

PARENTS' USE OF ONLINE CHILD CARE LICENSING REPORTS AS PART OF CHILD
CARE DECISIONS IN THE STATE OF GEORGIA

by

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(Under the Direction of Diane Bales)

ABSTRACT

This study examined parents' awareness and use of three types of child care reports through the lens of ecological systems theory. Participants included 122 parents with children ages 0 to 6 years, from 23 counties in Georgia. The study was a quantitative, cross-sectional, online survey that included univariate and bivariate data analysis. Analyses revealed that only half of parents were aware of the reports, and a large majority of parents did not know how to access them. After learning about the reports while taking the survey, the majority of parents reported that the online reports were an important part of child care decisions, and over 90% of parents reported they would use the online reports for future child care decisions. More parent outreach is needed to help parents understand what online child reports are and how to access them.

INDEX WORDS: CHILD CARE, LICENSING REPORTS, PARENTS, GEORGIA

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to events, individuals, and organizations. My first dedication goes to the birth of my daughter which inspired me to look at this topic area for my thesis. My second dedication goes to my husband who has endured all of my stress in writing. My third dedication goes to my parents who spent time with their granddaughter so I could write. My fourth dedication goes to Bright from the Start, who I worked for and who gave me so much knowledge about child care licensing. My fifth dedication goes to all the parents who have and are searching for the best child care settings for their children. It is not an easy task to look for quality child care. My last dedication goes to God for giving me the strength, endurance, and knowledge to finish.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Child Care Aware® of America (2014) news brief states there are almost 11 million children in child care arrangements across the United States. These arrangements include child care learning centers, family child care homes, and in-home child care, meaning the child is cared for in his or her own home by someone other than the parents. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education (2011) stresses how important it is that early child care environments are of high quality. Better overall developmental outcomes have been associated with high quality early child care environments (Belsky et al., 2007; Burchinal et al., 2000; Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010). Longitudinal research has clearly shown that higher quality care in early childhood is related to higher scores on academic and cognitive achievements, as well as fewer behavior problems (Vandell, Belsky, Burchinal, Steinberg, & Vandergrift, 2010). However, America's child care environments have been reported to be mediocre in quality across the United States (Barnard-Brak, Nuner, Sulak, & Davis, 2014; N. D. Forry & Hofferth, 2011; Gordon, Fujimoto, Kaestner, Korenman, & Abner, 2013; Hallam, Bargreen, & Ridgley, 2013; Hughes-Belding, Hegland, Stein, Sideris, & Bryant, 2012; Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011).

Parents' decisions about child care arrangements are a part of a complex decision making process. Parents make child care decisions based upon the information they receive, their values and beliefs, knowledge about child care quality, and the extent to which they are satisfied with

their child care choice (Kim & Fram, 2009). Parents' decisions about child care are often limited in the number of providers considered, the length of the search, and the sources of information considered (Nicole Forry, Isner, Daneri, & Tout, 2014). Many parents rely on family or friends to refer child care environments and many decisions are made in one day (Weber, 2011).

There are some disadvantages to relying on family and friends as the only sources of information for child care decisions. One disadvantage is that information about providers may be unreliable (Ispa, Thornburg, & Venter-Barkley, 1998). Parents who are recommending child care may not know much about the provider and may only have interactions based on drop off and pick up times. Another disadvantage is that each child may not always have the same experiences in a single child care program (Kagan & Neville, 1992). Lastly, when parents rely on social networks, information is filtered through cultural norms of parents' social networks, which can limit decisions (Gilbert, 1998; Meyers & Jordan, 2006). For example, Kim and Fram (2009) suggest that cultural norms surrounding the value parents place on learning versus practicality may be influenced by social networks. For example, a parent may discuss where to place their child with a friend who is also a parent. That friend refers a provider he or she used based upon the practicality of cost. In thinking about this disadvantage, if parents only choose providers based on a value of practicality they may have limited choices available in the communities they live and work. Parents may only have one or two providers that are open the hours they work, charge a price they can afford, and are located close to work or home.

Because parents often make child care decisions quickly and not all sources of information maybe an accurate reflection of quality of care, parents need easily accessible sources of information about child care providers that is as current and accurate as possible. Many states are now trying to help parents make informed decisions about child care settings by

making licensing and complaint reports available online. The state of Georgia provides sources of information to parents online through their licensing reports, quality ratings, and license revocation notices. This study examined how much of a role these three types of online child care reports play in parents' decision-making process when choosing child care in Georgia. Each type of report will be discussed in detail below.

Online Licensing Reports. There are two types of online licensing reports, routine biannual unannounced visits and complaint investigations that have been substantiated. The biannual reports provide details about whether and how well the providers are following current state child care regulations. These reports can provide parents with a quick reference about how the program is doing in following state laws in regards to keeping children healthy and safe while in care. The second type of online licensing report is a complaint investigation. When the agency receives a complaint about a provider violating health and/or safety rules online, over the phone, or by mail, a trained consultant goes to investigate the complaint. Complaints which are found to be true, or substantiated, are posted online on DECAL's website.

Online Quality Rated Reports. The Quality Rated initiative is a voluntary program that providers can participate in to rate and or improve the quality of their child care environment. Quality Rated assesses and communicates participating programs' level of quality. Quality Rated assigns a quality rating (one star, two star, or three star) to early education and school-age care programs that meets a set of defined program standards that are above the minimum licensing rules. The number of stars a provider receives is based on scores from observations and a portfolio. One star is the first step above minimum licensing standards and three stars is the highest step above the minimum licensing standards.

Online Revocation Reports. Online revocation notices provide parents with information about providers who have had their license taken away for the following reasons: non-payment of fees, multiple rule violations due to safety and health concerns, or violations that resulted in immediate danger or death to a child in care. Unfortunately, some providers have been found to still operate after state closures. Online revocation notices provide parents with an additional source of information about providers that may try to operate outside of state regulations.

All three types of reports can provide valuable information to parents. Complaints about child care environments serve as an early warning before more serious adverse events occur (Association & Pediatrics, 2011). Licensing and complaint reports provide key sources of information about the health, safety, and quality of child care providers (NACCRRRA, 2013). National agencies related to child care recommend that states post licensing reports and complaints online as a reference for parents seeking child care (NACCRRRA, 2013; Office of Child Care, 2014). When parents do not have access to these reports they have no way of knowing before enrolling a child in care whether a child care provider is compliant with state requirements, if the provider is Quality Rated, and/or if the provider may have numerous substantiated complaints. It is important to understand parents' decision-making in order to have an increase in the likelihood that policies, programs, and outreach will be designed to effectively support this process and improve child and family outcomes (Weber, 2011).

Parents need easily accessible and accurate information about child care providers to make well informed decisions about the best settings to place their children while working so their children can receive high quality care as well as experience the best possible developmental outcomes. Even though online reports are available to parents, the literature does not reveal

whether parents are accessing the reports, and if they are using the reports to inform their child care decisions in Georgia.

Statement of the Problem

Researchers have found that parents may not have accurate information in order to make well-informed decisions about the best child care setting for their child (Gable & Cole, 2000; Rose & Elicker, 2008). One way of providing more accurate information to parents is through access to online licensing and complaint reports (NACCRRRA, 2013). However, no studies have looked at the degree to which parents are aware of and use online licensing reports to help make decisions about early child care arrangements in Georgia.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to explore parents' knowledge and use of online child care licensing reports, and to evaluate the importance of these reports as part of parents' child care decisions. This study looked at parental child care decisions through the lens of ecological systems theory.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to understand how online licensing reports may influence parents' decisions about child care, it is important to examine what the existing research literature says about parents' decision-making process when choosing child care. This review is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the theoretical framework around which the study will be framed. The second section reviews the literature on parents' decision making processes surrounding child care arrangements. The last section discusses the gaps in the current research concerning parents' decision making about child care.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers have emphasized the importance of ecological approaches to examine the diverse factors that affect children in child care environments, including parents' decision making about child care arrangements (Marshall, 2004; McCartney & Phillips, 2008). Ecological systems theory looks at child development within the context that an individual's experience is nested within interconnected systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). According to ecological systems theory there are four systems, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. Each system plays an important role in parents' decisions about child care arrangements. This study's focus was on how much of a role Georgia's online licensing reports, a part of the exosystem, have on parents' decision making.

