

EQUITY IN EDUCATION

RESEARCH SNAPSHOTS

IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE WINDOWS SO YOU CAN GET SUNLIGHT

Children's Perceptions of Quality
in Early Childhood Education

UNEQUAL AND INCREASINGLY UNFAIR

How Federal Policy Creates Disparities
in Special Education Funding

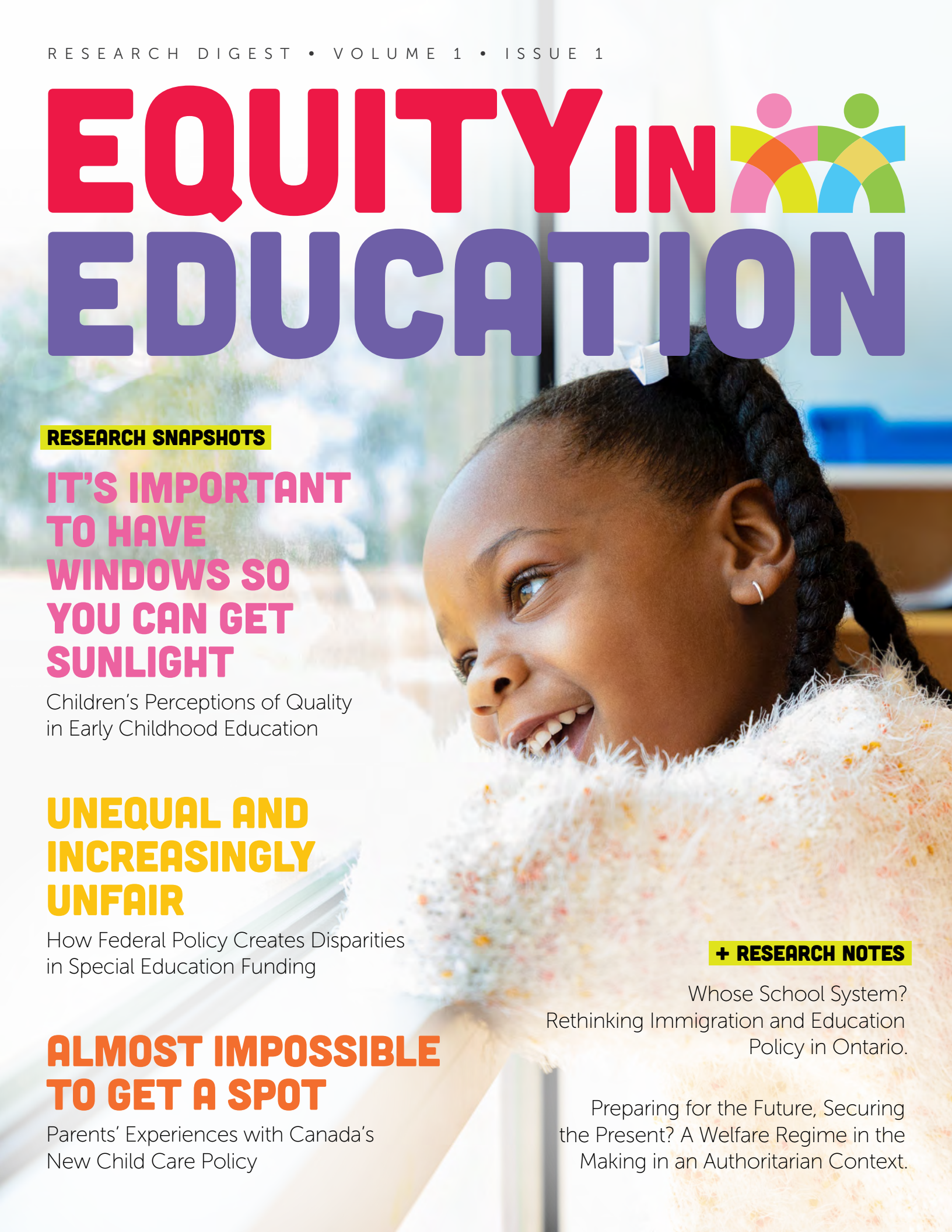
ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO GET A SPOT

Parents' Experiences with Canada's
New Child Care Policy

+ RESEARCH NOTES

Whose School System?
Rethinking Immigration and Education
Policy in Ontario.

