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Child Care: An Investment in the Future. Part 3. Corporate-sponsored Child Care Is More Than Just Baby-sitting

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On a snowy day early last February, William W. Scranton III, the lieutenant governor of Pennsylvania, arrived in Philadelphia for a tour of ISI® and our Caring Center for Children and Parents.¹ Scranton is a staunch advocate of quality child care and views it as an important way to boost employee productivity and morale, to help keep families together, and to spur economic development. He has been meeting with business leaders throughout the state to encourage corporate participation in providing or supporting child-care centers. Calling ISI "a pioneer in workplace innovation,"² Scranton hoped that his tour might draw attention to the Caring Center, which he commended as an example for other employers to follow.

Scranton's interest in child care parallels a growing need throughout the US to address the issue of caring for the children of working parents. According to a 1984 special report by the Bureau of National Affairs, Washington, DC,³ this need is a direct result of a dramatic shift in family life over the past two or three decades.

Among the most important factors influencing this shift, according to Natalie Madgy Collins and colleagues, were a high inflation rate, which forced many families to rely on two paychecks to maintain their standard of living, and a high divorce rate, which contributed to an increase in the number of single parents in the work force. Collins is the manager of the Business and Child Care

Project of the Greater Minneapolis Day Care Association in Minnesota. She writes that by 1980, based on US census data, only 16 percent of US families consisted of a mother who stayed home to care for the children while the father went off to work.⁴ Psychologist Lois Wladis Hoffman, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, notes that maternal employment is, for the most part, a response to social changes, including economic pressures. As such, she says, it "meets needs that the previous family ideal of a full-time mother and homemaker cannot."⁵

This increase of mothers in the labor force is "a demographic reality of tremendous import," assert psychologists Edward F. Zigler and Edmund W. Gordon, Yale University.⁶ (p. v) Over three million children under six years of age live in single-parent households headed by women (an additional 209,000 live in households headed by single fathers).⁷ (p. 57) Over half of these mothers were in the work force in 1984,⁸ and the trend continues to grow.⁹ Zigler and Gordon note that "the question is not only who will care for these children while their parents are at work, but also who will pay for the care, and will it help or harm the children?"⁶ (p. v)

The Child-Care Crunch

From 1947 until 1960, when only 12 to 20 percent of mothers with children under six were working,⁷ (p. 39) women

had the option of leaving their offspring with relatives, friends, or neighbors. Although friends and relatives are likely to be in the work force themselves today, many working parents still try to make informal arrangements for the care of their children in private homes.¹⁰ Two reasons for the popularity of these arrangements (often called family care) are their moderate cost and the presumably homelike atmosphere they provide for the children. And in fact, family care and neighborhood centers run by church or community groups or small family businesses are used much more extensively than corporate-sponsored child-care centers, according to a review of the literature by Marce Verzaro-Lawrence, assistant professor of early childhood, State University of New York, Buffalo, and colleagues.¹¹

In the past, some parents perceived family care as less reliable or less desirable than a corporate-sponsored child-care center, according to Sandra L. Burud, president, Burud & Associates, Inc., a child-care benefits planning and consulting firm in Pasadena, California.¹² Since family care was generally provided by a single individual who supervised several children in a private home, such arrangements were subject to disruption whenever the care-provider became sick or suffered a family emergency. Working parents also tended to view family-care situations as less stimulating educationally than the care in corporate-sponsored centers. But Burud says these generally negative attitudes have been slowly changing as family-care operations have begun acquiring licenses and church and community centers have begun hiring personnel trained in early childhood development.¹²

Child-care centers vary in their operations. They may be near the home or workplace, in churches, schools, or other facilities—or, in the case of corporate-sponsored centers, on company property (also known as on-site

child care). They can be operated by professionals with degrees in early childhood development or education, by those in the process of acquiring such degrees, by nonprofessionals who have no formal training but who are nevertheless good with children, or any combination of these.¹² As mentioned above, centers can be owned by families or church or community groups; they can also be owned by nonprofit or public agencies and even national chains.¹³ In the case of corporate-sponsored child care, an individual center may be administered by one or more companies. According to Zigler, some companies sponsor centers that are run independently by employees.¹⁴ Our own Caring Center is operated independently as a subsidiary of ISI.