Figure 1. Possible Influences on Parents' Child Care Decisions

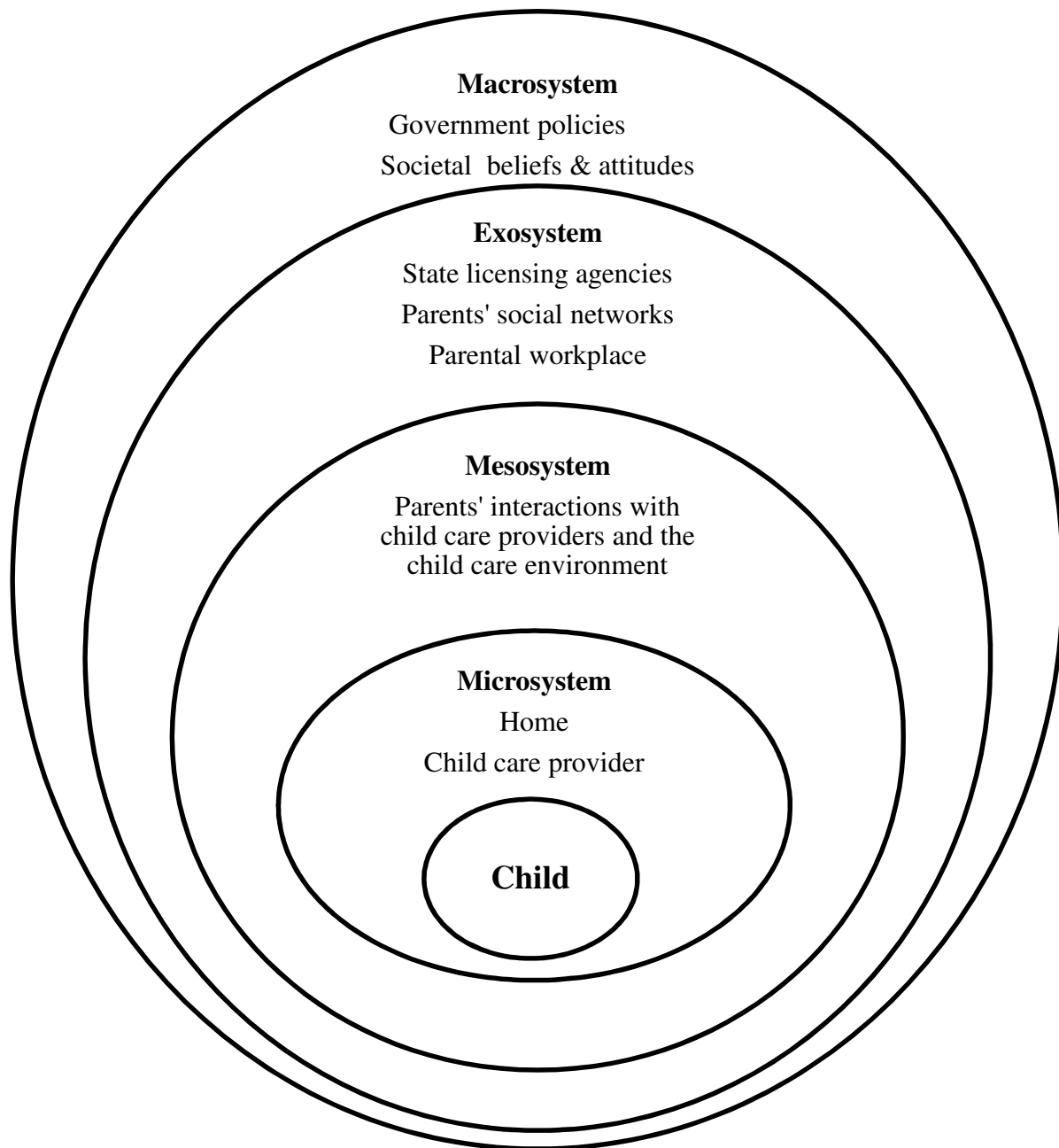


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1989)

Influences in the Microsystem of Child Care

The microsystem is the first layer around the child. The microsystem is characterized by daily interactions among individuals. Young children's experiences and relationships at home and child care are a part of the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Children's immediate experiences in child care come from their interactions with providers, teachers, peers, and the materials in the child care environment (McCartney & Phillips, 2008). Research has shown that a high quality child care microsystem affects overall developmental outcomes for children (Zaslow et al., 2010).

A few specific examples of factors in the child care environment that have been linked to better developmental outcomes are: (1) when teachers use positive guidance as a form of discipline (Longstreth, Brady, & Kay, 2013), (2) when teachers provide direct supervision of children while in care (Norlin, Crawford, Bell, Sheng, & Stein, 2011; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Whitebook, 1989), and (3) when the indoor and outdoor environments are rated overall to be healthy and safe by trained observers (Association & Pediatrics, 2011; Cradock, O'Donnell, Benjamin, Walker, & Slining, 2010). When children receive higher quality care, their overall life outcomes are usually better (Burchinal et al., 2000).

Influences in the Mesosystem on Parents' Child Care Decisions

The child care environment is nested within the mesosystem of influences on parents' decisions. The mesosystem is defined as the interconnections among contexts that the developing child experiences and the interactions between two or more microsystems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Marshall, 2004; McCartney & Phillips, 2008). There are two specific examples of influences in the mesosystem related to child care decisions. First, the factors that influence parents' initial child care choices and any changes in child care choices are

a part of this system (Marshall, 2004; McCartney & Phillips, 2008). A second factor that influences decisions is the interactions parents have with the child care provider and environment. Both factors are discussed below.

The first interconnection between parents and a child care environment takes place even before a parent places a child in a provider's care; it starts with the factors that may influence their decision-making process (Marshall, 2004; McCartney & Phillips, 2008). Parents' decisions about child care have been found to be complex and influenced by a number of factors (Katherine Kensinger & James, 2008; Weber, 2011). Weber (2011) lists the following factors that influence parents' decisions: education of parents, family income, age of children, special needs of parents or children, number of children and adults in the household, and race, ethnicity, culture, and home language spoken. There are many factors that parents have to consider when choosing child care, and these factors influence which provider is chosen.

A second way parents' decisions are part of the mesosystem is through parents' daily interactions with the child care provider and child care environment once the child is enrolled. These interactions provide the parents with either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their child care decision, and may or may not lead to changes in child care choices (Weber, 2011). One study found that despite parents' stated high levels of satisfaction, twenty-six percent of parents surveyed indicated that they wanted to change their child care arrangements (Hofferth, 1991). A second study found that parents who took longer than a month to decide on child care and who considered multiple options were more likely to switch care after 6 months of enrollment, compared to parents who only considered one arrangement (Gordon & Högnäs, 2006). Parents may decide upon a child care arrangement but due to interactions with the provider and environment decide they prefer a different child care arrangement.

Influences in the Exosystem on Parents' Child Care Decisions

The exosystem involves the larger social system that consists of links between the social settings that affects a child's development, even though the child does not actively participate in this system (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Parents' social networks, work environments, and government regulations of child care can be considered part of this exosystem (Marshall, 2004; McCartney & Phillips, 2008). Each of these will be discussed below.

Work Environments. Some places of employment have on-site child care or provide monetary child care supplements as part of their employee benefits package; however, this is not the norm. Some parents have employment where they have fixed schedules and work an 8 to 5 shift Monday through Friday, whereas other parents' places of work may consist of nonstandard work hours, unpredictable schedules, and fluctuating hours. Weber (2011), in a research brief, discusses how parents may have to consider certain factors related to work when making decisions about child care. First, parents may have to consider how far they may have to travel from work to child care provider. A second consideration would be whether the child care provider accommodates the parents' work hours. A final consideration would be whether the parent could afford the provider based upon the income from their job. Parents have reported that affordable, quality child care is often unavailable, particularly during non-standard hours (Heyman, 2000).

A few specific studies illustrate how parents' work influences child care decisions. A qualitative study of 86 low-income families from across the US found that the type of child care low-income parents choose heavily depends upon parents' work hours and shifting work schedules (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012). The authors found that low-income parents chose providers who were more flexible in non-standard work hours and shift work schedules. The

National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) is a set of four integrated, nationally representative surveys conducted in 2012. This study compared the main reason parents searched for their most recent child care. They compared parents' work related needs verses child's educational and social needs across three different age groups. The study found that 51 percent of parents with infants and toddlers made their most recent child care search due to a change in their work.

Parents' Social Networks. Parents' social networks are another influence on parent decisions about child care. Parents mostly rely on their social networks (family, friends, and neighbors) as sources of information when making child care decisions (Burstein, Layzer, Cahill, Werner, & McGarry, 2007; Chase & Valorose, 2010; N Forry, Tout, Rothenberg, Sandstrom, & Vesely, 2013; Witte, Queral, & Long, 2004). For example, a parent may choose a child care provider because a friend, neighbor, or someone in their online social network recommended that provider.

Government Agencies. A third example in this exosystem is government agencies that regulate child care environments. States regulate child care environments for compliance with health and safety rules and document their visits to child care providers in reports that reflect how well they are following the rules. The reports about providers are available to the public, either by going to the agency in person or through online access. These reports provide valuable information about child care providers for parents and the online access offers immediate information to parents. Parents' use of these online reports may affect the decision making process in choosing a child care provider. Another aspect of the government regulation is states' voluntary participation in quality rating systems. Quality rating systems provides information that goes beyond following basic health and safety regulations. If states provide a quality rating

system, and allow parent access to a provider's quality rating, this information could also affect the decision making process in choosing a child care provider.

Influences in the Macrosystem on Parents' Child Care Decisions

The macrosystem may influence the other systems through public policies, federal laws, as well as social and cultural values (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Public policies and federal laws affect child care options for parents (McCartney & Phillips, 2008).

One example of a public policy that affects child care is the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act (CCDBG). The federal government gives money to states to distribute to low-income parents to use toward child care costs. This monetary aid helps low income parents afford higher quality care (Burstein et al., 2007). In order for parents to receive this monetary aid, there are certain rules and regulations states and providers must follow.

