years of New Hope, a Child and Family Study (CFS) sub-sample of 745 families who had at least one child between the ages of 1 and 10 at baseline was surveyed to study of the impacts of New Hope on child development and family functioning.

The New Hope Ethnographic Study (NHES) began in spring 1998, during the final year of the New Hope experiment. The NHES stratified random sample of 60 families was drawn from the full CFS sample with equal representation of both the experimental and control groups. Of these 60, 45 (75%) were enrolled into the NHES study. One family dropped out very early in the study leaving 44 NHES families in the final sample. In return for their participation, each family was given financial compensation amounting to \$50.00 for every 3 months of their participation.

We were unable to use ethnographic data for two of the 44 NHES families for the present paper because sufficiently detailed child care related information was unavailable in the case material. Hence our NHES sample used in this paper consists of 42 families for whom we had at least some child care information. 31 of these 42 families had complete longitudinal information across all periods of observation. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the 42 NHES sample families and the 31 families used in the longitudinal analysis.

The NHES sample, just like the full CFS NH sample, is an ethnically diverse, low-income group. Slightly more than half of the sample was living with a male partner or spouse just prior to the start of the study. About a quarter of the families had three or more children, and all families had children who were age-eligible for child care subsidies (13 or younger) at the start of the study. There are no significant demographic differences between the full 42 families in the NHES and the 31 families used for the longitudinal analysis.

Methods

Fieldwork Methods

When visiting families, fieldworkers used open-ended interviews to engage parents in conversations and descriptions of their lives, their concerns, goals, and hopes, and their everyday routine of activities. The fieldwork team jointly developed a lengthy set of domains and topics to organize these discussions and was directed to probe for material relevant to all of them. Fieldworkers also participated in family activities (e.g., meals, shopping, church), and talked with the children about their home lives, school, and friends. After each visit, fieldworkers wrote up the conversations and observations they had with the families of the NHES into visit summaries and more complete descriptive fieldnotes. These fieldnote entries were based on tape recordings made during each family visit and/or written notes made during and after the day's visit. In this study, we draw upon field notes from the period between spring 1998 and spring 2000. During this period the 31 NHES families used for the longitudinal analysis were visited 10 times on average (Range 5 to 15 visits).

Analysis of the qualitative data

Excerpts related to the childcare choices for the 42 families used in this paper were extracted from the corpus of ethnographic fieldnotes dating between Summer 1998 and Spring 2000. These excerpts include discussions of parental and non-parental child care arrangements for infants, toddlers, preschool and school-aged children (up to age 15). After establishing high inter-rater reliability ($\alpha=.97$), two coders analyzed the data for content using conventional content-based qualitative analysis procedures (e.g., Bryman & Burgess, 1994).

The notes were coded for the type of child care arrangements for all children under age 15, whether the current arrangements were a change from the previous fieldworker visit, and, if there was a change, the reasons for the change. The reasons for change were then coded according to the categories relevant to ecocultural theory (i.e., resources, social connection, meaning, interpersonal congruence, and stability/flexibility), and into categories reflecting two additional general issues that became apparent after the initial coding step (i.e., changes in the annual school year cycle, and child maturational changes).

Identifying *change* in child care arrangements over time

We specified five distinct time periods in the data and then looked for evidence of change within and across those time periods. The five time periods were summer to fall 1998, school-year 1998-1999, spring to summer 1999, summer to fall 1999, and the school year 1999-2000.

In this paper we are specifically interested in the relationship between changes in child care arrangements and shifts in the features of the family ecological and cultural context. Therefore, we examined change at the *family* level. In other words, any change for any of the children in the family under the age of 15 was counted as a change in child care for that family.¹ A change was defined as a shift in child care arrangements from those in the previous family visit. Changes could involve shifts from one provider to another or the addition or subtraction of one or more providers at a given time. Since families in our sample were observed variable numbers of times during each period (2 to 3 visits in the spring-summer-fall transitions and 1 to 7 visits

¹Our choice to count change in child care this way presents a potential confound between change and the number of children in the family. Obviously families with more children will have more opportunities to change their child care arrangements over time than families with fewer children. The same could be said for child age. Families with younger children, who need child care more, are also more likely to change their child care arrangements over time than families with older children. Given the sample size and the use of qualitative data in this paper, it is difficult to statistically control for these confounding issues and it is also difficult to account for them qualitatively given the limited space for this paper. Nevertheless, the reader should keep these issues in mind and realize that the findings reported in this paper are provisional pending further research.

during the school years), we chose to only count the presence or absence of any change within a particular period of observation so as not to confound the frequency of field visits with our measures of change. We used the same procedures to locate the reasons for change in child care across all time periods. We maintained the temporal organization of child care arrangements, changes, and reasons for change as part of our longitudinal analysis.

Distinguishing *change* from *instability*

A single episode of change may or may not be indicative of instability for a family. Some changes are more predictable than others (e.g., the transition between school year and summer versus when a relative suddenly decides to stop offering child care). We distinguish between change and instability in two ways. Within each time period we distinguish change that is more or less predictable. For example, changing arrangements because as child was old enough to begin attending school or to care for him or herself was considered a predictable type of change. Changes associated with the typical beginning and ending of the school year cycle where parents often shifted between after school care settings to full-day summer care were also considered predictable. These were distinguished from more unpredictable shifts in one of the five features of the family econiche such as the sudden loss of income or the sudden end of a previously supportive relationship. We examined predictable change as well as instability by dividing the number of the five time periods a family changed a child care arrangement by the total number of the five periods that any data were available for that family. This produced a percentile measure of chronic instability between 0% (only predictable changes or no change) and 100% (only unpredictable changes).