In general, centers accept children ranging in age from as young as six weeks to as old as six years, although most accept only three-to-five-year-olds. While many centers are open for up to 12 hours a day, with provisions for older children before or after school, hours of operation can vary considerably. Incidentally, public and private schools are starting programs for children outside regular school hours.¹³ Centers—again, like ISI's Caring Center—usually combine formal learning programs with informal, play-oriented activities appropriate to the age and development of the child; they are not merely baby-sitting services, but rather preschool learning environments that help children acquire life and learning skills.¹⁵

Verzaro-Lawrence asserts that more parents would send their children to professionally staffed centers if such programs were more widely available or less costly.¹¹ Quality child-care centers are indeed expensive to start and maintain, and many must rely on outside sources of support in an attempt to meet costs. In addition to fees paid by parents, according to Dana E. Friedman, "the main source of financial support for child-care programs [in the US] has been the

federal government."¹⁶ Friedman is a senior research associate at the Work and Family Information Center of the Conference Board, a nonprofit business research service in New York, and the author of numerous works in the child-care field.

Friedman notes, however, that the current administration has moved consistently toward shifting the responsibility for services to state and local governments and encouraging private-sector initiatives. Thus, it is more important than ever for companies to get involved in some capacity in child care. But that doesn't necessarily mean building a child-care center; Friedman points out that *anything* a company can do to increase the availability of child-care services, to make them more affordable or accessible, or to improve their quality will be helpful.¹⁷ A useful resource for companies interested in practical suggestions is *Child Care and Corporate Productivity*,¹⁸ by John P. Fernandez, division manager, Personnel Services, American Telephone and Telegraph, White Plains, New York. Fernandez has compiled the results of a survey of over 5,000 people in various occupations and details the child-care problems they face and ways employers can help.

One way the government has tried to encourage corporate involvement in child care is with the Dependent Care Assistance Plan, passed in 1981. This law eases the way for corporations to provide their employees with child care as a nontaxable benefit, in much the same way that medical and dental benefits are now provided.¹⁹ (p. 67) Employers may provide care themselves, contract with third parties for child-care services, or reimburse employees for some or all of their child-care expenses, according to Burud and colleagues.¹⁹ (p. 7-12) In San Francisco, California, the Board of Supervisors has adopted an ordinance mandating that developers of office projects in excess of 50,000 square feet must either build an on-site child-care

center or contribute to a child-care fund;²⁰ the city is the first in the US to have such a requirement.

One major national bill concerning corporations and child care that is currently before the US Congress would provide tax credits for companies that establish on-site child-care centers for employees.²¹ Friedman feels, however, that this would have only minor influence in a corporate decision concerning so major an investment as on-site child care.¹⁷ For individuals, the major benefit now available is the federal child-care tax credit.¹⁹ (p. 72-3) This allows parents to deduct a portion of income spent on child care as a credit against taxes owed—up to 30 percent of a maximum of \$2,400 for one-child families or \$4,800 for families with two or more children.

Corporate Child Care: Issues and Options

Many companies have pushed ahead on child care without the benefit of tax credits. In 1982 only 600 US companies provided some form of support for child care, according to Friedman.¹⁷ In 1984, although the number of mothers in the work force with children under age six increased only moderately,⁸ the number of companies providing child-care services for their employees more than tripled, to over 1,850.¹⁷ And by Friedman's estimate, the number of companies underwriting some form of child-care support has increased to some 2,500 this year and continues to grow.²²

By no means, however, can we conclude that companies everywhere are rushing to support child care. Numerous firms have balked at the trouble and expense of establishing on-site child-care centers.¹¹ Corporate management claims that their facilities lack space for a center, or that employees lack interest, or that licensing standards are too restrictive. Other companies have considered supporting child care in some fashion but instead have chosen to empha-

Table 1. Selected list of research organizations, consulting firms, and referral services concerned with corporate child care.