A second public policy affecting child care providers is the President's new early learning initiative. This initiative calls for high quality care to be accessible to all children from birth through age 5. A part of this initiative is called The Preschool for All initiative, which will aim to improve quality and expand access to preschool through a partnership with all 50 states. It will provide all low and moderate income families with four-year-olds access to high quality preschool, and will encourage states to serve four-year-olds from middle-class families. The initiative also promotes high quality early education programs for children under age four.

Focus of this Study

The ecological systems theory encompasses all the systems that affect children. In looking at child care decisions through the lens of ecological systems theory, the current study examines whether and to what extent child care licensing reports (a part of the exosystem) influence parental decisions about child care providers (a part of the mesosystem).

Parents' Decisions about Child Care

It is important to understand parents' decisions about child care (mesosystem), because the child care arrangement (microsystem) that is chosen plays a role in developmental outcomes for children later in life (Camilli et al., 2010). The literature about parents' decisions about child care can be broken down into two areas: (1) parents' priorities and preferences and (2) the types of information sources relied on in selecting preferred child care (N Forry et al., 2013).

Parents' Priorities and Preferences in Decision-Making

Using various research methods, researchers have found that there are many factors that make up parents' child care priorities and preferences. For the most part, parents rate quality characteristics (e.g., provider relationship with child, curriculum, physical environment, equipment, and staff training) as being more important than practical ones (e.g., location, hours of operation, availability, cost) (Peyton, Jacobs, O'Brien, & Roy, 2001). However, some studies suggests parents are more influenced by the practical factors (Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996). Cost has been found to be a significant factor in some studies (Chase & Valorose, 2010; Hofferth & Wissoker, 1992; Seo, 2003). However, Kim and Fram (2009) found that hours and location were important and that cost was less important. Some research has actually found quality factors to be more important than practical factors. For example, a survey of 355 mothers from a large metropolitan and southern area of the United States found three top factors that emerged when using ratings, rank orders, and conjoint analysis of factors in choosing child care. The factors were warmth of caregiver, education of staff, and a play based curriculum. Cost was not found to be one of the top priorities in this study (Rose & Elicker, 2008).

Other research has found a combination of quality and practical characteristics listed as top preferences for parents. For example, location, cost, trusting the provider, and quality were

the top four factors in choosing a provider (Chase & Valorose, 2010). In the Maryland Child Care Choices Study of 2013 there were four preferences that emerged: high quality, close to home, trusting the provider, and affordable cost (Rothenberg, 2013).

Variations in demographic variables related to these factors have been found across the literature. Across race and ethnicity all mothers prioritized safety, warmth, and planned activities (A. Shlay, Weinraub, & Harmon, 2007). One study found trust to be rated as a top factor especially when parents are lower income (Mensing, French, Fuller, & Kagan, 2000).

Studies have shown that parents want high quality care for their children (Rose & Elicker, 2008; Weber, 2011). Twenty percent of parents in the Maryland Child Care Choices Study of 2013 said that the main reason they chose their current child care was because they thought it was high quality or had been told it was high quality (Rothenberg, 2013). Low-income parents placed high value on quality of arrangements, but not all parents were able to find the high quality desired due to issues in finding affordable high quality care that meet their non-standard work hours (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012). Additionally, researchers have investigated how quality rating systems are valued by parents in finding high quality providers. Eighty-eight percent of parents in the Child Care Use in Minnesota survey study of 2009 stated that having a quality rating system would be helpful in selecting the highest quality child care. Specific demographic variables that emerged in this study were that parents of color and that had lower incomes were more likely to report that the quality rating would be “very helpful” (Chase & Valorose, 2010).

It is important to note that parents may not always see quality in the same way as trained assessors (Barbarin et al., 2006; Helburn & Bergmann, 2002; Meyers & Jordan, 2006). In looking at how ratings are different between these two groups, parents usually rate providers’

quality higher than trained assessors (Cryer & Burchinal, 1997; Cryer, Tietze, & Wessels, 2002). For example, a survey study of 727 infant and toddler parents and 2,407 preschooler parents across four states found that parent scores were similar with trained observer scores when respondents had children who were in high quality programs. However, when children were in medium or low scoring programs as scored by the trained observers, parents continued to assign high scores to those classrooms. These researchers suggest the differences in quality seen between trained observers and parents may be due to stronger parental values about aspects of quality that may interfere with parental monitoring. If a parent values caregiver affection then they may not be able to accurately access this value because of the importance it has to that parent (Cryer & Burchinal, 1997). This is only a hypothesis by the researchers and the explanation between the differences in trained observers and parents has not been directly studied. This is one reason access to and use of licensing reports and quality ratings is so important. These reports provide more objective information about the safety and quality of providers that parents may miss because they may not understand what quality looks like.

Another indicator of quality is national accreditation (Association & Pediatrics, 2011; Fiene, 1992). Centers can be accredited by several accrediting organizations, including the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Family day care homes can be accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC). One study gathered data on parents' rated importance of national accreditation. Shlay (2010) surveyed a total of 658 White, Hispanic, and African American parents in Pennsylvania about child care preferences. The study found that all parents when selecting child care providers rated accreditation as neither more or less desirable from scenarios designed to reveal parents' child care preferences. The authors suggest that accreditation is a potential indicator of quality care,

but that this indicator may not be understood, recognized, and/or valued by parents as an indicator of quality.

Sources of Information in Decision-Making

Parents have a variety of information sources they can consult in their child care searches. These information sources can be broken down into two categories: formal and informal. Informal sources include family, friends, and neighbors. Formal sources of child care information include media ads, doctors, child care resource and referral agencies, quality rating systems and state licensing agencies (N Forry et al., 2013).

In order to understand the information sources that are available to parents, a few terms need to be defined. Resource and referral agencies are available to help parents find child care free of charge. Quality rating systems evaluate and communicate a provider's level of quality based on specific criteria in each state. State licensing agencies monitor child care providers for adherence to state rules.

Informal Sources. Research has found that parents mostly rely on informal sources, like family and friends, for information in their search for child care. The National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2014) found that about 70 percent of the households across the United States used informal sources to make child care decisions. Among informal sources, friends are the most common source utilized for child care decisions (Chaudry, Henly, & Meyers, 2010; Iruka & Carver, 2006). The Maryland Child Care Choices Study (2011) studied child care decision making of parents who had applied for Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) and found that the majority of parents used the internet to learn about child care options, but chose a provider they learned about from informal sources.

Formal Sources. Not all states have quality rating systems, but most states have resource and referral agencies. Many studies have asked questions related to using resource and referral agencies instead of quality rating systems. These are two different types of information sources. Only 10 percent of families were found to use resource and referral sources in the decision-making process (National Survey of Early Care and Education project Team, 2014; Willer et al., 1990).

Quality rating systems have been studied in regards to awareness, perceptions, and use. Researchers have found that most parents do not know about the quality rating system in their states. If they are aware of the quality rating system in their state, they usually find out through their current provider (Elicker, Langill, Ruprecht, Lewsader, & Anderson, 2011; Starr et al., 2012; Tout et al., 2011). Parents rate having their child in a quality rated program as being somewhat to very important (Elicker et al., 2011). Some parents say they would pay more for programs with higher quality ratings (Starr et al., 2012).

Shlay (2010) found that 41 percent of parents did not know if their current provider had a quality rating and that parents had a lack of awareness and understanding of the state's quality rating program. Furthermore, the parents in this study did not rate national accreditation as a potential indicator of quality in child care. The researchers could not conclude from their study if parents understood or recognize national accreditation as an indicator of quality or if national accreditation was not a part of the parents' values and beliefs. The parents did value the state's quality rating system but did not have correct information about the system. The researchers point out that although information is available, it may be misunderstood, as was the case with the quality rating system in this study.

Last, two studies have looked at impacts of online licensing reports related to parents' decisions about child care. Witte and Queralt (2004) found that posting online licensing reports, and outreach about the online reports through the media, resulted in a 10 percent increase in the vacancy rate for enrollment for centers with failing inspection reports posted online. However, through using regression and quasi-experimental strategies, the results were not statistically significant between enrollment numbers in centers that passed or failed inspections. The researchers compared vacancy rates for passing centers as well and found an 8 percent increase in vacancy rates. In order for this result to be significant, the difference in the two vacancy rates would need to be significantly different from zero. The study was conducted in Broward County, Florida (a large metropolitan area) which had a population of 1,623,018 spread over 30 municipalities. The study used the number of children documented on licensing reports, as well as referral agencies' enrollment information, to measure differences in enrollment numbers. The study did not directly survey parents about using the online licensing reports when making child care decisions. Even with these limitations, this study does suggest that online reports may influence parents' decision-making about child care.

A second study was related to the evaluation of the Saint Paul, Minnesota early childhood scholarship program. The study found that when a part of a parent's scholarship required them to choose a quality rated provider, the parents always used the states' star ratings to find a quality provider. Additionally, 3 of the 18 parents that participated in the focus group used a website to find a quality provider (Gaylor, Spiker, Williamson, & Ferguson, 2011). This study shows that when parents were given information about quality, how to find quality providers, and actually required to choose a provider with a quality rating, parents were able to use the internet to find and choose higher quality child care.