Preparing for the Future, Securing
the Present? A Welfare Regime in the
Making in an Authoritarian Context.



HELLO!

We are excited to share our first issue of the Equity in Education Research Digest.

In this first issue, we highlight three different articles and two Research in Progress notes, that intersect in the area of education and public policies. For our Research in Progress notes, Mark Ariba describes work he did with Dr. Phil Triadafilopoulos that seeks to understand the impact of immigration on schools in Ontario. I Younan An, working with Dr. Linda White, takes us to Cambodia, where he is examining the contradiction that is Cambodia: an authoritarian state that has surprising policies supporting social welfare.

For our articles, the three in this group explore different aspects of policies relating to education. In our first article, Dr. Samantha Burns, Jesseca Perlman and Dr. Michal Perlman examine children's understandings of their early childhood education and care environments, to explore whether child perspectives should be included in policy related discussion around quality in those spaces. Tammy Kolbe and Dr. Elizabeth Dhuey examine the funding formulas around special education in the United States, and find that attempts to shift formulas in more equitable directions do not seem to have worked. And finally, Dr. Burns, Esther Yu, Jesseca Perlman, Kashish Kahlon and Dr. Perlman examine parental responses to a relatively new childcare policy in Canada, seeking to understand how it is shaping their family's lives.

Future digests will explore other aspects of our work, including the development of interventions to promote learning in early childhood, and economic issues related to education systems.

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Dr. Michal Perlman Director
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OUR PEOPLE

DESIGNING EFFECTIVE POLICY RESPONSES

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INTERVENTION CREATION AND TESTING

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WHOSE SCHOOL SYSTEM



Rethinking Immigration and Education Policy in Ontario

ARTICLE AUTHOR: **MARK ARIBA, PHD CANDIDATE**

How is education policy responding to demographic shifts that have taken place over the past 30 years? Have policymakers adjusted their frameworks, supports, and funding models to reflect new realities? Have the needs of immigrant and second-generation pupils been addressed in a systematic way, or have they been left to the discretion of boards, schools, and individual educators?

Over the past three decades, Ontario has become one of the most demographically diverse regions in North America. As immigration to Canada rose in the 1990s, from around 250,000 newcomers to nearly 500,000 in recent years, the province, and especially the GTA, absorbed a disproportionate share of that growth. Ontario's schools are primary sites of integration and have long been tasked with supporting academic and also social and civic development of children from diverse linguistic, cultural, and national backgrounds.

OUR RESEARCH

Our team, led by Dr. Phil Triadafilopoulos, has three main areas of exploration:

1 A shifting population:

We are exploring how Ontario's K–12 education policies have addressed the evolving needs of immigrant and second-generation students, using data from 1990 to the present. This period is significant because of rising immigration levels, and also because of changes to the Canadian immigration system itself.

Since the mid-2000s, Canada shifted to a “two-step” process, where many immigrants first enter on temporary visas as workers or students, only later transitioning to permanent status. This had significant implications for families with school-aged children, who may find themselves navigating Ontario's school system without the entitlements or stability enjoyed by earlier generations of immigrants.

2 Policy explorations:

We are also looking at the relationship between immigration, education, and economic policy. Canadian governments have often spoken about immigration as a tool for building a knowledge-based economy, enhancing human capital, and addressing labour market needs. Education is often cast as a partner in this work, but in practice, it is not clear how coordinated these domains are.

Has Ontario deliberately adapted educational strategies in response to these broader demographic and economic trends? Or has it relied on its school system to absorb change without ever really confronting it? How do education policies promote “soft skills” and virtues necessary for the successful functioning of immigrants in society?

3 Evaluating Progress:

We are also interested in testing a broader assumption: Ontario is doing well when it comes to immigrant student outcomes. Data often show relatively strong results for immigrant children in comparison to many other countries, but these numbers can mask internal disparities—by region, ethnocultural background, immigration class, and legal status.

Our work asks whether these relatively positive outcomes are the result of proactive policy or, instead, inertia of a relatively well-resourced system. In short, we want to know has our education system evolved in a meaningful way?

How are we exploring these questions?