Adolf & Rose Associates 65 Bleecker Street New York, NY 10012	Day Care Information Center Health and Welfare Canada Tunneys Pasture Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1A 0K9
Burud & Associates, Inc. 553 South Marengo Avenue Suite 102 Pasadena, CA 91101	National Association for the Education of Young Children 1834 Connecticut Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20009
Catalyst 250 Park Avenue South New York, NY 10003	National Children's Bureau 8 Wakley Street London EC1V 7QE, UK
Center for Public Advocacy Research 12 West 37th Street New York, NY 10018	Resources for Child Care Management P.O. Box 669 Summit, NJ 07901
Child Care Action Campaign 99 Hudson Street New York, NY 10013	U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau 200 Constitution Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20210
Child Care Law Center 625 Market Street, Suite 816 San Francisco, CA 94105	Wellesley College Center for Research on Women Wellesley, MA 02181
Children's Defense Fund 122 C Street, NW Suite 800 Washington, DC 20001	Wider Opportunities for Women 1325 G Street, NW Washington, DC 20005
Conference Board 845 Third Avenue New York, NY 10022	Work/Family Directions 200 The River Way Boston, MA 02215
Corporate Child Care Consultant 161 Buckminster Road Brookline, MA 02146	Workplace Options P.O. Box 13572 Research Triangle Park, NC 27709

size other community-oriented service programs. And during the period of high US unemployment and the economic recession earlier in this decade, few companies found it necessary to institute a child-care benefits package—much less build an on-site center—as a recruitment strategy.¹¹

But with the recent economic recovery and the increasing competition for workers, businesses are being forced to consider the child-care needs of their present and prospective employees. In addition to on-site centers, companies' responses have included flexible working schedules that allow employees to accommodate family needs, permanent

part-time work with full-time benefits, flexible benefits programs that allow employees to tailor packages for their needs, financial aid for employer-sponsored or designated community centers, direct partial reimbursement to parents for child-care expenses, and information and referral programs to help employees link up with existing services.¹³ Many companies also combine options to meet the needs of their employees. ISI, for instance, offers a sliding scale of financial assistance to employees using the Caring Center and flextime for all employees.

Table 1 lists selected agencies, research organizations, and consulting firms involved in child-care issues.

Benefits of Child Care

Employees benefit from adequate child care in many ways. In a study of child-rearing problems encountered by single and working mothers, Sheila B. Kamerman, assistant professor of social policy and social planning, School of Social Work, Columbia University, New York, found that their central concern was securing quality child care.²³ "When child-care arrangements are truly satisfactory," Kamerman writes, "a large burden is removed from these women's daily lives."²³ (p. 99-100) Worry over whether a child is getting the right kind of care can distract parents' attention from their work and make their lives miserable; the peace of mind that comes with knowing a child is secure in a stimulating, nurturing environment is often cited by working parents as one of the most important benefits they derive from child care.²³ (p. 100) On-site care is also a boon for nursing mothers, who may be able to coordinate their work schedules with their nursing schedules.²⁴

Anecdotal evidence from existing child-care programs paints an extremely favorable picture of the benefits that corporations derive from providing child care. According to Burud, companies report substantially reduced turnover and training costs, reduced absenteeism and increased productivity, greater efficiency and success in recruiting, a positive impact on employee morale, and an enhanced public image as a community-minded, caring organization.¹⁹ (p. 21-32) One company claimed that its child-care program saved it over two million dollars in turnover costs in a single year;¹⁹ (p. 40) another estimated that it saved \$30,000 annually in recruitment costs due to the existence of its child-care program.¹⁹ (p. 44) Friedman cautions, however, that the benefits of sponsoring child care vary from one company to the next.¹⁷

In fact, quantifying the beneficial effects of child care to corporations is

often problematic. In a 1973 discussion of the cost-benefit methods of analysis used by employers to make decisions about child care, economist Mary P. Rowe, special assistant to the president, MIT, states that some effects attributed to the introduction of child care may be uncorrelated with such programs and that unintended effects can go unnoticed as well as unreported.²⁵ She also points out that differences in measuring presumed benefits and disparities in programs from one company to the next may invalidate comparisons. And in reviewing claims that employer-sponsored child care improves worker morale and productivity, Thomas I. Miller, Division of Research and Evaluation, City of Boulder, Colorado, found that the conclusions of even the better studies are often contradictory and that those of the less rigorous ones are supported partly or almost completely by conjecture.²⁶ Clearly, Miller says, this is a fertile field for research.