Overall, the literature about parents' decision-making about child care suggests that parents consider many factors when choosing a child care provider and that these factors may or may not vary across demographic variables. Most parents rely on informal sources of information in making decisions, which may limit the number of providers considered as well as limit the amount of accurate information received about a provider. Parents have reported that having a child in high quality child care would be somewhat to very important. However, parents may not know about the quality rating systems in their state or how these systems rate quality, even though they believe that a quality rating system would be helpful in selecting high quality care. Finally, little is known about the use and value parents place on licensing reports that maybe available online in their state. No studies have looked at these factors in Georgia.

Gaps in the Literature

Most of the research regarding online child care reports has focused on quality ratings in various states. The literature suggests that licensing reports and quality rating systems are a more accurate account of a provider's quality of care than parents' observations. Specifically, online reports about child care providers can provide parents with a quick reference about a provider's performance in meeting health and safety requirements as well as provide information about the quality environment. The 2014 re-authorization of the CCDBG calls for states to make these reports easily available by electronic means; however, we do not know whether parents are currently utilizing these reports when available, and whether they make a difference in their child care decision-making process. No studies have asked parents directly about their use of online licensing reports as part of their decision-making process in choosing child care. The literature does not address whether parents with children ages 0-6 years are aware of these online reports, whether parents would utilize these reports in decision making, and how much preference they

would give these reports in relation to other factors that are usually part of the decision-making process when choosing child care. This study addressed the questions of parental awareness and use of online reports.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to find out whether parents of children age 0- 6 years are aware of and use online child care licensing reports to help determine child care arrangements. The study will attempt to answer the following questions in regard to online child care licensing reports, complaints reports, and license revocation reports:

- (1) Are parents aware of these reports, do they know how to access the reports, and have they ever used the reports as part of their child care decisions?
- (2) How important were the reports in parents' most recent child care decision? How did the importance of the reports compare to importance of other factors that were a part of parents' most recent child care decision?
- (3) After being given a definition of what each type of online report is, how important do parents' feel it is to review these reports as part of their child care decisions? Also, what is the likeliness that parents would use the reports for future decisions?
- (4) Is there a relationship between how important parents rated online licensing reports as part of their most recent decision and parents who are likely to review the online reports as part of future child care decisions?
- (5) Is there a relationship between parents who believe it is important to review online licensing reports as part of the decision-making process and parents who are likely to review the online reports as part of future child care decisions?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

This study used quantitative methods to investigate whether online child care licensing reports influence parents' decision-making process when choosing child care arrangements. The data for this study were collected from a survey designed by the researcher to measure the influence online child care licensing reports have on the child care decisions parents make in Georgia. This chapter includes: (a) a description of the participants, including demographic data; (b) a summary of the study design; (c) the procedure; (d) a description of the measurement tools; and (e) the data analysis methods.

Participants

Participants were 165 parents with children ages 0 to 6 years old who lived in Georgia. Forty-two of the 165 participants who started the survey were missing about 90% of the data needed for analysis and were removed from the sample. Therefore, the final sample was comprised of 122 participants. Parents were recruited through social media sites (such as Facebook), electronic listservs, and flyers and surveys placed at child care learning centers, mothers' groups, doctor's offices, businesses and restaurants in counties around northeast Georgia. Paper questionnaires with return postage were also mailed to 10 who requested a paper version; no parents returned the paper surveys. A part of the recruitment process included an

option for parents to be entered into a drawing for one of ten gift cards, each valued at 10 dollars, whether or not they completed the survey.

Study Design

The study was a quantitative, cross-sectional survey designed to measure the influence online child care licensing reports on parents' child care decisions. The sample was a convenience sample of parents willing to complete the survey. Snowball sampling was encouraged; friends, colleagues, and respondents were asked to tell others about the online survey.

Measures

The questionnaire for this study included six sections: (1) factors that influenced decision-making related to child care, (2) awareness and use of online child care reports in decision-making, (3) importance of reviewing online reports in making child care decisions, (4) likeliness of using online reports for future child care decisions, (5) knowledge of current child care provider's licensure, accreditations, and Quality Rating, and (6) parent demographics. The survey is included in Appendix A. Questions in two of the sections were combined to form measurement scales: importance of reviewing online reports in making child care decisions and the likeliness of using online reports for future child care decisions.

Section 1: Factors that Influenced Decision-Making Related to Child Care

This measure used a 5 point Likert scale (1 = not important, 2 = important, 3 = not sure/neutral, 4 = important, 5 = very important) to assess how much various factors (including, but not limited to, online reports) influence parents' child care decision-making process. The parents saw the following statement: "The next section will look at

what factors may have influenced your child care decision. Please select how important each factor was in your most recent child care decision". Participants rated the following statements using the above Likert scale: (1) "word of mouth from other parents and friends" (2) "the provider was nationally accredited" (3) "the provider offers high quality care" (4) "tour of the facility" (5) "location of the center" (6) "number of children and teachers in my child's classroom" (7) "days and hours of operation" (8) "cost" (9) "type of curriculum" (10) "educational level of teachers" (11) "warmth of provider" (12) "trusting my child's provider" (13) "acceptance of subsidies" (14) "referral from a resource and referral office" (15) "meets my child's special needs" (16) "safety of child care environment" (17) "cleanliness of environment" (18) "online licensing reports". The first 17 items in this measure came from four studies (Fram & Kim, 2008; Rose & Elicker, 2008; Rothenberg, 2013; A. B. Shlay, 2010) which reported one or more of these factors as being the most cited by parents' in the decision-making process of choosing child care. All of the items were chosen because more than one study listed the item as an influence. The last item about online licensing reports is a new variable that was the primary focus of this study.

Section 2: Parents' Awareness and Use of Online Child Care Reports in Decision-Making

For this measure, parents reported their use of online child care reports (located on DECAL's website, www.dec.state.ga.us) in making child care decisions. To measure awareness of these reports, participants answered "yes", "no", or "I don't remember" to the following questions: (1) "Did you know that every child care provider that is licensed by the state of Georgia has reports available online that show their compliance with licensing rules?"; (2) "Do you know how to access these reports on the internet?"; (3)

“Have you ever accessed child care provider licensing reports from The Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) website, www.dec.state.ga.us?”; (4) “Did you use online child care licensing reports found on www.dec.state.ga.us to help in your child care decision?” This section of questions was placed after the importance ratings for what factors may have influenced parents’ child care decision so it would not influence the importance scale ratings for online reports.

Section 3: The Importance of Reviewing Online Reports about Child Care Providers

Parents first read the statement, “There are different reports available to give parents information about child care providers. One report is a licensing report that tells how well child care providers are following state child care rules. A second report, Quality Rated, gives a one, two, or three star rating on the quality provided. A third report, a revocation, tells when a licensed provider has had their license to operate a child care taken away. Please think about how important you feel these reports are to review when choosing child care.” The parents rated each of the following statements using a 5 point Likert scale (1=not important, 2=somewhat important, 3=not sure/neutral, 4=important, 5=very important): (a) “I feel reviewing licensing reports about child care providers is an important part of making child care decisions.” (b) “I feel reviewing quality rated reports about child care providers is an important part of making child care decisions.” (c) “I feel reviewing revocation reports about child care providers is an important part of making child care decisions.” All three of the above questions were combined to form a scale. This scale was constructed by summing the responses to three items on the above 5 point Likert scale, with a possible range of 1– 15. This measure will be referred to as the importance scale in the rest of the paper.

Section 4: Likelihood of Using Online Reports for Future Child Care Decisions

For this measure, parents rated the likelihood of using the three types of online licensing reports for future child care decisions. Parents first saw the statement, “Please use the following scale to rate how likely you are to view each of the following reports for future child care decisions”. The parents rated each of the following statements using a 7 point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely, 2 = unlikely, 3 = somewhat unlikely, 4 = undecided, 5 = somewhat likely, 6 = likely, 7 = very likely) to rate these statements, (a) “I will view licensing and or complaint reports as part of my future child care decisions”, (b) “I will view Quality Rated reports as part of my future child care decisions”, (c) “I will view revocation reports as part of my future child care decisions”. All three of the above questions were combined to form a scale. This scale was constructed by summing the responses to three items on the above 7 point Likert scale, with a possible range of 1– 21. This measure will be referred to as the likelihood scale in the rest of the paper.

Section 5: Parents’ Knowledge about Current Provider

This measure surveyed parents about their knowledge about their current child care provider’s licensure by the state of Georgia, national accreditation status, and Quality Rated status. This measure had four separate questions that were analyzed individually.

Question 1: “Please check if your family day care home or center is nationally accredited”. Answer choices are: “NAEYC accredited”, “NAFFCC accredited”, “not accredited”, and “I don’t know”.

Question 2: “Is your child care provider licensed by the state of Georgia?” Answer choices are: “yes”, “no”, “I don’t know”.

Question 3: “Is your provider Quality Rated?” Answer choices are: “yes”, “no”, “I don’t know”.

Question 4: “If your provider is Quality Rated, how many stars is it?” Answer choices are: “one”, “two”, “three”, “I don’t know”.

Section 6: Demographics

Demographic data were collected at the end of the survey by having participants select the best option from a list of choices. Self-reported parent demographic information included parents’ (a) age, (b) gender, (c) marital status, (d) education, (e) employment status, (f) county of residence, (g) race/ethnicity and, (h) college student status.