We have a multi-pronged approach. First, we are collecting and synthesising literature on immigration and education in Ontario, focusing on the 1990s onward. We are reviewing media coverage to understand how these issues have been publicly discussed, contested, or ignored. We are analysing government documents, including legislation, ministry reports, policy frameworks, equity plans, and funding allocations.

This allows us to trace how immigration and diversity have been represented (or not) in official policy language over time. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we are interviewing individuals who shaped education policy in the province: senior civil servants, school board officials, and former ministers of education. These interviews will offer insight into the logic of policymaking—how issues were prioritised, how reforms were justified, and whether immigration and diversity were perceived as challenges, opportunities, or administrative afterthoughts.

Shaping equitable education policy

Our aim is to assess whether Ontario's education system has truly grappled with the social transformations it has been asked to manage.

We hope our findings will inform a more robust conversation about institutional responsiveness, equity, and inclusion, in Ontario, and in other places experiencing similar demographic shifts.

At its heart, our research asks a deceptively simple question: How do public institutions evolve as their populations change? Over the coming months, we look forward to sharing our findings and engaging with educators, policymakers, and communities across the province. We believe that better understanding Ontario's past responses can help shape more deliberate, equitable, and forward-looking policies for the future. ■

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE, SECURING THE PRESENT?

A Welfare Regime in the Making in an Authoritarian Context

AUTHOR: I YOUNAN AN, PHD CANDIDATE
SUPERVISOR: DR. LINDA WHITE

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GLOBALLY, there has been a significant paradigm shift from the traditional welfare state toward a “social investment state” (Bonoli 2005; Palier, Garritzmann and Hausermann 2022), which views social policy as a “productive capability” that is essential to the economy and the labor market (Holliday 2000; Rudra 2009). Despite this rising trend, the creation of comprehensive and inclusionary welfare and social investment states, especially in the Global South, has been slow and has received limited scholarly attention (Barrientos 2022; Morel, Palier, and Palme 2012).

My research explores the following questions: what drives authoritarian regimes to commit to social welfare expansion? Beyond basic protection, why do these states also focus on social investment policies, such as skills and training, that specifically target marginalized and vulnerable populations? Is the primary objective of these policies to serve as an economic catalyst for industrialization?

Or, are these social investment strategies driven by the political motives and elite calculations of policy actors seeking political gains and/or legitimacy?

The research: an authoritarian welfare state?

This project fills a gap in the current political science literature. As a developing country, Cambodia is rapidly undergoing industrialization and economic growth. Such growth has been fostered by the rule of a hegemonic political party that has dominated the political realm for more than 40 years. Simultaneously, the Royal Government of Cambodia has proactively shifted its policy attention towards welfare and human capital programs in the recent years. Using Cambodia as a case study, this research explores three interlocking layers of authoritarian paradoxes in investments in welfare and social investment programs.

1

Cultivating dependence through welfare programs:

The foundational anomaly is that autocrats are generally not expected to invest in welfare at all, yet some autocrats provide welfare (Knutsen and Rasmussen 2018; Grunewald 2022). Most existing explanations reduce authoritarian welfare states to either legitimization (where welfare programs buy public and mass approvals), or co-optation (where welfare programs neutralize threats from regimes' opposition). These explanations are essentially focused on the short-term. They do not account for why authoritarian governments invest in long-term programs or hard-to-reach segments of the population. Thus, this anomaly leads into two further interlocking layers of paradoxes.

2

Targeting the poor and marginalised populations:

Mares and Carnes (2009) state that the standard distributive politics models predict that welfare programs generally target the easiest to reach and most politically organized groups. However, in the case of Cambodia, the poor and marginalized populations have weak political power and collective action capacity. In addition, they are geographically dispersed, making them costly targets of welfare provision. Yet, the government of Cambodia invests in the poor population through national skills and training policies.

3

Investment uncertainty: Investments with long-term horizons yield uncertain returns for autocrats. Welfare programs focusing on social investment programs such as skills and training take years to produce results. Labour market training is one illustrative example that takes longer to materialize benefits, and political returns are often even more uncertain. Autocrats prefer any strategies that yield immediate results to restrain opposition and threats to their power.