And what of the children themselves? As Michael Rutter, professor of child and adolescent psychiatry, Institute of Psychiatry, London, UK, points out, it seemed likely to early child-care researchers that prolonged daily separation of children from their parents might lead to insecurity, anxiety, or aggression in some children.²⁷ But according to a 1978 review by Jay Belsky, Division of Individual and Family Studies, College of Human Development, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, and Lawrence D. Steinberg, Program in Social Ecology, University of California, Irvine, high-quality, center-based child care has no seriously negative impact on children and does not disrupt children's bonds with their parents.²⁸

The lack of rigorous, widely applicable long-term studies prompted Belsky and Steinberg to conclude in 1978 that research was "grossly inadequate" to the task of assessing the overall impact of child care on the children involved, their parents, and society.²⁸ In 1982 Rutter²⁷

noted that researchers who have considered the effects of child care on children have tended to study high-quality, learning-oriented centers and that their results do not necessarily apply to other forms of child care. Obviously, as many in the child-care field point out, more and better research needs to be done, especially long-term studies of children of all backgrounds and of those in family child-care settings.

Whether or not research validates claims made for corporate child care, however, demand for care is expected to increase throughout the 1990s. Companies providing some form of child-care support should have an edge over their competitors in attracting new employees. But it seems to me that such considerations are beside the point; there is a moral imperative for corporations to involve themselves in the welfare of both their employees and the community at large. Now that others have done the pioneering, both government and private initiatives should make child care as standard as social security or medical benefits.

Research-Front Data

Calls for more research, however justified, should not be construed as indicating a lack of activity in this field. We identified three small 1983 and 1984 research fronts from the *Science Citation Index*[®] (*SCI*[®]) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*[®] (*SSCI*[®]) that specifically deal with child-care issues. There are others that have some indirect bearing on the field. A research front consists of recent papers that cite any of a group of high-impact books or articles that were frequently cited together. Fronts indicate areas of high research activity and as such are identified each year as part of the *ISI Atlas of Science*[®] "encyclopedia" of topics.

A few of the papers discussed in this essay are key works around which some of the child-care research fronts co-

alesced. Belsky and Steinberg's review,²⁸ for instance, as well as the article on maternal employment by Hoffman⁵ mentioned earlier, are among four core papers associated with the 1984 research front on "Effect of maternal employment on child behavior in family and day-care settings and other social interactions" (#84-2326). The other two core papers are a review of research on the emotional health of the children of working mothers by Hoffman²⁹ and a paper on the factors influencing occupational choice among women, by Sandra Schwartz Tangri, Richmond College, City University of New York.³⁰ There are 42 citing papers in this research front.

Another 1984 research front, entitled "Day care for children and other social support programs available to parents" (#84-4531), consists of 19 papers clustered around 2 core works. One of these,³¹ by Moncrieff M. Cochran and Jane Anthony Brassard, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, College of Human Ecology, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, presents a model of the relationships found in a family's social network of friends, relatives, neighbors, and child-care providers and their effects on the development of children in the family. The other,³² by K. Alison Clarke-Stewart, Department of Education, University of Chicago, assesses the accuracy and quality of the many parenting primers now available that claim to support and advise parents with "expert" guidance for raising children.

We identified a group of 49 papers in the 1983 front entitled "Prevalence, prevention, and treatment of infectious diseases in day-care centers" (#83-0562). They discuss the transmission of infectious diseases in group-care settings and how such illnesses can be treated or prevented. Lest parents become alarmed over visions of serious illnesses sweeping through child-care centers, Gordon points out that the most common of

these infectious diseases are colds and the flu and that most children quickly develop resistance to such sickness.³³ In 1984 there were 91 papers and 108 in 1985 that cited into the 9 core papers of the 1983 front. The numbers of both the core and the citing documents in this front are the largest among the fronts we identified.

In a recent article Robert F. Pass, Department of Pediatrics, University of Alabama School of Medicine, Birmingham, and colleagues have found that children in child-care centers are more likely to acquire the virus cytomegalovirus (CMV) than children kept at home. Frequently these infected children transmit this virus to their parents. This can be potentially dangerous to pregnant mothers, as well as to those who subsequently become pregnant again, since even mothers who have been infected a year or more before conception can still transmit CMV to the fetus. This may result in congenital defects including impaired vision, cerebral palsy, or mental retardation in 10 percent of the babies born to infected women. Pass and colleagues note that identifying the sources of this virus is an important step in preventing CMV infections in pregnant women.³⁴ This study and others will be important to follow to observe whether future research resolves this crucial problem.