Validity and Reliability

In order to establish content and face validity of the survey, 5 professors with PhDs in child development or early childhood education reviewed the measurement scales. In addition, a field test of the survey instrument was conducted with 15 parents of children ages 0 to 6 years. Parents were asked to complete the survey online to test for clarity and content. Parents had a chance at the end to comment about any questions that were unclear or their opinion about any factor that was a part of their decision but was left off the survey. Parents who participated in the field test thought the survey was clear and thorough, so no changes were made to the survey. To establish reliability, Cronbach’s alphas were analyzed for the two measurement scales. The importance scale had a Cronbach alpha of .86 and the likeliness scale had a Cronbach alpha of .88. A Cronbach alpha score of at least .70 is considered acceptable to establish reliability.

Procedure

Parents who received information about the study through email or social media clicked a hyperlink, or copied and pasted the link into their web browser. Printed promotional flyers included tabs with a URL for the survey and researchers' contact information at the bottom that parents could tear off if they were interested in participating in the study. Parents were able to either type the link into their web browser, or contact the researcher to obtain the hyperlink electronically to participate in the study. Paper copies with paid return postage were also available for parents who requested them.

Parents who followed the survey link were first shown a consent statement, and had to select "I agree to participate in this study" to begin the survey. If they did not agree to the consent statement, they were directed immediately to the gift card drawing option. The last question on the survey gave participants the option to "submit their survey to be included in the study" or "discard my survey; I no longer wish to be included in the study." After parents who completed the survey clicked "submit" or "do not submit" they were automatically asked if they wanted to be entered into the gift card drawing. Parents completing a paper survey signed a consent statement and returned it with the completed survey. For parents requesting a paper survey, a separate gift card drawing form was attached to the survey. No paper surveys or paper gift card drawing forms were returned that were mailed out.

Data Analysis

Data analyses were conducted using the SPSS 23.0 software. Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. Education and age were the only two demographic variables analyzed for relationships because there was not enough variability in the other demographic variables to make comparisons valid and meaningful. Independent t-tests were conducted in

order to determine whether there were differences among parents of different age and education levels in terms of awareness of online reports, knowledge of how to access the reports, and use of the reports in most recent child care decision. A Chi-square test was used to look for differences in percentages of parents who were and were not aware of online licensing reports across age categories and education levels. Three correlation analyses were conducted. The first correlation determined whether relationships existed between the importance ratings parents gave to online reports in their most recent child care decision and parents' age and education level. The second correlation determined whether a relationship existed between the importance rating parents gave to online reports as a factor in their most recent child care decision and how important parents feel reviewing the combined three types of licensing reports are as part of child care decisions in general (as measured by the importance scale). The third correlation determined whether a relationship existed between how important parents feel reviewing the combined three types of licensing reports are as part of child care decisions in general (as measured by the importance scale) and their likeliness of using these reports in future child care decisions (as measured by the likeliness scale).

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' knowledge about, use of, and perceived importance of three types of child care licensing reports that can be accessed online through the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). This chapter first reports demographic data. Secondly, this chapter reports parents' knowledge about their current provider. Finally, this chapter reports the results for each research question of this study:

- (1) Are parents aware of these reports, do they know how to access the reports, and have they ever used the reports as part of their child care decisions?
- (2) How important were the reports in parents' most recent child care decision? How did the importance of the reports compare to importance of other factors that were a part of parents' most recent child care decision?
- (3) After being given a definition of what each type of online report is, how important do parents' feel it is to review these reports as part of their child care decisions? Also, what is the likeliness that parents would use the reports for future decisions?
- (4) Is there a relationship between how important parents rated online licensing reports as part of their most recent decision and parents who are likely to review the online reports as part of future child care decisions?
- (5) Is there a relationship between parents who believe it is important to review online licensing reports as part of the decision-making process and parents who are likely to review the online reports as part of future child care decisions?

Demographics

The majority of participants were female (90.9%, $n = 110$), married (90.2%, $n = 110$), employed full-time (71.1%, $n = 86$), and Caucasian (91%, $n = 111$). A little over a third of parents resided in Clarke county (40.3%, $n = 48$). The sample was heterogeneous in regards to education level and age. Most parents reported completing at least a 4-year college degree, with having either a master's degree (39.3%, $n = 48$), bachelor's degree (26.2%, $n = 32$), or a doctorate degree (15.6%, $n = 19$). The distribution of the participants age were 31-35 (28.7, $n = 35$), followed by an equal number of participants ages 26-30 (26.2%, $n = 32$) and 36-40 (26.2%, $n = 32$). The remainder were ages 41 and above (13.9%, $n = 17$) and 21-25 (4.9%, $n = 6$). See Table 1 for a full report of parent demographics.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Parent Demographics

| Parent Demographics | | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
|----------------------------|----------------------|----------|----------|
| Parent Age | | | |
| | 20-24 | 6 | 4.9 % |
| | 25-30 | 32 | 26.2 % |
| | 31-35 | 35 | 28.7 % |
| | 36-40 | 32 | 26.2 % |
| | 41 and older | 17 | 13.9 % |
| Race/Ethnicity | | | |
| | Caucasian | 111 | 91 % |
| | African American | 4 | 3.3 % |
| | Hispanic/Latino | 1 | 0.8% |
| | Asian | 2 | 1.6% |
| | Pacific Islander | 0 | 0 % |
| | Other | 2 | 1.6 % |
| | Prefer not to answer | 2 | 1.6 % |
| Education | | | |
| | High school/GED | 12 | 9.8 % |
| | Associate degree | 11 | 9 % |
| | Bachelor degree | 32 | 26.2 % |
| | Master's degree | 48 | 39.3 % |
| | Doctoral degree | 19 | 15.6 % |
| Employment Status | | | |
| | Full-time | 86 | 71.1 % |
| | Part-time | 16 | 13.2 % |
| | N/A | 18 | 14.9 % |
| | Prefer not to answer | 1 | 0.8 % |
| Gender | | | |
| | Female | 110 | 90.9 % |
| | Male | 10 | 8.3 % |
| | Prefer not to answer | 1 | 0.8 % |
| Marital Status | | | |
| | Married | 110 | 90.2 % |
| | Single | 5 | 4.1 % |
| | Widow | 1 | 0.8 % |
| | Other | 6 | 4.9 % |

| Parent Demographics cont. | | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|----------|
| College Student Status | | | |
| | Full-time | 7 | 5.8% |
| | Part-time | 7 | 5.8% |
| | Not a college student | 106 | 88.3% |
| County of Residence | | | |
| | Clarke | 48 | 40.3 % |
| | Bulloch | 11 | 9.2 % |
| | Oconee | 10 | 8.4 % |
| | Barrow | 5 | 4.2 % |
| | Oglethorpe | 5 | 4.2 % |
| | Jackson | 5 | 4.2 % |
| | Cobb | 5 | 4.2 % |
| | Floyd | 4 | 3.4 % |
| | Madison | 4 | 3.4 % |
| | Gwinnett | 3 | 2.5 % |
| | Houston | 2 | 1.7 % |
| | Other counties* | 1 | 0.8 % |
| | Prefer not to answer | 3 | 2.5 % |

*One parent participated from each of the following 17 counties: Baldwin, Banks, Bryan, Chatham, DeKalb, Forsyth, Franklin, Fulton, Habersham, Jenkins Jones, Lowndes, Lumpkin, Newton, Sumter, Thomas, Walker

Parents in this study used a variety of different types of child care. The majority of parents used child care learning centers. The breakdown of parents' current child arrangements were: child care learning center (50.8%, $n = 62$), parent stays home (20.5%, $n = 25$), unrelated nanny or babysitter (11.5%, $n = 14$), relative care (9.8%, $n = 12$), spouse (7.4%, $n = 9$), other (4.1%, $n = 5$), and family day care home (3.3%, $n = 4$). A few parents had more than one type of child care arrangement (7.4%, $n = 9$). Because some parents selected more than one child care arrangement, the total percent is more than 100. The majority of parents reported that their most recent child care decision was for an infant, defined as age 0-12 months, (48.3%, $n = 58$),

followed by equal numbers of child care decisions for toddlers (25.8%, n = 31) and preschool/Pre-K age children (25.8%, n = 31).

Parents' Knowledge about Current Provider

The majority of parents reported that their child was in care licensed by DECAL (60.2%, n = 71). Some parents reported that they did not know whether their child care provider was licensed by DECAL (19.5%, n = 23). An even larger number of parents did not know whether their child care arrangement was nationally accredited (44.8%, n = 52). A fourth of parents knew their child care provider was nationally accredited (25.8%, n = 30) and almost a third knew their provider was not nationally accredited (29.3 %, n = 34). Similar results were found in parents' who reported on knowledge about if their provider was Quality Rated. Over a third of parents did not know whether their child care provider was Quality Rated (40.7%, n = 48). Among parents who knew whether or not their provider was Quality Rated, 41 parents reported that their provider was Quality Rated (34.7%), and 29 parents who reported that their provider was not Quality Rated (24.6%). Finally, parents who stated that their provider was Quality Rated were asked how many stars the provider had. Almost half of the parents reported they knew their provider had a three star rating (43.9%, n = 18), one parent reported a one star rating (2.4%), and eighteen parents who knew their provider was Quality Rated did not know how many stars the provider had (43.9%).

Parents' Knowledge and Use of Online Licensing Reports

Research Question 1: Are parents aware of online child care licensing reports, do they know how to access the reports, and have they ever used the reports as a part of their decision-making for child care arrangements?