In sum, this research is puzzling because, first, authoritarian leaders should not invest in welfare, but some do. Second, even if they invest in welfare, they should not target the hardest-to-reach population, but some do. Third, when they target the poor, they should not commit to longer term time horizons that yield high uncertainty of returns but, in Cambodia, they do. Cambodia provides a representative case to examine why some authoritarian governments invest in such targeted social investment policies, especially for the poorer population with weak political power.

Study design and research methods: how to explore these questions?

Using a mix of policy document analysis and semi-structured interviews, I am using a mixed methods approach to answer these research questions. First, I collect and review all available policy documents related to welfare and social investment programs in Cambodia written/authored by the government of Cambodia, International Organizations such as the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the International Labor Organization and the United Nations, and non-governmental organizations. Second, I conduct semi-structured interviews with political actors in Cambodia to examine their policy insights to understand the purpose of the investment in welfare and skill programs. Interview participants range from bureaucrats in government agencies and ministries, International Organization actors, street-level bureaucrats at different vocational training institutes, and other stakeholders, including economic elites and business representatives.

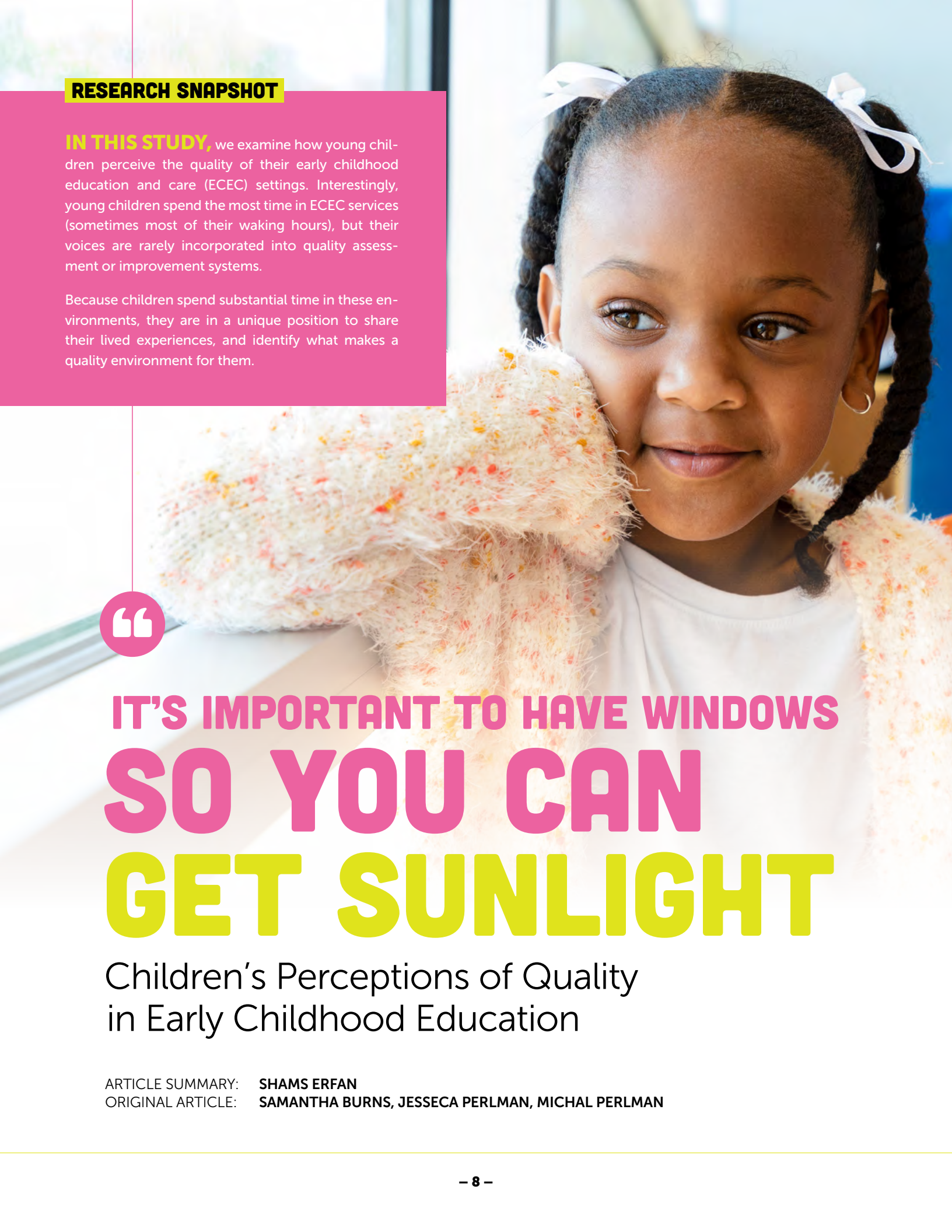
Between March 2025 to July 2025, I conducted 20 interviews in Cambodia and anticipate conducting more soon in a second round of field research.