A search of the *Index to Social Sciences and Humanities Proceedings*[®] (*ISSHP*[®]), an index of published proceedings from major societies, associations, and leading social sciences and humanities publishers, turned up four major research conferences in the past three years on various aspects of child care. In addition, using *Social Sci-Search*[®], the online version of the *SSCI*, we found about 1,500 scholarly articles published from 1972 through March 1986 on the topic of day care by using keyword searching; the numbers range from 72 to 132 articles per year. Many of these articles concern the dangers of in-

fectious illness in child-care settings, licensing and legal issues, and the effects of care on children's development. Many also deal with the training, selection, and quality of centers and teachers in center-based care. The danger in using the keywords is that we miss papers employing new terminology.

Child Care Internationally

Although the focus of this essay has been on corporate-sponsored child care in the US, the need for such care, of course, is not restricted to this country. On average, according to estimates by M.-C. Séguret, International Labour Office, Geneva, Switzerland, over half of the women age 20 to 44 throughout the world are "economically active."³⁵ Internationally, the figures range from a high of 90 percent participation in the labor force by women in the USSR to lows of 42 percent in Africa, 40 percent in South Asia, and 28 percent in Latin America.³⁵ More than 60 percent of women in East Asia are employed, as are 55 percent in Europe.³⁵ The percentage of working mothers of young children is lower than the employment rate among women in general, but it, too, has steadily increased and in some parts of the world approaches the numbers reported for all women. In Hungary and the German Democratic Republic, for example, over 80 percent of mothers with children under three are in the labor force; 90 percent of Chinese mothers are employed.³⁵

In some countries, such as Canada, child care increasingly is being financed by the government.³⁵ The Israeli government provides child care for half of all three- and four-year-olds.⁶ (p. 341) In France, over 95 percent of three-to-five-year-olds attend government-sponsored pre-primary school programs during normal working hours; even a large minority (between 30 and 40 percent) of two-year-olds are enrolled in these pro-

grams.²³ (p. 140),³⁵ Similar programs exist in Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Sweden, although the percentage of children enrolled is not quite so large.³⁵

In many other countries, including Argentina, Bolivia, Burma, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Jordan, and the Philippines—to name a few—governments have provided for child care by passing laws stipulating that employers must set up day nurseries if they employ a given number of women.³⁵ However, this raises the cost of employing women; in Mexico and Colombia, employers are instead required to contribute funds—whether or not they employ women—to public organizations set up to administer child-care facilities.

Conclusion

In the US, as Friedman has pointed out,²² one of the reasons for corporate reluctance to support child care is a deep reticence on the part of executives to involve companies in the personal affairs of their employees. Historically in this country, there has been a sharp division between home life and work life. Business executives may fear that corporate support of child care may blur those boundaries. Moreover, many companies worry that only a handful of their employees will benefit from on-site child care. And in fact, even ISI's center, a success for the over 275 families that have used it during its first four years of operation, has *directly* benefited only a small fraction of the eligible parents at ISI. We underestimated the logistical problems facing parents traveling to an on-site center with their children. Commuting to work with one or more children is, for a variety of reasons, a serious impediment for many parents. As a consequence, it is the local university

population and others in the community who are the main beneficiaries of the child-development programs at the center.

The child-abuse scandals in day-care settings that rocked the US in the last few years have heightened awareness of the responsibility involved in running a first-class child-care program. Thus, although the cost of maintaining a top-quality center is high, we gladly pay it. This is partly because the investment in our center is our best insurance against a deterioration in service and quality. As time passes, we hope that increasing numbers of ISI parents will be the beneficiaries. But we are, after all, part of the local community and the center is one of our most tangible contributions to it.

I feel that many of the difficulties I have just detailed may be regarded as typical "growing pains" that inevitably come with any new type of endeavor. The important point is that child care is an issue that will have to be faced sooner or later. And most studies conducted to date, despite their methodological shortcomings, support the view that employees are healthier, happier, and more productive when their child-care needs are met.²² The glowing words of praise from parents who use the Caring Center amply demonstrate the center's value to them; it has become a deeply appreciated part of their family life. It is all well and good to speak of figures showing lower turnover rates or greater productivity, but I can think of no greater justification for our Caring Center than the happy faces of "our" children and the gratitude of their parents.

* * * * *

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