Awareness of Online Child Care Reports. Almost half of the parents reported awareness of the online reports (49.2%, $n = 60$), and slightly more than half of parents were not aware of the online reports (50.8%, $n = 62$). A Chi-square test was used to look for differences in percentages between parents who were and were not aware of online licensing reports across age categories and education levels. Within each age and education category, the majority of parents did not know about online licensing reports. The only exceptions were found for parents who were in the age category of 31-35 (62.9%, $n = 22$) as well as parents with a Master's degree (56.3%, $n = 27$). For this sample, this means that more parents who were ages 31-35 or had a Master's degree were aware of reports than the parents in other age and education categories. However, independent t-tests revealed that the differences were not statistically significant between parents who were and were not aware of the online licensing reports for age [$t(120) = .67, p = .50$] or education [$t(120) = .67, p = .77$].

Knowledge of How to Access Reports. The majority of the parents did not know how to access the online reports (70.5 %, $n = 86$). An independent sample t-test was used to look for differences between parents who did and did not have knowledge of how to access the reports across age categories and education levels. No statistically significant differences for age [$t(120) = .98, p = .33$], or education levels [$t(120) = -.18, p = .86$] were found.

Use of Reports as Part of Recent Child Care Decisions. More than two-thirds of the parents reported that they did not use online child care reports for their most recent child care decision (69.7%, $n = 85$); less than a third of the parents used the reports (27%, $n = 33$). Less than a fourth of parents reported using Quality Rated reports as part of their most recent child care decision (19.7%, $n = 23$); over three-fourths of parents reported not using Quality Rated reports (78.3%, $n = 94$). A little less than a fifth of parents reported using revocation reports when

making child care decisions (19.7%, $n = 17$); over three-quarters of parents did not use revocation reports (80.3%, $n = 98$). Independent t-tests were conducted to analyze differences between parents who did and did not use each type of report across age categories and education levels. No statistically significant differences were found between parents who did or did not use any of the reports for age [$t(116) = .50, p = .62$ for online reports; $t(115) = -.20, p = .84$ for Quality Rated reports; $t(113) = 1.00, p = .32$ for revocation reports], or education [$t(116) = .35, p = .72$ for online licensing reports; $t(115) = .55, p = .58$ for Quality Rated; $t(113) = .128, p = .21$ for revocation reports].

Research Question 2: How important were the reports in parents' most recent child care decision? How did the importance of the reports compare to importance of other factors that were a part of parents' most recent child care decision?

Importance of Reports. Slightly more than a third of the parents rated the online licensing reports as important or very important combined (39.1%, $n = 47$). A little over a third of parents rated the importance as "not sure" (39.2%, $n = 47$). About a fifth of the parents rated these reports as somewhat important (8.3%, $n = 10$) or not important (13.3%, $n = 16$).

There was no significant correlation between how important the reports were in parents' most recent child care decisions and parents' age (Pearson's $r(120) = -.90, p > .001$) or education (Pearson's $r(120) = -.14, p > .001$).

Comparisons between Reports and other Factors. Overall, online reports were included in the three lowest percentages of importance. Of all the factors that parents rated important or very important, only two variables had lower percentages than online licensing reports: resource and referral (11.6%) and accepting subsidies (13.4%). The top five factors that parents rated important and very important were: provides quality care (94.2%); warmth of provider (94.2%);

safety of environment (95%); cleanliness of environment (96%); and trusting the provider (96.7%). Table 2 shows the breakdown of parents' ratings of the eighteen variables that were a part of their most recent child care decision.

Table 2. Parents' Ratings of Importance for Factors that Influenced their Most Recent Child Care Decision.

| | Not Important | Somewhat Important | Not Sure | Important | Very Important | Important + Very Important |
|--|---------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Word of Mouth about Provider from Family/Friends | 8.3% N=10 | 12.5% N=15 | 7.3% N=9 | 23.3% N=28 | 48.3% N=58 | 71.60% |
| Provider Nationally Accredited | 13.4% N=16 | 10.9% N=13 | 21.8% N=26 | 28.6% N=34 | 25.2% N=30 | 53.80% |
| Provides Quality Care | 2.5% N=3 | .8% N=1 | 2.5% N=3 | 14.2% N=17 | 80% N=96 | 94.20% |
| Tour of Facility | 4.2% N=5 | 1.7% N=2 | 7.6% N=9 | 41.2% N=49 | 45.4% N=54 | 86.60% |
| Location | 3.4% N=4 | 5.9% N=7 | 9.2% N=11 | 46.2% N=55 | 35.3% N=42 | 81.50% |
| Teacher/Child Ratio | 3.4% N=4 | .8% N=1 | 7.6% N=9 | 33.6% N=40 | 54.6% N=65 | 88.20% |
| Days/Hours Operation | 2.5% N=3 | 6.7% N=8 | 8.3% N=10 | 48.3% N=58 | 34.2% ⁴ N=41 | 48.30% |
| Cost | 6.7% N=8 | 10.8% N=13 | 13.3% N=16 | 35.8% N=43 | 33.3% N=40 | 69.10% |
| Curriculum | 5% N=6 | 14.2% N=17 | 12.5% N=15 | 44.2% N=53 | 24.2% N=29 | 68.40% |
| Teacher Education | 5% N=6 | 9.2% N=11 | 18.3% N=22 | 41.7% N=50 | 25.8% N=31 | 67.50% |
| Warmth of Provider | 1.7% N=2 | 2.5% 3 | 1.7% N=2 | 21.7% N=26 | 72.5% N=87 | 94.20% |
| Trusting Provider | 1.7% N=2 | 0 | 1.7% N=2 | 5.9% N=7 | 90.8% N=108 | 96.70% |
| Accepting Subsidies | 51.3% 61 | 5% N=6 | 30.3% N=36 | 6.7% N=8 | 6.7% N=8 | 13.40% |
| Referral from Resource and Referral Agency | 50% N=60 | 10% N=12 | 28.3% N=34 | 5.8% N=7 | 5.8% N=7 | 11.60% |
| Meets my Child's Special Needs | 24.2% N=29 | 2.5% N=3 | 30.8% N=37 | 17.5% N=21 | 25% N=30 | 42.50% |
| Safety of Environment | 1.7% N=2 | 0 | 3.3% N=4 | 13.3% N=16 | 81.7% N=98 | 95% |

| | Not Important | Somewhat Important | Not Sure | Important | Very Important | Important + Very Important |
|----------------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|----------------------------|
| Cleanliness of Environment | 1.7% N=2 | 0 | 2.5% N=3 | 25% N=30 | 70.8% N=85 | 96% |
| Online Licensing Reports | 13.3% N=16 | 8.3% N=10 | 39.2% N=47 | 20.8% N=25 | 18.3% N=22 | 39.10% |

Independent t-tests showed that parents who rated online licensing reports as an important part of their most recent child care decision were more likely to be aware of the reports [$t(118) = 4.41, p < .001$], know how to access the reports [$t(118) = 4.72, p < .001$], and use the reports as part of their most recent child care decision [$t(114) = 6.51, p < .001$].

Research Question 3: After being given a definition of what each type of online report is, how important do parents feel it is to review these reports as part of their child care decisions? Also, what is the likeliness that parents would use the reports for future decisions?

Importance of Reviewing Reports as a part of Child Care Decisions. Almost 80 percent of parents considered reviewing reports as part of the child care decision-making process as important or very important. A little over a quarter of parents reported that reviewing the reports as a part of making child care decisions was very important (29.5%, $n = 36$), and over a third reported reviewing reports as important (38.5%, $n = 47$). Please see Table 3 below for how important parents' believe it is to review online licensing reports as part of the decision-making process for child care. There was no significant correlation between the importance scale scores and parents' age (Pearson's $r(122) = .120, p > .001$) or education (Pearson's $r(120) = -.001, p > .001$).

Table 3. Importance of Viewing Online Licensing Reports as Part of Child Care Decisions

| | <i>N</i> | % |
|--------------------|----------|-------|
| Very Important | 36 | 29.5% |
| Important | 47 | 38.5% |
| Not Sure | 24 | 19.7% |
| Somewhat Important | 13 | 10.7% |
| Not Important | 2 | 1.6% |

An independent t-test showed that parents who considered reviewing reports as an important part of the child care decision-making process were more likely to have used the reports in their most recent child care decision [$t(90.02) = 4.47, p < .001$]. However, about 56% of parents who did not use the reports for their most recent decision reported that they felt reviewing the online reports was an important part of the child care decision-making process; and 27% of those parents reported being not sure of the importance of reviewing the reports as part of the decision-making process.

Research Question 4. Is there a relationship between parents who believe it is important to review online licensing reports as part of the decision-making process and how important licensing reports were as a factor in parents' most recent child care decision?

A bivariate correlation was conducted to assess this relationship. Parents' ratings on how important online reports were in their most recent child care decision and their rating on the importance scale were moderately positively correlated, Pearson's $r(120) = .42, p < .001$. Parents who believed online reports were an important factor in their most recent child care decision also believed reviewing online reports was important part of the child care decision-making process in general.

Research Question 5. Is there a relationship between parents who believe it is important to review online licensing reports as part of the decision-making process and parents who are likely to review the online reports as part of future child care decisions?