Finally, to capitalize on the longitudinal nature of this project, we selected three exemplar cases from the study to describe in detail. Our goal in selecting these cases was to highlight the shifting nature of the five ecocultural features of these families over time and how family accommodations affected the relative stability of their child care arrangements. The cases were chosen to give the reader a sense of the breadth of issues low-income families contend with over time and how those issues impact the stability of their child care arrangements. Although each family is unique in its own way, there are recurring themes and patterns to their child care choices and changes that fit ecocultural theory. The three family case studies are arranged from greater to lesser stability.

Results: Quantitative Patterns of Child Care Change

Our analysis in this section is guided by three questions. (1) How much change and instability in child care arrangements is there for the families in our sample? (2) What features of everyday family life, particularly the five ecocultural features of family context, are generally

associated with change and instability? And (3) how do subsidy programs like New Hope and W2 help promote or obstruct stability of child care over time?

Change in Child Care over Time

Table 2 shows the proportion of NHES families who experienced change in their child care arrangements in the transition from summer to fall 1998 and 1999, from spring to summer 1999, and within each of two school years between 1998 and 2000. These data include any change for any reason, whether or not the precursors of such change were predictable (e.g., school year ending). Overall, 26 of the 31 families (84%) experienced a change during at least one of the five time periods studied. During the summer and school year transitions about 55% experienced a change in child care arrangements. Between one-third (35%) and about one-half (48%) of the 31 families experienced a change in child care arrangements within one of the two school years. Nearly a third (29%) of the families experienced a high rate of change in child care arrangements (i.e., a change in four or five of the five time periods). Finally, the families in our longitudinal sample changed child care in a little more than 2 of the 5 time periods on average (s.d.=1.6).

During the 1998-1999 school year (a period just after the ending of the New Hope intervention) 36% fewer New Hope families experienced change than controls ($p<.05$). There were no other significant differences in the amount of change experienced by New Hope and control group families after that point.²

Reasons for Changing Child Care Arrangements

Table 3 shows the major categories underlying the reasons for change for the 26 families who experienced change in any of the five periods observed between summer 1998 and spring 2000. We were able to organize the various reasons for change into the five general themes predicted by ecocultural theory, plus the two additional themes (shifts associated with the annual school-year cycle, and children's maturation). When change was due to predictable school-year or child maturation, we never found that changes in family ecocultural circumstances were also causing child care instability at the same time. Therefore, we could clearly distinguish between predictable changes in child care due to school or child age maturation, versus change due to alterations in family ecocultural circumstances. Table 3 shows reasons for change both within each of the five time periods and across all five.

²This is not to say that New Hope had no other long term impacts. MDRC will release a 60 month impact report later in 2003 that examines the experimental impacts of New Hope for the full CFS and those who responded to the 60 month CFS survey.

Two-thirds (66%) of the families who experienced any change over the two years of observation, cited school year cycles or child maturation as reasons for changing their child care arrangements. Naturally, the changes associated with the beginning and end of the school year were concentrated in summer-fall and spring-summer transitions. While school-year changes are an annual event, the social transitions children experience are much less common, and happen only occasionally across the life course. Hence child maturation was cited only in the summer to fall transition of 1998 and in the 1999-2000 School Year by a total of three families as the primary reason for changing a child care arrangement.

Eighty-nine percent (or 23 of 26) of the families who reported changing child care arrangements reported changing their child care arrangements as a result of a shift in one or more of the five dimensions of the ecocultural niche. The most common reasons, cited in 65% of these cases, were associated with changes in the amount of flexibility present in the respondent's daily routine. These were followed by changes in the provision of social connection and support (46%), shifts in financial and material resources (23%), and, finally, family conflicts and meaning issues (15% each). (Since more than one reason could be cited by the respondent for each change in child care arrangements, these values exceed 100%.)

The ranking of the five features of the econiche associated with change was similar across five time periods. The lack of flexibility or stability of the daily routine is always the most common reason associated with change. Social connection/social support and income/material resource fit issues come next. Congruence/conflict in the family (e.g., the amount of interpersonal agreement or conflict) and the meaningfulness of child care (e.g., its fit with parental goals and values) are the least frequently cited.

Note that the rates for which these issues are cited are generally lower than the marginal totals. This suggests that different issues come up at different times for these families. Hence the same ecocultural feature does not account for change and instability in child care over time for any given family.

Predictability/Stability of Family Routine

Shifts in the stability of the daily routine had three main themes in fieldnote data. The most common theme was shifts in the participant's employment routines or employment environment. These included participants who started or stopped working or changed their work hours or place of employment. The next subtheme involved shifts in the non-employment related family routines and household makeup. For example, four women had new babies and as a result stayed at home to care for the infants and the other children. One family moved across the country and lost the child care supports that had been available in Milwaukee. Other reasons had to do with a mother's failing health and, as a result, changes in her ability

to work or provide care for her children. The final subtheme involved features of the child care or school-related services that led to a change in family routines. For example, respondents complained about unreliable in-home babysitters, child care centers that were too far from the participants work or home, and after-school programs that were unexpectedly cancelled due to shortfalls in funding.