Relevance: understanding the politics of welfare in authoritarian regimes

Understanding welfare investment in authoritarian regimes is a significant research agenda. Despite the limited attention from scholars, this research is anticipated to fill the gap in the political science literature to understand why authoritarian countries invest in social welfare programs, especially in social investment programs such as skills development. This research also seeks to bridge the literature of both authoritarian politics and welfare politics.

Lastly, this research seeks to offer new ideas and insights to help the Cambodia government to produce and understand their policy processes and results more effectively. I hope my anticipated research findings will help the Cambodian government to engage in robust policymaking and informed discussion on social welfare and social investment programs. In the near future, I am hoping to produce several policy briefs and journal articles about these research findings. Moreover, I hope to present this research findings at various political science/public policy academic conferences as well. ■





RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

IN THIS STUDY, we examine how young children perceive the quality of their early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. Interestingly, young children spend the most time in ECEC services (sometimes most of their waking hours), but their voices are rarely incorporated into quality assessment or improvement systems.

Because children spend substantial time in these environments, they are in a unique position to share their lived experiences, and identify what makes a quality environment for them.



IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE WINDOWS SO YOU CAN GET SUNLIGHT

Children's Perceptions of Quality in Early Childhood Education

ARTICLE SUMMARY: **SHAMS ERFAN**
ORIGINAL ARTICLE: **SAMANTHA BURNS, JESSECA PERLMAN, MICHAL PERLMAN**

THE STUDY AIMS TO:

- 1 Identify what children enjoy most in their care settings
- 2 Examine whether preferences differ across settings; and
- 3 Map children's perspectives onto a validated Canadian quality measure, the Assessment for Quality Improvement (AQI).

It uses photovoice, a methodology uniquely suited to working with young children.

BACKGROUND

The research places ECEC quality within developmental theory. High-quality ECEC is associated with improved language, academic, and socio-emotional outcomes, particularly for children from lower-income backgrounds. The study uses three key theories, attachment theory, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, to guide how quality is examined.

These theories collectively suggest that quality involves basic structures, as well as including relationships, the surrounding environment, and children's everyday experiences.

This research also highlights a tension: while policymakers often emphasise school readiness, scholars argue for a broader view of quality that includes children's wellbeing, belonging, empowerment, and agency. This view requires listening to children directly. As one child in the study put it, "It's important to have windows so that you can get sunlight," a statement that shows how children can express a sense of quality, through sensory and emotional experiences.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Settings

Twenty-one children, aged 3–5, participated across five ECEC programmes in Halifax, Canada. Four programmes were centre-based (three not-for-profit, one for-profit), and one was a home-based childcare setting. The centres were different in materials, room layout, and intentionality of activity setup, allowing for comparison across contexts.

Photovoice Procedure

Children were given Polaroid cameras and asked to photograph their favourite parts of their classroom or outdoor environment. They could take photos independently, with assistance, or choose to appear in the photo. Afterwards, each child participated in a semi-structured interview where they explained why they chose each image. The researcher recorded verbatim responses.

Analysis

The team coded children's responses for commonly occurring themes, refined categories through discussion with policymakers and researchers. Next, they mapped children's themes onto AQI quality indicators. When children mentioned parts of their environment not captured by the AQI, new domains were created (e.g., emotional regulation spaces).



FINDINGS

Centre-based Settings: *Children's Descriptions about Materials and Activities* - In two centres, children emphasized materials, such as blocks, Lego, animals, puzzles, costumes, scissors, play-dough. These materials were stored on shelves rather than set up as activities, and children often played independently. In two different centres, children emphasized *activities* (painting stations, spelling tables, playdough tables, and large boxes) for imaginative play. These settings featured intentionally arranged activity areas that encouraged collaboration.

Children's comments revealed understanding of how the environment shaped their play. For example, one child noted having only one activity tray "means we don't play with anybody, we play by ourself because see there's only one tray."

Children's Descriptions about Physical Spaces - Children frequently described the uses and emotional meanings of physical spaces. One centre had areas with special names: the Loft (quiet, elevated, restful), the Safe Shelf (a place to save unfinished work), the Nook (a calming space for emotional regulation), and the Picture Wall (a connection to family). Children at this centre showed evidence of understanding the space functionally and emotionally. One child said the

Nook was special because "when I feel mad and sad then I go there and feel calm." The other two centres were more traditional in their layout; there was a block area, sandbox, and quiet reading area in one, and children described the kitchen, book area, and block areas in the other.

Children's Descriptions about their Interactions with People - Very few children mentioned educators or peers as their favourite part of care. Only one child photographed an educator, and only children from one centre discussed their peers. This contrasts with adult-defined frameworks that emphasize interpersonal interactions.

Home-based Settings: Children in the home-based programme focused their comments on sensory exploration, cause-and-effect, and physical movement. They liked things such as: Water play (water table, sink, rain barrel); Natural materials (apple tree); and Gross motor materials (toy car, lawn mower, basketball).

Connecting Children's Preferences to Quality Indicators: The authors noted that children's statements about their centres were linked to many AQL domains such as the importance of accessible materials, areas for different types of play, and displays reflecting children's families. However, children also highlighted aspects *not captured* by the AQL, such as: Emotional regulation spaces (e.g., the Nook); Respect for unfinished work (e.g., the Safe Shelf); and Autonomy in choosing materials across areas. These findings suggest children's voices can meaningfully refine existing quality frameworks.

DISCUSSION

The study demonstrates that children can articulate sophisticated understandings of their environments, through concrete, sensory, and emotional language. Their preferences varied by setting, highlighting differences in material availability, intentionality of setup, and educator practices.

Interestingly, children in this study rarely mentioned educators, raising questions about adult presence, engagement, or children's understanding of "favourite" aspects. And most importantly, children emphasized aspects of their care environments - autonomy, emotional regulation, and sensory experience - which are not usually considered in current quality measures.

The research argues children's perspectives should be integrated into quality improvement efforts, as meaningful contributions that reveal both strengths and gaps in ECEC environments.

TAKEAWAYS

Photovoice is a powerful method for eliciting young children's perspectives on ECEC quality. Children's insights align with many expert-defined indicators but also extend them, especially in areas related to autonomy, emotional wellbeing, and the affective meaning of space.

Including children's voices can strengthen quality assessment tools and ensure that ECEC environments reflect the needs and experiences of the children they serve. ■



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UNEQUAL AND INCREASINGLY UNFAIR:

How Federal Policy Creates Disparities in Special Education Funding

ARTICLE SUMMARY:
SHAMS ERFAN

ORIGINAL ARTICLE:
TAMMY KOLBE, ELIZABETH DHUEY,
SARA MENLOVE DOUTRE



RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

IN THIS PAPER, researchers examine how federal special education funding is distributed across U.S. states and evaluates whether the current Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B formula allocates money fairly. The study argues that although IDEA was created to equalise educational opportunity for children with disabilities, changes made to the funding formula in 1997 have produced significant and widening disparities.

As the study notes, the revised formula “generates large and concerning disparities among states in federal special education dollars,” particularly disadvantaging states with larger child populations, higher poverty rates, and greater proportions of non-White and Black students.

POLICY CONTEXT

The study outlines the historical and policy background of IDEA Part B. Since 1975, the US federal government has provided categorical aid to help states cover the additional costs of educating children with disabilities aged 3 to 21.

IDEA originally authorised federal funding up to 40% of the national average cost of special education, but appropriations have never reached this level; in fact, they often remain below 20%.

While public debate frequently focuses on the failure to “fully fund” IDEA, the study highlights that less attention has been paid to how existing funds are distributed among states.

1 The Original Funding Formula

Initially, IDEA funding was tied directly to the number of students identified for special education in each state. This approach reflected policymakers’ intent to match funding with demand for services. However, it also raised concerns that states might be incentivised to over-identify students to secure more federal funding.

2 The 1997 Re-authorisation and the Census-Based Formula

To address these concerns, the 1997 reauthorisation introduced a new “census-based” formula. Under this system, all new federal funds are allocated based on:

- **85% according to each state’s population of children aged 3 to 21**
- **15% according to the number of children living in poverty**

At the same time, states were guaranteed a fixed “base amount” equal to what they received in 1999. This base amount does not adjust for demographic changes.

The study argues that the combination of a fixed base and a census-based calculation for new funds has created inequitable and unintended outcomes.





METHODS & DATA

Using data from 1999 to 2021, the study evaluates how funding levels have changed and whether the distribution aligns with principles of fairness used in contemporary school finance research.

It analyses funding per pupil and per *student receiving special education* and applies equity measures to assess both the spread of funding across states and how far low-funded states fall below the median.

FINDINGS

1 Growing Disparities

The study finds that disparities among states have increased sharply since the new formula took effect. In 1999, states received nearly identical amounts of federal funding per student receiving special education. By 2021, the gap between the highest-funded and lowest-funded states had widened substantially.

The difference in per-pupil funding grew from \$47 in 1999 to \$252 in 2021. The difference in funding per student receiving special education increased from \$582 to \$1,396. Both equity measures confirm rising inequality.

2 Equity Analysis: Who is Disadvantaged?

The study then examines whether these disparities reflect meaningful differences in need. If the formula were progressive, states with higher poverty, more children with disabilities, or greater educational challenges would receive more funding per capita. Instead, the opposite is true. States with the largest child populations receive significantly less funding per pupil and per student receiving special education. States with the highest poverty rates also receive less funding per pupil. States with the largest shares of non-White and Black students receive substantially fewer federal dollars per capita than states with predominantly White student populations.



TAKEAWAYS

The study argues that these disparities contradict both the original intent of IDEA and modern principles of equitable school funding. IDEA was designed to equalise educational opportunity for children with disabilities, yet the current formula systematically disadvantages states with greater need. The formula also fails to account for differences in the cost of providing special education services and does not address racialised inequities in school funding.

Simply increasing federal appropriations, such as efforts to reach the long-promised 40% funding level, will worsen existing disparities if the formula itself is not redesigned.

Researchers note this raises key questions for policymakers about whether funding should be tied to special education enrolment, broader population characteristics, student need, educational cost, or racial equity. ■



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RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

THE RESEARCH FOCUSES

on Canada's new child care policy, the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC) initiative, introduced in 2021/2022. The policy aims to make early childhood education and care (ECEC) more affordable, accessible, high-quality, and inclusive for families across Canada. Specifically, CWELCC seeks to reduce child care costs to an average of \$10 per day by 2026, increase the number of not-for-profit child care spaces, improve the quality of care, and remove barriers to inclusion.

The study examines whether the policy is achieving equitable access to child care, particularly for marginalized families who often face greater challenges in accessing quality care.



IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO GET A SPOT WHEN YOU NEED IT

Parents' Experiences with Canada's
New Child Care Policy

ARTICLE SUMMARY:
ORIGINAL ARTICLE:

SHAMS ERFAN

SAMANTHA BURNS, ESTHER YU, JESSECA PERLMAN, KASHISH KAHLON, MICHAL PERLMAN

RESEARCH METHOD

The researchers used a survey to explore parents' knowledge, experiences, and concerns about CWELCC. They surveyed 1,341 parents of young children from Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta—the four most populated provinces in Canada, representing majority of the country's population. These provinces were selected because they have diverse ECEC systems and policy contexts, which provide insights into how CWELCC is being implemented across different regions.

The survey, conducted online in May 2024, included questions about parents' knowledge of CWELCC, the benefits and challenges they experienced, and their concerns about its implementation. Parents were also asked about their family characteristics, such as income, location, ethnicity, education level, and whether they had a child with a disability. Parental mental health was also examined, to explore how family characteristics influenced parents' experiences with CWELCC, and how mental health can be interconnected with child care access.

KEY FINDINGS

1 Knowledge of CWELCC

The study revealed that 72.18% of parents had heard about CWELCC, but their understanding of the policy was limited. Most parents were aware of the financial benefits, such as reduced child care costs, but few knew about the policy's goals to improve quality and inclusivity. This lack of awareness was more common among younger parents, lower-income families, and employed parents, who may have less time or resources to seek out information about government initiatives. Families in Quebec were the least informed about CWELCC, likely because it already has a subsidized child care system in place.

The researchers noted that this lack of awareness could lead to families not fully using the program, especially those who would benefit the most. When parents don't know about CWELCC, they might miss out on financial help, good early learning programs, and the long-term benefits these programs can offer children. This emphasizes why communication strategies that are targeted and clear are important, so every family in Canada can understand and benefit from the program.

2 Benefits of CWELCC

The most commonly reported benefit of CWELCC was financial relief, with nearly half of parents citing reduced child care costs as a major advantage. Other benefits included the ability to return to work or school, more time for household tasks and self-care, and improved well-being for children. These benefits were particularly significant for employed parents, who were more likely to report financial and work-related advantages.

However, the study found that not all families experienced these benefits equally. Parents of children with disabilities were more likely to report that they did not experience any benefits from CWELCC. This highlights the need for targeted support to ensure that children with disabilities and their families can access affordable, high-quality, and inclusive child care. Black parents specifically reported increased time for social connections, underscoring how affordable child care can improve family well-being.



3 Challenges and Concerns with CWELCC

Despite the financial benefits, many parents reported challenges with accessing child care under CWELCC. The most common challenge was finding available spaces, with nearly half of parents struggling to secure full-time care. This issue was particularly pronounced in rural areas and smaller communities, where child care deserts are more common. In these areas, there are often more children than available licensed spaces, making it difficult for families to find care close to home. This lack of access disproportionately affects marginalized families, including those with lower incomes, single parents, immigrant families, and Indigenous families.

Accessibility was the most frequently reported concern, with nearly one-third of parents expressing worry.

Affordability ranked second, with Black parents more than twice as likely to report concern, indicating a need for increased financial support. This finding reflects broader patterns of economic and systemic inequality. Without measures to address access barriers and ensure culturally and economically inclusive care, universal programs like CWELCC risk perpetuating or even widening existing disparities.

4 Connections with Parental Mental Health

The study found that concerns about affordability and inclusion were associated with increased anxiety and depression in parents. Parents who worried about the cost of child care reported higher levels of anxiety, while those concerned about inclusion reported higher levels of depression.

Interestingly, the study did not find a direct link between experiencing benefits from CWELCC and improved mental health. This may be because the financial relief provided by the policy has not yet translated into noticeable improvements in parental mental health, or because the policy primarily benefits middle- and higher-income families, who are less likely to experience severe financial stress due to child care costs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

The research highlights several ways in which CWELCC could affect marginalized communities:

1 Access Challenges:

Marginalized families, such as those living in rural areas or smaller communities, often face greater difficulties accessing child care due to limited availability of spaces. This makes it harder for them to benefit from the policy's affordability goals.

2 Affordability Concerns:

While CWELCC aims to reduce costs, some families, particularly those with lower incomes, struggle to afford child care. Black parents were more likely to report concerns about affordability, reflecting broader economic inequalities.

3 Inclusion Barriers:

Families with children with disabilities and those from marginalized racial and ethnic groups may face additional barriers to accessing inclusive child care. This can lead to feelings of exclusion and stress for parents.

4 Mental Health Impacts:

Concerns about affordability and inclusion are linked to increased anxiety and depression in parents, particularly those from marginalized communities. This highlights the importance of policies prioritizing the needs of vulnerable children and families.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY IMPROVEMENTS

This study suggests several ways to improve the implementation of CWELCC, listed below:

1 Increase Awareness:

Improve communication strategies to ensure all families understand the full range of benefits offered by CWELCC, including its goals for quality and inclusion.

2 Expand Capacity

Focus on increasing the number of licensed child care spaces, particularly in rural areas and smaller communities.

3 Monitor Quality

Prioritize maintaining and improving the quality of child care services, even as they work to expand access and reduce costs.

4 Targeted Support

Attention should be given to families with children with disabilities and those from marginalized communities to ensure they can access high-quality, inclusive care. ■



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