For this measure, all three questions that reported parents' likelihood ratings were combined into one scale. These questions asked the likelihood of parents using the licensing reports, Quality Rated reports, and revocation reports as part of future child care decisions. A bivariate correlation was computed to determine the relationship between the importance scale scores and likeliness scale scores. Parents' importance and likeliness ratings were moderately positively correlated, Pearson's $r(122) = .60, p < .001$. Parents who believed it is important to review online reports as part of the child care decision-making process were more likely to use the reports for future child care decisions.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to explore parents' knowledge and use of online child care licensing reports, and to evaluate the importance of these reports as part of parents' child care decisions. This study contributes to our understanding of how parents choose child care, and it provides information to the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning about parents' use of online reports. Overall, slightly more than half of parents (50.8%) did not even know that online reports existed, and a large majority of parents did not know how to access these online reports (70.5%). There is a need for more parent education efforts surrounding what online child licensing reports are and how to access these reports. The results showed a relationship between how important parents' rated the reports as a part of the child care decision-making process and their likelihood of using the reports for future child care decisions. This relationship is not surprising, but does suggest that parents who consider the reports important are more likely to use the reports in future child care decisions. However, if parents do not know how to access the reports, they do not have an opportunity to use or value them. This section interprets results, places results in the context of the ecological systems theory, identifies contributions and limitations, and recommends directions for future research.

Interpretations

First, there were almost equal numbers of parents who were and were not aware that online child care licensing reports existed. It is not very surprising that almost half of the parents knew about licensing reports. One reason for this could be due to the recent publicity from

media sources in Georgia about child care centers being closed due to forgetting children in locked vans. The media sources have been telling parents about reports that are available to check a child care provider's health and safety records.

Second, a large majority of parents did not know how to access the reports and did not use the reports in their most recent child care decision. In fact, only 30% of parents who were aware of the reports actually knew how to access the reports. Possible explanations could be that media outlets may not be providing information about how to access the reports, parents may not know what website or state agency provides this information, and parents may not understand how to navigate DECAL's website to find the reports. Another possibility could be that parents are not putting forth effort to find the reports and read them because they do not consider the reports a priority in choosing child care. This suggests a definite need for more outreach to parents about how to access online child care licensing reports.

Third, only 33 of all parents who completed the survey actually used the reports as part of their most recent child care decision. Even though only 33 out of 123 parents used online licensing reports in their most recent child care decision, this finding must be put into the context that only 36 parents knew how to access these reports. A large majority of the parents (92%) that knew how to access the reports did use the reports. Again, parents can't use the reports if they do not know how to access them. The fact that most parents who knew how to access the reports actually used them in child care decisions provides further evidence for the need for more outreach to parents about what the reports are and how to access online child care licensing reports.

Last, the majority of parents 82.8% in this survey reported they were somewhat likely to very likely to use the reports in future child care decisions. In looking at the parents who were

likely to use the reports in the future, 91% of parents that used them before reported they would use them in the future. Additionally, 56% of parents that did not use the reports previously reported they were likely to very likely to use the reports in the future. Many of the parents (59.7%) who learned about the reports while taking the survey reported they would use them in the future. However, these parents would have to understand how to access these reports in order to use them. This is further confirmation that parent outreach is needed to increase awareness of reports. These data provides information for the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning that parents need more information about how to access these reports on their website.

The Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) could help raise the awareness of the online reports using a few methods. First DECAL could ask the media covering news about child care programs to show where they got the reports they hold up for the viewers. Second, there could be more information through their social media pages with links to access the online reports. Third, they could do an education campaign similar to the one currently being presented on TV stations, social media, and YouTube, the Look Again campaign. The Look Again campaign was designed to raise awareness among parents and child care providers to check vehicles again for the children that were riding in them. This campaign was launched after parents and child care providers left children inside locked vehicles and some of the children died as a result. This is an example of a media campaign based on an identified need for more information for parents and child care providers that relates directed to child care. Fourth, they could ask Georgia resource and referral agencies, colleges, Extension offices, and other nonprofit organizations to pass along the information to parents. Last, they could print

information brochures that can be given out along with the other informational brochures parents receive in the hospitals after child birth.

Ecological Systems Theory

The ecological systems theory looks at possible influences within each system on the developing child. This study uses this theory to look for possible influences on the parents' child care decision-making process as it relates to the child's microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem. Even though this study did not examine all the systems of this theory, all are still important.

Microsystem. Research has shown that a high quality child care microsystem affects overall developmental outcomes for children (Zaslow et al., 2010). This study did not measure the direct impacts of parents' child care decisions on child developmental outcomes. However, this study did measure parents' perceived importance of certain factors which previous studies have shown to be important in child care decisions. The factors that parents rated important and very important that are a part of the child care environment were national accreditation (53.8%), teacher education (67.5%), curriculum (68.4%), cost (69.1%), location (81.5%), teacher to child ratio (88.2%), quality care offered (94.2%), safe environment (95%), and cleanliness of facility (96%).

Mesosystem. This system includes not only the individuals and environmental contexts of the child's microsystems, but places emphasis on the relations and interaction between these groups of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). A part of the mesosystem is the child care environment and the parents' interactions with this environment. Parents in this study placed a high importance on many factors that are a part of the interactions between parents and child care providers. The factors that were rated as important and very important as part of the parents'

interactions with providers were tour of facility (86.6 %), warmth of provider (94.2%), and trust of provider (96.7%).

Exosystem. The exosystem involves the larger social system that consists of links between the social settings that affects a child's development; even though the child does not actively participate in this system (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Parents' social networks can be considered a part of this system. For this study, parents placed a combined importance of important and very important rating for word of mouth (71.6%) which came from parents' social networks. The state agency that regulates child care centers (DECAL) can also be considered a part of this system. For this study, only 39.1% of parents perceived licensing reports as important and very important in their most recent decisions. A little over half of the parents did not know about these reports, and a large majority did not know how to access the reports that are housed under state regulatory agency. Online reports were of little importance to parents in their most recent decision; however if more parents knew about the reports they might consider them more important. Most of the parents that knew how to access the reports also valued the reports in their most recent decision.

The use of ecological theory to explain parents' child care decisions reveals that bi-directional influences in the microsystem (child care provider characteristics) and mesosystem (parent interaction with provider) have a large influence on parents' child care decisions. The interactions on the outer level, exosystem, (online reports and parents' social networks) influence parents' child care decisions as well. This is important since studies have shown that perceived quality of a child care environment is often different between parents and trained observers (Barbarin et al., 2006). Parents may perceive the child care provider to be a higher quality than a trained observer does (Cryer & Burchinal, 1997; Cryer et al., 2002). Parents' social networks

may recommend child care providers who are not providing high quality care. Parents may select lower quality care based on their social networks' recommendations. Parents trust people they know and are less aware of outside measures that can help them access quality, such as online reports. This means that more awareness is definitely important. Within this study, parents valued word of mouth from their social networks almost twice as much as online licensing reports when choosing child care. If parents aren't getting accurate information about providers from their friends; that can have a big impact on the quality of care children are receiving. Parents can get information from both sources and value both sources. The online reports are an objective outside resource for parents to help them gauge the quality of the child care environment. This is important since word of mouth from parents' social networks may not accurately reflect a child care provider's true quality of care.

Contributions of the Study

This study makes two main contributions to the literature on parents' awareness, use, and perceived importance of online child care licensing reports. This study expands the knowledge base about how parents choose child care by evaluating a factor that has not been studied in the past. No previous studies have investigated parents' awareness, use, and perceived importance for online child care reports in Georgia.

The second contribution of this study is that it reveals a need for parent outreach about online licensing reports. To begin with, parents were asked about how important online licensing reports were in their most recent child care decision. The same percentage of parents (39%) reported they were not sure about the importance of the reports as the percentage of parents (39%) who reported the reports as important and very important combined. After learning about online licensing reports in the survey, 68% of parents rated online licensing

reports as important or very important as part of the child care decision making process. An even higher percentage of parents, 91%, said they were likely or very likely to use online licensing reports for future child care decisions. More parent education is needed about what licensing reports are and how they can be a resource in parents' child care decisions. This outreach could be done with various media campaigns and education brochures as mentioned previously.

Limitations of the Study

There were five main identified limitations of this study. These limitations included sample size, homogeneity of sample, convenience sampling, self-reported data, and a short recruitment time.

First, the sample size was very small ($n = 122$). The Child Care Aware® of America (2014) fact sheet states there are potentially around 509,000 children under the age of six needing child care in Georgia. This means that there may be almost a million parents with children under the age of six in Georgia. This sample likely represented less than 1% of Georgia's parent population.

Second, the sample was very homogenous in that most parents reported being Caucasian, female, married, employed full-time, and had higher education levels. Due to the very small sample size it is difficult to generalize this study to the parent population of Georgia. Since most of the demographic variables were homogenous, many relationships among these variables could not be analyzed. A possible way to reach a more heterogeneous sample would be to target local community and health centers, as well as child care providers who serve at risk children across the state. This could be accomplished by providing surveys directly at these locations or placing flyers for the study.