Social Connections and Support

Issues associated with social connection/support reflect two subthemes. The first involved changes in the support of close relatives or friends. These included changes in the availability of relatives as sources of child care support. The availability of relatives could change for a number of reasons. For example, in five cases the participant's mother or other relative would come and stay and take care of the children, then leave again some months later as circumstances changed. In eight cases, a relative who had been helping with child care was no longer available to help. In five other cases, participants sent some of their children to stay with relatives in a distant city for the summer. Finally, in one case, a relative who had been caring for a participant's children took ill and was no longer able to help.

The second subtheme involved changes in the status of the participant's relationship or support from current boyfriends or spouses. For example, there were men who agreed to support the family financially so the mother could stay at home with the children, men who agreed to help care for the children while the mother worked, and men who ended their child care support because of the demands of their own work schedule. Other men ended their relationship with the mother. Some men were incarcerated.

Resources

Resource issues either had to do with changes in the fit between family resources available to meet the costs associated with sustaining a particular child care arrangement, or with shifts in the family's access to state subsidies and supports to help pay for a particular child care arrangement. Five of the six families who cited resource issues as a cause for their changing child care arrangements described the change as a direct result of changes in their access to subsidies that help pay for child care. Two of these five changed child care because they had applied for and *received* subsidies from the state. The remaining three reported having to change child care because they had *lost* the subsidy. They lost the subsidy either because of the ending of New Hope, because their income had gone over W2 eligibility thresholds, or because of bureaucratic problems with their W2 office.

Conflict

Balancing different family members' interests or the level of conflict in the family or the community often precipitated child care changes. For example, some participants reported changing their child care arrangements because their *child* preferred some other arrangement, or did not like the arrangements they had and the parents responded by changing. Other families changed their child care arrangements because the child was getting into trouble in the wider community, such as getting in trouble at school or being taken into the foster care system as a result of his or her difficult behavior. Finally, in one case, a participant moved the entire family out of the area to avoid further contact with a violent and abusive former boyfriend.

Meaning, Goals, and Values

The final themes in our parents' decisions to change child care arrangements had to do with parents' goals and values regarding good parenting and appropriate care. The most common among these were participants who changed their child care arrangements because they felt the quality of care in the arrangement was poor. The second most common set of values-related issues involved the parent changing child care arrangements so that their own parenting priorities could be better realized. For example, one parent felt that her daughter, who was caring for her younger sister, was acting "too grown up"; her mother felt that children should get to act like children. Another participant found a care setting for her children away from home because she felt it was important for children to be out of the house for at least part of the day, even though she had care available in the home.

Instability in Child Care over Time

Table 4 identifies the changes in child care that were due to sudden shifts in the ecocultural circumstances of the family rather than the more predictable structural reasons (e.g., school schedules or children's normal age-related changes) and, as a result, represent rates of *instability* rather than change more broadly defined. Table 4 shows the rates of instability in child care arrangements over the five time periods of observation. As would be expected, these rates of instability are lower than those rates described in Table 3 (all changes). However, the data show that instability due exclusively to ecocultural and family factors is still quite common for the families in our sample. Typically, between one-in-five to nearly one-half of these families experience instability in child care during any single period. Moreover, the rates appear to be quite stable, with three of the five periods showing a rate of instability of about 33% to 35%.

Instability, New Hope, and State Subsidy Supports

We focused specifically on the relationship between instability in child care use, and extent of participation in the New Hope experiment, or use of W2 subsidies after New Hope

had ended. As Table 4 shows, during the Summer — Fall 1998 period and the 1998 — 1999 school year, a period just after New Hope eligibility had ended for most program group families, significantly fewer New Hope families experienced instability in child care than did families in the control group ($p < .05$). These findings correspond with evidence from the full CFS sample at 24 months showing that New Hope increased the length of time children were enrolled in formal care settings (such as child care centers and after school programs) by about 3 months on average, when compared the control group (Bos et al., 1999). But the impact of New Hope diminished over time. By Summer 1999, rates of instability between the two groups was not significantly different.³

While participation in New Hope is associated with greater stability at least for the year after the program had ended, use of W2 subsidies to pay for child care seems to be associated with greater *instability*. We compared levels of chronic instability (i.e., the number of the five periods in which instability occurred) for those who had used the W2 child care subsidy and those families who had not. Those families who did not use the W2 subsidy at any time during the study averaged 1.3 periods of unpredictable change associated with shifts in the family ecology (s.d.=1.3). Families who *did* use the W2 subsidy experienced an average of 2.4 periods of change (s.d.=1.25). The difference is significant ($t = -2.24$, $p < .05$).

The reader should be aware that these comparisons of W2 subsidy use are not based on a random assignment procedure as was the case for the comparison of New Hope's impact on child care stability. As a result, it cannot be said that use of W2 subsidies *caused* greater instability in child care arrangements. It is equally likely that families who are dependent on W2 services for assistance are inherently more unstable than families who do not use these services and that this is the reason for the statistical finding reported here. Given the nature of our data and this type of comparison, it is not possible to resolve the matter further.

Nevertheless, there are a number of reasons why families' experiences with the subsidy system *might* have led to greater instability (e.g., Lowe and Weisner, in press). Many of our families reported struggling with bureaucratic red tape, having to repeatedly reapply for benefits, intermittently having to reestablish eligibility, or suddenly losing the child care supports because their household income was found to have crossed the (invisible and largely uncontrollable to families) mandated threshold for support. Indeed, among the ten families in the longitudinal sample who reported using the W2 child care subsidy, four (40%) experienced instability in their child care arrangements specifically because of the way the W2 program is structured and administered. Many of these NHES parents were ambivalent about the subsidy system in Milwaukee during the period of our study. Subsidies helped them find stable — but low paying

³Again, it is possible that there are experimental impacts for child care that could be masked due to the small sample size of this study.

— employment. But, subsidies also tended to increase the amount of instability and hassle present in their daily routines and in child care.

Results: Ethnographic Case Exemplars of Child Care Stability

The patterns described so far consider how various features of the family cultural ecology may have individually contributed to the degree of change and stability in child care over time. In this section, we present three ethnographic cases to qualitatively describe the dynamic relationship among various features of the family cultural/ecology and how their interrelationships produced stability or instability.

CASE 1. KATIE: STABLE, FLEXIBLE CHILD CARE

Katie and her two children had relatively stable child care arrangements for most of the study. Katie was a divorced 39-year-old white single mother of a 5-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son in 1998. Katie did not get assigned to the program group for New Hope. For the year and a half leading up to the start of this study Katie had a stable job as a maintenance person at a local college. This job afforded her a low earned income in 1998 of about \$13,000.00. Prior to her working at the college, she had been on AFDC support for about two years. Katie no longer received support from the state in 1998, but she did use the child care subsidy available through Wisconsin Works (W2) and also the W2 health insurance.

When we met Katie in Spring 1998, she had a stable childcare situation because her brother Frank was able to help. Frank was a licensed childcare provider who lived with their mother close by, was authorized to receive child care subsidy payments from Wisconsin Shares, and restricted his care to Katie's two children, Erin and Sean.

Having a reliable relative to help out made a huge difference. Katie worked second shift, from 3 PM to 11 PM on weekdays and could not have found a center that was open during those hours. On a typical day during the 1998-99 school year, Katie got the kids up and took them to school, sometimes staying to watch their classes or help their teachers for an hour or two. Then she prepared dinner and left it in the refrigerator before leaving for work. Frank picked up the children from school and took them back to Katie's house, where he helped with their homework, gave them dinner, put them to bed, and stayed until Katie returned. Katie said she wished she could spend more time with her children, but she was glad to be working and did not want to be "sitting around" at home.

Katie was glad she could leave her children with her brother. This arrangement fit well with her values regarding alternative child care options. When her son was an infant, she tried private babysitters and was never satisfied with their care because the caretakers would leave

him alone for long periods and did not change his diapers or feed him enough. But she did have some problems with her arrangement with Frank, mainly because Frank had continual delays in receiving checks from the state system. His first check took six months to arrive, and the payments were always late thereafter.

Katie had other family and friends who could help when Frank was not available. On weekends, or when the kids had a day off from school, Katie's ex-husband was sometimes available to watch the children, and Katie's mother worked nights and was available for emergencies during the day.

The flexibility of Katie's work also helped her maintain a constant child care arrangement over time. For example, when her daughter, Erin, was ill with a serious ear infection, Katie was able to take time off from work to stay with Erin or bring her to medical appointments. Her son, Sean also required some special care. He failed first grade during the 1998-99 school year. At that time, Katie had to meet with teachers and specialists to get him into a speech therapy program. Katie did not like to miss work, but was happy to have an understanding supervisor who gave her the time when she really needed it.

When school ended in 1999 Katie's routine remained fairly stable. Her work hours switched to 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., giving her more time to rest. During the day Katie played with her children, taking them to the park, swimming pool, or library in the mornings before she left them with her brother and went to work. She got a second raise and promotion, to Shift Supervisor, and no longer did cleaning herself. Even with the raise, Katie's income still allowed her to qualify for W2 childcare supplements, which she continued to pay to Frank.

Frank continued caring for the children as usual over the summer and into the 1999-2000 school year. During this time, his health deteriorated and he began kidney dialysis three times a week. He applied for disability benefits. Since the disability program required him to show that he was unable to work (including work doing child care), he could not receive the childcare supplements from W2 and receive disability benefits. He opted to receive disability and let his childcare license expire. Nevertheless, he continued watching Katie's children as he had before.

Katie and Frank's mother died in 1999. In January 2000, Katie bought a house and Frank went to live with her and the children. This situation was convenient, but difficult for the family to adjust to. Frank was drinking during the day, and was sometimes mean to Sean and Erin, so Katie was less happy about him caring for them. Nevertheless, for the time being, Frank remained Katie's primary child care provider.

CASE 2. ALICIA: FROM INSTABILITY TO RELATIVE STABILITY

Alicia's case involves much more instability in child care than is true for Katie, but then becomes more stable by 2000. Alicia was a single — though engaged and soon to be married to her boyfriend of six years — 31-year-old African-American and lived with her three children, ages 12, 10, and 5 at the start of the NHES study. A New Hope intervention participant, Alicia had been working as a Head Start teacher for the past several years. This work was stable during the school year, allowing her to earn about \$13,000.00 each year. But, she was laid-off each summer. During the summer, she typically stayed home with her kids and relied on unemployment insurance for her income.

Alicia did not use subsidies to help pay for her child care needs. Alicia relied upon a combination of friends and relatives, formal centers like the Boys and Girls Club, and even her oldest son as sources of child care. The major ecocultural reason for Alicia's instability was due to her seasonal, episodic employment and also her living situation. Changes in each required accommodations that lead to changes in the child care arrangements of her children. Once her employment and her living situations stabilized (between 1999 and 2000), and with the added support of her maturing older children and extended family, Alicia's child care arrangements also became much more stable.

After being laid off from Head Start in June 1998, Alicia collected unemployment insurance and stayed home with her children. Her son Preston, age 12, went to summer school and then went to the Boys and Girls Club in the afternoons with the other two children. Occasionally, Alicia would ask one of her two sisters to watch her children.

In August 1998, Alicia started a new full-time job at a local church day care center run by a relative. She sent her youngest child, Shanikwa, to stay with her mother for the month in Tennessee. The other two children would spend the day at the Boys and Girls Club while she worked. Alicia was happy with the Boys and Girls Club, where her sons could take field trips and play with other children. She also liked her job at the childcare center, because the children were older than at the Head Start and her work was not tied to the school calendar. She told Head Start that she had found another position and would not be back in the fall.

This decision was unfortunate, because once the school year started, enrollment at the childcare center plummeted, and Alicia was unexpectedly laid off. During September and October of 1998, she worked a few temporary jobs babysitting and waiting tables, but for the most part she was back home with her kids, getting them off to school in the mornings and watching them in the afternoons.

In November 1998 she started another temporary job, sorting mail for the Postal Service on the third shift (11:00 PM to 7:00 AM). Her children were on their own at night. Alicia

felt comfortable with Preston in charge of his younger siblings. Her boyfriend Lewis and his sister lived upstairs and kept an eye on things at night. Lewis got them off to school in the morning and Alicia was home when they returned from school.

In January 1999, Alicia and her children moved to Tennessee to live with Alicia's family. Her father was ill and Alicia wanted to be near him. Alicia and her children moved in with her father, two sisters, and her brother — a total of five adults with eleven children! The adults shared responsibility for cooking, cleaning, and child care.

Alicia was not employed during the Winter and Spring of 1999. Staying at home with the kids and her family was difficult. She said, "I hate it. Being in the house all day, not working. I'm used to working and being about. Sometimes I take my car and go visit my friend who also don't have a job, just to get out of the house."

Alicia did find a job in June 1999. She started at a wood manufacturing plant working on the assembly line assembling pieces of furniture. She worked the third shift (11:00 PM to 7:00 AM); but, she did not worry about child care. There was always a family member available to look out for her kids at night.

By April 2000, Alicia continued to live with her extended family and work the same job on the assembly line at night. Her sister, father, and husband, Lewis (whom she married the year before), were always home at night. Preston and Conley were now 14 and 12 years old. Alicia felt comfortable leaving them home to care for their younger sister, Shanikwa.

CASE 3. EDITH: UNSTABLE CHILD CARE

Edith's situation shows the impact of more imbalance and conflict in the family and instability resulting from inadequate fit between her resources and child care needs. Her case also reflects how important it can be for families to have care options available which fit parents' personal values and beliefs regarding what counts as "quality" care. Finally, Edith relied on subsidies both from New Hope and, later, W2 to offer her children stable child care arrangements, in a preferred setting in a formal child care center. But, when she lost the subsidy supports after earning above the program's mandated income threshold, her child care situation became more unstable and quality, in her view, declined.

At the start of the study, Edith was married and a mother of three young children, Max (age 6), Libertad (age 4), and Junior (age 2). Edith lived with her husband Manuel, the father of her two younger children. She worked as a caseworker for one of the firms that administered W2 in Milwaukee County. This was a good and steady job. Edith earned about \$23,000.00 during the first year of the ethnographic study. She continued to work there for the duration of the

NHES study. A New Hope intervention participant, she used the child care supports from the program until her three years of enrollment came to an end in early 1998.

In the spring of 1998, Edith described strong values and preferences associated with the various child care options for her children. She preferred to place her children in formal daycare centers rather than with babysitters. She believed that it is more difficult for a provider to mistreat the children in a center than in a home. Furthermore, Edith said she and other parents could make unannounced visits to her children's daycare center. But in a house where somebody takes care of children it is harder to monitor the care being given. Edith was particularly concerned about her younger children (ages two and four) who could not communicate well enough to tell her of any problems they encountered when in child care. Moreover, Edith said she even preferred formal center daycare to care by a family member, because, as she explained, "A family member takes really good care of the children, but does not offer them an education because they do not have the training. They are more worried about getting the chores around the house finished then concentrating on the children like it is done in a daycare. There, the teachers are one hundred percent with the children because it is their job."

Edith was mainly interested in signing up for New Hope because of the offer of childcare subsidies. She had a particular need for childcare help in the mid-1990s because her husband Manuel, who had been caring for the children, was sent to prison for selling drugs (he was released by the time the ethnography began). Edith relied on her mother and her social support network for childcare during this time, but she was relieved to have subsidies she could use at a formal center. Once she got the subsidies, "I went to a lot of daycare centers and finally I chose the daycare where I saw that my children were more comfortable."

By May 1998, Edith used W2 subsidies for the daycare center, which she qualified for only by leaving Manuel's income off the records. When her caseworker discovered that she and Manuel lived together and subsequently reported his income, her childcare subsidy was cut in half. This doubled her copayment at the center, so in the summer Edith enrolled her two older children in a public school program. She left the baby at home in the care of her niece.

Edith was soon forced to move her six-year-old son, Max, from the school program to the care of a babysitter, a personal friend of hers, because the program refused to care for him after he hit another child and a teacher. Edith described Max as "hyperactive," because he had witnessed a great deal of conflict and violence between Edith and Manuel in his early years (their relationship was now somewhat calmer). Max also had a hearing problem that was not diagnosed or treated until he was three years old. As a result, his speech was delayed.

By October 1998, Edith had moved her two younger children to the care of another babysitter recommended by a friend. The baby spent the day there and the four-year-old (Liber-tad) went there after school. Manuel was home from work by 3:30 PM and watched Max after

school. In spite of her preference for daycare centers, Edith was satisfied with the babysitter's care, saying that this sitter did not leave her children to watch TV all day as another sitter had in the past. The sitter was also flexible with her time, relatively inexpensive (\$150 per week), and understanding about late payments. Unfortunately, the babysitter was only available until January, and Edith worried about what she would do then.

After January 1999, Edith moved her children to a babysitter who charged only \$100 per week but did not provide her children with any developmental activities, and relied on the television to keep the children occupied. Edith was especially unhappy about the situation because Max had increased his behavior problems (he began seeing a psychologist, who linked Max' troubles with the violence in his home). Also, Edith's younger son, now age three, was not developing his language skills on schedule.

Moreover, Edith was not satisfied with Manuel's care. She complained about his parenting. She said he was impatient with the children, yelling at and threatening them, and did not talk to them, help with homework, or express any interest in them. He was also a regular drug user. Edith worried about Manuel's impact on Max in particular, who was visibly upset by the violence and conflict between his mother and Manuel.

During the 1999-2000 school year, Edith sent Junior to the same babysitter who had cared for the children during the previous school year, and Max and Libertad came home after school around the same time as Manuel. If Manuel was late or unavailable, Edith's mother, who lived in their basement apartment, watched the children. Beginning in January 2000, Edith's babysitter was unavailable and she began taking Junior to her sister-in-law's house during the day.

SUMMARY OF EXEMPLAR CASES

We see in these three cases that the amount of change and instability in child care arrangements over time is highly variable in working poor families, and that stability is both a matter of ecocultural family circumstances and subsidy. While Katie's case shows relative stability over time, Alicia and Elisabeth and their children experience much more instability during the period of observation. Nonetheless, there are also periods of relative stability for Alicia and Edith. Alicia's child care arrangements together with her overall daily routine, for example, go through a period of instability earlier in the study but then stabilize toward the end. Edith, on the other hand, seems to have gone from a period of relative stability just before the onset of the study to instability and conflict most of the next three years, due to sudden resource loss and chronic conflict issues in the family.

Ecocultural circumstances drove the level of stability across all the cases. Katie, for example, was able to maintain a stable arrangement because of a high degree of coherence among

the several features of the family cultural ecology. W2 subsidies helped her to pay for the care she preferred (good resource fit). Her brother (a social support) was available. Katie and Frank generally got along well, and there is no evidence of the children complaining (good interpersonal balance). Also, the W2 payments for Frank that reduced the burden of social obligation and also helped promote good interpersonal balance. Katie, who did not trust babysitters and child care centers liked this arrangement; it fit with her goals and values as a parent. Finally, Katie and Frank's routines were stable and predictable over time. There were some bumps along the way (e.g., Frank's period of drinking) but these seem to have been resolved and the arrangement was sustained.

There was less coherence among the features of the econiche for Alicia and Edith and, therefore, less stability in child care. But different features of the econiche seemed to be creating problems for these two families. Alicia had a reliable set of social supports who helped out tremendously. But her resource base was unreliable, her employment routines unsteady for the first year, and she found that staying home with the children was often difficult and frustrated her goals and values associated with work and adult independence. Edith, on the other hand, had a very steady employment routine. Although her personal resources were inadequate to pay for child care in high quality centers (her goal and value preference), she and her husband nonetheless made too much money to qualify for child care subsidies. Edith found that the child care options she could afford failed to meet her values associated with quality. There also were serious balance/conflict problems in this family: Edith lived with an abusive, drug addicted husband, and her sons also suffered from severe developmental and behavioral problems.

Katie, Alicia, and Edith's child care stability or instability involve all five of the features of the ecocultural niche. Extra-familial issues like school-year cycles, and personal characteristics of the children themselves, such as child age or developmental problems, are also important at least in terms of arrangements that then are forced to change, or unable to change when parents wanted to.

Finally, subsidy programs were both beneficial and harmful. Since Katie's earned income was well below the state mandated threshold throughout the three years of the study, she remained eligible for W2 support and used this support to pay her brother for stable child care for most of the study. Edith, on the other hand, had a household income that just placed her over the mandated thresholds. She lost subsidies she highly valued, subsidies that could have helped her shield her children from an abusive husband and better prepare her children for school. This was the case even though her husband was unreliable as a source of support; how long would it be before his drug problems lead to another round of incarceration or the loss of employment?

Instability in child care, then, was related at the case level to the way each family juggled resources, dealt with conflict, applied values and goals to changing circumstances, and so forth. School and other regular yearly cycles, and child characteristics, also played important roles.

Discussion and Conclusions

Summary of Main Findings

Change in child care occurred frequently for the families in this study. Between one-third and nearly three-fifths of our sample changed a child care arrangement during any one of the five time periods used in this analysis. Of course, a great deal of this change was predictably associated with transitions at the start and end of the school year, or with changes in children's needs for care as they grew. When these more predictable changes are removed from the child care change dataset, change that is associated with shifts in the ecocultural family context was still typically observed in slightly more than one-third of the sample. Since shifts in child care can have negative impacts on women's employment and on children's development (O'Brien-Caughy, DiPietro, and Strobino, 1994, Hofferth and Collins, 2000, Fuller, Kagan, Caspary, and Gauthier, 2002: pp. 98-101), the possibility that there might be this much instability in a population already at risk for developmental problems should merit concern among researchers and policy makers alike.

We found that instability and inflexibility in the everyday work and employment related routines of these families were most frequently associated with changes in child care arrangements, followed by shifts in the availability of social supports from friends and family. The world of low wage work can be highly unstable or particularly taxing due to the odd hours it can require. Women who work in these kinds of jobs often change shifts frequently or change jobs in order to find better pay and a more workable schedule. As employment schedules change, so must child care arrangements, since providers rarely have the flexibility that can accommodate the unpredictable or atypical hours of many marginal jobs.

Perhaps because of the low pay and shift-work schedules for typical lower wage jobs, many low-income families rely on family and friends as sources of child care support (e.g., Capizano, Adams, and Sonenstein, 2000; Levine-Coley, Chase-Lansdale, and Li-Grining, 2001). Our data fit these wider national trends well: Shifts in the social connections and social supports available to the families in our sample were the second most common kind of reasons for changing child care arrangements.

Resource fit, or the degree to which the financial and material costs associated with child care fit with the financial and material means of the family was the third most frequent reason for change. In some cases, these women changed a child care arrangement because of

added financial support, particularly from boyfriends or new spouses. On the other hand, the loss of financial resources signaled a change. Often this situation forced women to choose arrangements for their children that were of lower quality than they would have preferred. For example, while she was receiving support from W2, Edith was able to find the best quality of care (as she saw it) for her children at the time. As the support from W2 ended, Edith was no longer able to secure care that she preferred. She felt her children were suffering emotionally and developmentally as a result.

The values, goals, and priorities parents had for their children, for themselves as parents with regard to romantic partners, and as workers occasionally related to changing child care arrangements. Values were associated with change most often when a child care arrangement did not match the parent's preferences. Although parents held strong views regarding child care quality as they defined it, values and preferences seldom directly led to change in child care because parents' beliefs about good child care did not change much. More commonly, other ecocultural features changed, requiring child care change that sometimes went against parental values. Recall that Katie, Alicia, and Edith all expressed strong opinions about using one type of care or another. In Katie's case, her fundamental mistrust of people that she did not know generally precluded her from using child care centers, babysitters, or other similar options. Even when she had adequate financial support from W2, Katie still preferred her brother as a child care provider over other paid options available to her. On the other hand, Edith repeatedly expressed her preference for a care setting that would help her children academically and cognitively. Only when she lost her subsidies, and later the support of an acceptable babysitter, did she move her children to a setting that, in her view, did not provide adequate stimulation and interaction.

The contrast between Edith's and Katie's experiences is instructive about the relationship between the quality of child care settings and its stability from the parent's point of view. That is, a parent's consideration of issues of quality, in combination with other concerns (e.g., resources, social supports, etc.) has an impact on the relative stability of arrangements over time. Both women saw the benefits and risks in various child care settings and marshaled their resources to place their children into the setting they preferred and that fit well with their work routines. Katie may have sacrificed any educational benefits that having her children in an academic setting might have provided her children, so that she could ensure that someone she knew well and trusted was caring for her children. Having adequate financial and social supports available allowed her to sustain this arrangement in the long-term. On the other hand, Edith was much more comfortable placing her children with strangers, who, ideally, would provide an environment that was academically challenging. However, her resource and social support base was inadequate and did not support her children's reliable access to an academically enriching setting.

Finally, the level of interpersonal balance, and conflicts in the family was implicated in some of the cases of changing child care arrangements. Like issues involving values and goals, balance issues may have more to do with limiting various child care options, rather than directly leading to instability. For example, children who act out or who are violent often are removed from or kept from formal child care centers and programs. Moreover, many parents are loath to leave their children with household members whom they mistrust or dislike, so this did not happen very often. Nevertheless, occasionally we did find that these kinds of conflicts were associated with a parent having to shift child care arrangements for her children.

Policies should support stability in child care. Participation in programs designed to help low-income families like New Hope or W2 can either help or hurt the levels of stability in child care. The difference is not likely to be simply a matter of financial supports, but also in the way the program is administered. While child care subsidies were invaluable to the New Hope clients who used them, New Hope's expanded child care assistance services may have helped parents find the child care options that best fit their families needs. New Hope provided more efficient direct payment to providers, flexible provider options including certified friends and relatives, and in-office provider referral services to parents. Most parents in our sample raved over how much New Hope helped them to find and pay for stable and trusted child care options that fit with their goals and values for the non-maternal care of their children. New Hope's provision of reliable market information to parents, in addition to the provision of subsidies based on weekly work effort may have combined to promote more stable child care arrangements over time, an impact that seems to have lasted for at least a year beyond the termination of the program.

Next, while subsidy use was a relatively minor factor in child care stability in our sample, subsidy policy still could assist working poor families. For example, child care support tied exclusively to work or income levels leads to more instability since work is unstable in so many cases. *Annual eligibility* for child care (rather than eligibility based on current work hours, for example) would ensure that a child in a program could remain through a school year period, for instance. It is likely, based on how parents in our sample talked about child care subsidies and what they did about them, that if child care supports were more stable and certain (e.g., tied to the child's annual school year, allowed for periods in and out of work, or provided child care space which was available for the child to return to even if a mother dropped out for a spell during a year), that the benefits of using child care subsidies would increase and the ability of these families to sustain a stable family routine would improve.

However, assuming that child care assistance will continue to be tied to maternal work rather than tied to a *child* throughout the school year cycle, then policy provisions should be made to ensure stability. Those families who lose eligibility due to loss of work, should be given ample time to secure new child care arrangements that will fit with the parent's and the

child's schedules and needs. More family-friendly employment and child care subsidy administration (as in New Hope) might go a long way to relieving the changing, unpredictable burden these parents often place on the informal support networks among family and friends as well. Those parents who want to become eligible providers of home child care themselves, could be proactively encouraged to do so by state subsidy providers. Since kin care is so common, those parents who become qualified for home child care payments as licensed providers became a valuable resource for agencies seeking to encourage women to work, since both agencies and parents should strive to support flexible child care that will fit with daily routines.

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Table 1: Background Characteristics of 42 NHES Families Just Prior to Start of Ethnographic Study

	Full NHES	Longitudinal	New Hope	Controls
Participant's age - 1998	33.0 (6.1)	33 (6.3)	33 (7.4)	33 (5.0)
Earnings, in thousands (\$)	11.1 (7.5)	11.6 (8.2)	12.2 (8.3)	10.9 (8.3)
Black	50%	52%	50%	53%
Hispanic	33%	29%	38%	20%
White	17%	19%	13%	27%
12 or more years of education ^a	68%	64%	56%	73%
Husband or partner lives with	55%	57%	60%	53%
3 or more children ^c	26%	23%	13%	33%
Age of youngest child 0 to 2	19%	23%	25%	20%
Age of youngest child 3 to 5	40%	32%	31%	33%
Age of youngest child 6 to 10	29%	29%	19%	40%
Age of youngest child 11 to 15	12%	16%	25%	7%
Used New Hope or welfare child subsidy prior to start of	41%	32%	50%	13%
Used W2 anytime during NHES (Summer 1998 to	26%	32%	19%	47%

NOTES: Standard deviations appear in parentheses.

^aNHES n=41 due to missing survey data.

^bNHES n=40 dues to missing survey data.

^cNHES n=39 dues to missing survey data.

**Table 2: Rate of Changing Child Care Arrangements for NHES Families
Between School Year Transitional Periods and Within School Years
Summer 1998 to Spring 2000**

	New Hope		Controls		NHES		
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	
Change within time periods							
Summer to Fall 1998	9	56%	8	53%	17	55%	
School Year 1998 to 1999	5	31%	10	67%	15	48%	*
Spring to Summer 1999	8	50%	9	60%	17	55%	
Summer '99 - Fall '99	7	44%	10	67%	17	55%	
School Year 1999 to 2000	6	38%	5	33%	11	35%	
Any change during any period	13	81%	13	80%	26	84%	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Levels of chronic change							
Periods experienced change to econiche	44%	31%	56%	32%	45%	32%	
Sample Size	16		15		31		

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10

Table 3: Major Reasons for Changing Child Care for 26 NHES Families ^a

	Summer to Fall 1999	School Year 1998 to	Spring to Summer	Summer to Fall 1999	School Year 1999 to	Any Period
General issues (%)						
School year cycles	15	0	23	42	0	62
Child maturation	3	0	0	0	6	9
Family econiche issues (%)						
Resources	4	8	12	4	8	23
Balance	0	12	0	0	8	15
Meaning	4	0	4	4	4	15
Flexibility	19	27	27	15	19	65
Connection/social support	4	12	8	4	19	46

NOTES: ^a5 families were dropped from the sample of 33. These families did not show any evidence of change.

**Table 4: Rate of Changing Child Care Arrangements for NHES Families
Related Only to Shifts in Family Economic
Summer 1998 to Spring 2000**

	New Hope		Controls		NHES	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Change within time periods						
Summer to Fall 1998	2	13%	8	53%	10	32% *
School Year 1998 to 1999	5	31%	10	67%	15	48% *
Spring to Summer 1999	5	31%	6	40%	11	35%
Summer '99 - Fall '99	3	19%	3	20%	6	19%
School Year 1999 to 2000	6	38%	5	33%	11	35%
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Levels of chronic change						
Periods experienced change to economic	43%	27%	24%	26%	33%	28% * one tailed test
Sample Size	16		15		31	

NOTES: Statistical significance levels are indicated as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10