Third, the sample for this study was a convenience sample. This drawback is clearly seen since there were only 28 counties represented out of 159 counties in Georgia. Clarke County had the most participants with 48 parents. There was probably a higher response for Clarke since it is the location the researcher is from and where most of the researcher's friends on social media live. The majority of the flyers for this study were placed in Clarke and surrounding counties. Clarke County has a large heterogeneous parent base; however, this was not represented in the parent demographics. There definitely need to be more counties represented in future research to know where parent outreach maybe needed or focused.

Fourth, the sample used self-reported data to find out whether parents would use the online reports for future child care decisions. Even though parents reported a high likelihood of using the reports for future child care decisions, there is no way to know whether parents actually use online reports for their next child care decision. Using either a pre and posttest or longitudinal design would allow researchers to know if parents who intended to use the reports actually did use the reports for future child care decisions.

Finally, the study duration was very short. The survey was only open for three weeks due to time constraints for completing data analysis. A longer duration might have allowed more time for larger and more diverse group of parents to be recruited and respond. Also, a longer study window might have allowed for more paper surveys to be utilized, which might have achieved more diversity. More time could have allowed for more follow-ups with surveys sent out through email or the mail. It would optimal for the survey to be open around three months to give parents and recruiters time to allow as many parents as possible to participate. Reminders could be sent out by emails or visits back to places where flyers or paper surveys had been placed.

Directions for Future Research

Although information gained from the current study adds to the literature on factors affecting child care decisions, much research is still needed on the awareness, use, and importance of online child care licensing reports on parents' child care decision-making. This study is the first in Georgia and can be a starting point for future research about parents' knowledge and use of online licensing reports.

Future studies could repeat this type of survey with a focus of getting a larger and more diverse sample. By using a larger sample, the power of analyses should increase, thereby allowing a wider range of analyses to be utilized. Additionally, a larger sample size and more diverse group would allow researchers to evaluate differences within the variable categories. In this study, the effects of many parent demographic variables on use and perceived importance of online reports could not be determined. Through increasing and diversifying the sample, future researchers may be able to determine to what extent parents' knowledge and use of reports is affected by demographic variables.

Additional recommendations include alternative sampling techniques to be used for future research. Other sampling options could include mailing surveys to various child care settings for distribution to parents, or interviewing a random sample of parents by phone. These and other alternative sampling techniques could enable researchers to increase the diversity of their sample, while also reaching a larger number of parents throughout the state.

An optimal study would include a longitudinal study design to access change over time in knowledge and use of online reports. With a longitudinal study, researchers would be able to see whether parents' reported likeliness of using online reports in future child care decisions correlated to actual future use. Additionally, it would be beneficial to longitudinally study

whether parents' importance ratings given to multiple factors in their child care decisions change over time, and if so, how they change in regards to online licensing reports.

Finally, future research could investigate the effectiveness of an outreach program designed to increase the awareness of what child care licensing reports are and how to access them. It could also analyze if the outreach changed parents' perceptions and importance ratings of online child care reports. This could be done utilizing a pre-posttest design, measuring how much effect an outreach program about what licensing reports are and how to access them influenced the perceived importance or likelihood of future use.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to explore parents' knowledge and use of online child care licensing reports, and to evaluate the importance of these reports as part of parents' child care decisions. This study found that many parents were not aware of online reports and did not know how to access the reports. However, the parents that do know how to access the reports were likely to use them. Parent education is needed to help parents looking for child care to understand what online licensing reports are and how to access them. The online reports provide parents with a trained observer's report about the health, safety, and quality of a child care provider's environment. The online licensing reports may help parents in choosing high quality child care. The parent outreach around awareness and knowledge of how to access online reports can empower parents with reliable knowledge in selecting a child care provider. Selecting a child care provider who is providing quality care can ultimately provide children with a safe environment in which to grow, play, and learn.

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APPENDIX A

The Parent Questionnaire

1. Please check the appropriate statement for yourself:
☐ I currently live in Georgia
☐ I currently live in another state but had a child or children in child care in the state of Georgia
☐ I have never lived in Georgia
2. Please check the appropriate statement for yourself:
☐ I am 18 years old or older
☐ I am 17 years or younger (if you are under 17 you are not eligible to participate in this survey)
3. Please check how old your youngest child is
☐ Under 6 years old
☐ 6 years old and older
4. Please check the all statements that apply to your current child care arrangement(s)
☐ I stay home providing child care
☐ Spouse provides child care while I work
☐ An unrelated nanny or baby-sitter provides care
☐ A relative provides child care
☐ My child or children are in a family day care home
☐ My child or children are in a child care learning center
☐ Other

For the all the following questions please think about your most recent child care decision

5. Please check the age your child was when you made your most recent child care decision
 ___ Infant (0-12months)
 ___ Toddler (1-2 years old)
 ___ Preschool/Pre-K (3-6 years old)

| The next section will look at what factors may have influenced your child care decision. Please circle how important each factor was in your most recent child care decision. | | | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| I based my child care decision on the following factors..... | Not important 1 | Somewhat important 2 | Not sure/ Neutral 3 | Important 4 | Very Important 5 |
| 6. word of mouth from family or friends | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. the provider was nationally accredited | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. the provider offers high quality child care | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. tour of the facility | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. location of center | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. number of children and teachers in my child's classroom | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. days and hours of operation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. cost | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. type of curriculum | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. education of teachers | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. warmth of provider | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. trusting my child's provider | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. acceptance of subsidies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. referral from resource and referral agency | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. meets my child's special needs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. safety of child care environment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. cleanliness of environment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. online licensing reports | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

The following section will ask you about your awareness of and use of the 3 types of online child care reports. Please check the appropriate response for each question.

24. Did you know that every child care provider licensed by the state of Georgia has reports available online that show their compliance with licensing rules?

☐ Yes ☐ No

25. Do you know how to access these reports?

☐ Yes ☐ No

26. Have you ever reviewed **licensing reports** from the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) website, www.dec.al.ga.gov as a part of your child care decision?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don't remember

27. If you have made a child care decision since July 1, 2013 did you review **Quality Rated** reports from the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) website, www.dec.al.ga.gov as a part of your child care decision? These reports were made available online July 1, 2013.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don't remember ☐ I made my decision before July 1, 2013

28. Have you ever reviewed **revocation reports** from the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) website, www.dec.al.ga.gov as a part of your child care decision?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don't remember

There are different reports available online to give parents information about child care providers. One report is a licensing report that tells how well child care providers are following state child care rules. A second report, quality rated, gives a one, two, or three star rating on the quality provided. A third report, a revocation, tells when a licensed provider has had their license to operate a child care taken away.

Please think about how important you feel these reports are to review when choosing child care.

Please use the following scale to rate each statement below

| | Not important | Somewhat important | Not sure | Important | Very important |
|---|------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 29. I feel reviewing licensing reports about child care providers is an important part of making child care decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. I feel reviewing quality rated reports about child care providers is an important part of making child care decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. I feel reviewing revocation reports about child care providers is an important part of making child care decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please use the following scale to rate how likely you are to review each of the following reports for future child care decisions.

| | Very unlikely | Somewhat unlikely | Unlikely | Undecided | Somewhat likely | Likely | Very likely |
|--|---------------|-------------------|----------|-----------|-----------------|--------|-------------|
| 32. I will review licensing and or complaint reports as part of my future child care decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 33. I will review Quality Rated reports as part of my future child care decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 34. I will review revocation reports as part of my future child care decisions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

35. Please check if your family day care home or center is nationally accredited
☐ Accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
☐ Accredited by the National Association for Family Child Care (NAFCC)
☐ Not accredited
☐ I don't know

36. Is your child care provider licensed by the state of Georgia?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don't know

37. Is your provider Quality Rated?
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I don't know

38. If your provider is Quality Rated, how many stars is it?
☐ One ☐ Two ☐ Three ☐ I don't know

Please take a minute to answer a few questions about yourself. Thank you for your time!

| | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| Your Age | <input type="checkbox"/> less than 19 | <input type="checkbox"/> 20-24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 25-30 | <input type="checkbox"/> 31-35 | <input type="checkbox"/> 36-40 | <input type="checkbox"/> 41 or older | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| Race /Ethnicity (check all that apply) | <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian | <input type="checkbox"/> African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Latino/ Hispanic | <input type="checkbox"/> Asian | <input type="checkbox"/> Pacific Islander | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| Highest level of education | <input type="checkbox"/> Some high school | <input type="checkbox"/> High School Diploma/ GED | <input type="checkbox"/> Associate degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Master degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Doctoral degree | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| Your employment status | <input type="checkbox"/> Full-time | <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time | <input type="checkbox"/> N/A | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| County of residence | Please write in _____ | | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| Gender | <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Female | | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| Marital status | <input type="checkbox"/> Married | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced | <input type="checkbox"/> Single | <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed | <input type="checkbox"/> Other | | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |
| College student status | <input type="checkbox"/> Full-time college student | <input type="checkbox"/> Part-time college student | <input type="checkbox"/> Not a college student | | | | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to answer |

Please fill out your email address or phone number on the next page if you want to be entered for the gift card drawings. Thank you for your time!

Yes I want to be entered into the gift card drawing. Ten gift cards each in the amount of 10 dollars will be given away. This page will be torn off from survey to ensure confidentiality of surveys.

Email address: _____

Or phone number if you don't have an email address: _____

Or mailing address for gift card to be sent:
