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Author

Hernandez, Kimberly

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A Qualitative Study of the Perceptions of Families Regarding the Limitations of Early

Childhood Care and Education

by

Kimberly Hernandez

UCLA, Class of 2021

Sociology Studies B.A.

Faculty Mentor: Bemmy Maharramli

Community Engagement and Social Change

A Qualitative Study of the Perceptions of Families Regarding the Limitations of Early childhood care and Education

Early childhood care and education centers are primary and secondary prevention for children at risk for low performance. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) programs serve children zero to five years old and prepare them for kindergarten (California Department of Education). ECCE are essential in the first three years of an individual's life; the connections one experiences in such services are crucial to brain development. The various interactions encountered at child care facilities can positively influence how a child thinks, feels, acts, and connects with others into adulthood. It additionally contributes to academic readiness and decreases the rate of school dropouts. These facilities are a valuable resource to families with toddlers, especially low-income families who may struggle to offer certain resources and skills to their young ones. However, it seems that the families who need the help the most struggle the most to access them. Previous studies have shown a lack of top-quality ECCE resources within populated black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) neighborhoods; generally, research presumes it is due to inadequate communities and discrimination. However, research still struggles to determine constructive ways to address systematic racial barriers within early childhood development within BIPOC families. As a consequence, children are not getting the necessary child development resources. Likewise, the disparity gap within quality ECCE suggests that policies are not recognizing the importance of ECCE enough. The purpose of this community-engaged research was to examine obstacles limiting families from acquiring quality ECCE by utilizing the voices of historically marginalized communities. The second purpose was to identify ways to make a resourcefulness website accessible to the communities being affected.

This study question was established with the guidance of the *Advancement Project* and from *First 5 L.A - Best Start*. The tools utilized in the study included interviews formerly conducted with the *First 5 L.A.* team. Additionally, inductive coding was used to analyze the interviews to identify themes. The research results helped clarify the study's research questions. In brief, this study emphasized that community members possess resolutions that help diminish the gap in quality ECCE resources.

Keywords: Early childhood and education, COVID-19, Parenting skills, Resources

Over the years, there has been a collective effort to improve the quality of early childhood care and education (ECCE) for children and their families (U.S. Department of Education, Higher Education, 2013). In 2013, President Obama proposed $15 billion over ten years to increase access to high-quality ECCE by extending voluntary home visiting programs that positively impact children's health, social development, and education (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Although there has been some improvement, such as a growth in the enrollment rate of young children (0-3) in education, children from low-income neighborhoods who are traditionally BIPOC continue to face large volumes of disparities within accessible early childhood development resources. For example, infants born to Black mothers are more likely to die than any other race despite the parent's income level status (First 5 LA, 2016). The Los Angeles County Black Percentage is less than 7.8%. Research shows that that race discrimination may be limiting these communities from accessing quality ECCE. However, it does not directly unveil the disparities from the family's perspective (Greenwood et al., 2020). Intentionally reaching out to communities and using them as resources may help inform solutions and distinguish barriers to ECCE access for underserved groups. The purpose of this community-engaged qualitative study is to understand the community's perceptions and concerns regarding early childhood care and education support.

A second purpose is to share potential methods with the *Advancement Project* and *First 5 L.A. - Best Start* that will positively improve their in-progress website to be more convenient and accessible to the community affected by ECCE barriers. Specifically, the study analyzes secondary interviews from *First 5 L.A. - Best Start* elected Region 4 - Wilmington and Central Long Beach community that reveal challenges and suggestions regarding ECCE.

This research was a collaborative project with two outside organizations, the *Advancement Project* and *First 5 L.A. - Best Start*. The Advancement Project research team is an organization that focuses on racial issues by utilizing methods to unveil data on matters affecting communities most impacted by racial inequities. In addition, they have partnered up with the *First 5LA -Best Start*, an independent public agency that supports the development of young children zero to five years. One of their collaborative intentions was to create a community-engaged website for Region four - Central Long Beach and Wilmington community that explicitly presents community social disparities such as child care, parenting, and housing. The website intends to be an approachable source for families, community schools, and local councils to understand better the deeper reciprocities of those systems failing them. With this website, *First 5 L.A.- Best Start's* objective is for Region 4 to strengthen community engagement skills to design and improve policy outcomes for their children and families. For this reason, this research looked at what factors prevent some communities from accessing ECCE support and the best website design methods for the Region 4 community.

Literature Review

This section begins with an overview of some literature on resources preventing BIPOC families from accessing quality ECCE. Firstly, this piece discusses the inaccessible healthcare resources towards BIPOC. The following section discusses relevant literature on the lack of education in marginalized communities and how it enforces gender roles. Lastly, the last section addresses the ECCE economic crisis.

Health Care Access

The disproportionate rate of healthcare access to BIPOC is an indicator of structural racism on Black Americans. A 2020 study found that BIPOC newly mothers have on and off

insurance within preconception and after giving birth compared to white mothers (Mostafavi, 2020). Mostafavi examined 107,921 women's insurance plans in 40 states between 2015 to 2017 and found that when BIPOC moms needed postpartum care, they did not have access to it. This secondary study concludes that part of the lack of healthcare among BIPOC mothers is racial discrimination. Additionally, it emphasized that healthcare needs to be extended after pregnancy and stressed the importance of resources. In Mostafavi's methods, his research did not interview the new mothers. Part of this study's limitations is the lack of active outreach.

Another 2020 study by Charles R. Rogers suggests that the pandemic revealed inadequate access to healthcare. Although the current Covid-19 virus does not discriminate, the current U.S. healthcare system set the Black community and other marginalized communities further in danger during the pandemic, impacting parents' ability to care for their families (Rogers et al., 2020). By examining secondary data, his research found that more than 40% of the Black population are part of COVID-19 death rates when the Black community barely makes 14% of the people in most states. Due to the high-cost health care, the Black community is twice more likely not to have insurance than the white and Latino communities (Rogers 2020, 2). Rogers suggests that another part of high death rates is the lack of healthcare access and prior illnesses many Black families carry. Many marginalized communities are highly likely to obtain diabetes due to poor nutrition (Rogers, 2020). Although Rogers explains, there has been an attempt to improve health care programs such as implementing Medicaid; this study demonstrates that Black families have a more difficult time accessing them. For this reason, Black parents have a greater chance of getting sick. This hinders their children's receiving proper care; this is a problem because quality ECCE begins at home. This study examined the enrollment rates in healthcare. However, it overlooked the black communities' perspectives.

Child Care and Education Crisis

This study further examines the pandemics' repercussions within gender disparities in the labor market and early childhood care and education resources. The U.S. was already facing a child care crisis before the pandemic regarding circumstances relating to accessibility, affordability, and quality (Bishop-Jose, 2019, 4). The pandemic made the situation worse; California is expected to lose more than half of its child care centers. Since the pandemic, one of every four has already closed (Rani, 2020). Partially, this is due to the high cost of maintaining child care and early education centers, and parents can no longer afford the monthly fees. Families are finding themselves no longer able to afford the cost of daycares or are unaware of the other available options. On average, daycares cost $1000 each month. For many, that is more than half of their monthly rent. Although the rate of children ages 3–6 years (still not in kindergarten) who attend early childhood programs increased in 2012, almost 40 % of children were still not registered in programs. Statistics show a large gap of children missing out on formal schooling readiness due to not having structured school-type experiences before entering kindergarten (Garro, 2016). Not surprisingly, in today's society, most women are still liable for the child care responsibilities meaning they have to put their career on pause.

Economic Crisis

Further, the Advancement Projects data unveils the discrepancy between the numbers of pre-kindergarten children eligible for subsidized early learning care (ECE) programs versus those enrolled in them is significant in Wilmington and Longbeach, Los Angeles. This is concerning because Brown families are more likely to earn an income below the actual cost of living. (Unitedway, 2019). As the Advancement Project emphasizes, the disproportion highlights the need to understand the barriers preventing eligible families from enrollment.

Not only do the child care closures affect parents and the facilities, but it also harms the U.S. economy. When workers' time and productivity decrease due to reducing their hours or leave suddenly to take care of a child, it affects the entire U.S. economy. A study examining the nation's insufficient child care economic consequences reveals a yearly revenue loss cost of $57 billion. As for the child care facilities, since most are small businesses and there is a lack of government relief funds, the low turnout of children in their program forces facilities to reduce the number of employers they can afford. However, even with less than half of their staff, many facilities find themselves using their savings and credit cards to get through. A care facility expressed how they struggle to stay open (Malik, 2021) financially. The rehiring and recruiting process also adds a burden cost that could potentially put them out of business. When their employees are not well trained or have little experience, they lose revenue because hiring new people takes a lot of time and money (Malik, 2021, 3). This shows that the child care crisis is more extensive than an individual personal issue.

Material and Methods

This secondary analysis study used inductive coding to analyze interviews from the *First 5 L.A.* data collection with the guidance of a youtube video discussing how to utilize inductive coding in research analysis (Professor Tera Dornfeld, 2015). There is also a need to make the website in progress more accessible to the Wilmington community.
Addressing this study will also review best practices based on academic literature and community resources on creating and sustaining an accessible community-engaged website. Finally, yet importantly, this study will protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants; for this purpose, this study will not use the participant's names; instead, this study will distinguish participants with a number.

Interviews

The interviewees were a combination of the existing community and organizational partners and new individuals recruited through social media outreach and the personal networks of *First 5 L.A.* community leaders. Their responses were documented as notes on excel. *First 5 L.A. - Best Start* gave this secondary interview data access to examine with inductive coding. This study kept the data secure and interview individuals' names. The interviews state ECCE issues in an *Idea* excel column and a *Problem* column. The *Problem* column section addresses issues regarding early childhood care, and the *Idea* column is where they suggest resolutions. This research intends to draw attention to interviewees' matters and analyze the repeated themes.

Findings

In this section, the interviews show how the lack of ECCE resources affects the community in Central Long Beach and Wilmington, CA. In addition, the effects of lack of funds and outreach within the community are displayed. The last section presents the second intention of this study. The individuals in the interviews discuss making ECCE resources online and making a website accessible to them. Theme one and two examine the families' support and well-being, including the parents, children, and guardians. The following theme three discusses the lack of knowledge and information that puts several families at risk. Finally, theme four is probably the most important because it addresses the second part of the research; it discusses how families from Region 4 want to access a website. Each theme is discussed in further detail below. The findings are broken down into four distinct themes. The significant themes identified in this study included: Support and Resources - Lack of Voice and Funding, Mental and physical health - Mental and Physical Trauma, Family Empowerment - Pervasiveness and Lack of Empowerment, and One-Stop Online Assistance - Untapped Ideas for Community Engagement.

Support and Resources

This theme can be broken down into two subsections. The first part is regarding an emotional support task force, such as peer support groups. Several families in *First 5 L.A.* individuals admitted how lonely they feel in the early childhood process. For example, three interviews who shared this concern were teen parents. They felt left out on many programs currently being held from *First 5 L.A.* Additionally, many individuals talked about the lack of translations. Many individuals seek sources, but the language barrier limits them from actually receiving them; Individual concerns are presented below.

Figure 1

Problem: Issue: "There are not culturally accessible resources for people to turn to	**Idea:** "Have a list of resources for people, so they feel comfortable/open to sharing with people who speak their language and/or have been through similar experiences (like CalWorks, direct aid, etc.)."

Source: First 5 - *Best Start Master IC Table BSCLB Year 3 File*

Another group who also felt like an outlier were parents with children who have disabilities. This group requested workshops regarding parenting skills with disabled students and assistance such as an advisor they can go to regarding their child's needs and emotional support.

Only one interview unexpectedly shared that they came from an LGBTQ family and communicated how they felt there are no resources in the community-oriented explicitly for the LGBTQ community. Although they did not distinctly say it, they are a minority group within a minority that has been neglected. One father also demonstrated they felt disregarded during the pregnancy and after childbirth. He expressed how he thought he was constantly pushed out from pregnancy programs. They wished there was a support group for the second parent (the parent not having the baby). In simple words, the community members requested virtual or in-person support groups and a place to vent and share resources.

The other section of this theme is financial assistance. For example, three interviews were grandparents asking for food resources/vouchers to have nutritious meals for their health and the child's health. They understood that part of one's well-being is partly due to one diet, but healthy food is costly. This section is more about funded resources than human action support. For these resources to come to life, there need to be some funds.

Mental and Physical Health

Of the eighty-eight participants, forty-one requested *First 5 L.A.* to host workshops on self-development that included mental and physical health themes. For more than half of the participants, wellness was a primary concern for themselves as parents and their children. Their concern significantly grew during the Coronavirus lockdown; many children were forced to stay indoors. It has been stressful for them, particularly with online school, and many parents believe this is harmful to their well-being overall. As a result, some suggested for *First 5 L.A.* to host outside exercise events or even zoom live workshops that force participants to be active.

Figure 2

Problem:	Idea
#1 "They are always sitting in class or at home - helping unite the family- it's better for mental health."	"Involve parents and children in physical activity (ex. yoga, Zumba)."
#2 "On a surface level, children may seem fine, but deep down, things may be brewing."	"Programs to help parents engage in dialogue with their children. How to foster and facilitate conversations with young children."

Source: First 5 - *Best Start Master IC Table BSCLB Year 3 File*

Another big topic regarding the well-being of families and workshop ideas was personal development. Aside from physical health, several interviews were also open to self-growth and development workshops and presentations. Most interviews who mention this were parents willing to learn new parenting skills that would support their children utilizing positive reinforcement. Some further emphasized that they come from generational family trauma and wish to stop the cycle of mistreatment but need guidance. Four individuals expressed this, which is pretty significant.

Family Empowerment

This category was added because some interviews felt they were unaware of their entitlement and rights or how to defend themselves. Consequently, interviews expressed how they were mistreated in certain situations and felt powerless as parents. In particular, many of the discussions that brought up this issue were immigrant or undocumented parents. The interviewees who were willing to identify as immigrants asked for workshops that would teach them about their rights and for a professional to be available for them when needed. It is important to note that they emphasized the need to feel empowered.

The other interview, who also felt incapable of defending themselves and their child, had terrible experiences with established institutions such as social services. For example, a 10-year-old child was verbally abused by a social worker. The interviewee did not further explain the details of the incident but revealed how powerless they felt because they did not know how to defend the child because the parent was not aware of their rights. Their advice was for First 5 L.A. to host workshops that detail one's constitutional rights and what they are supposed to say in certain circumstances.

One-Stop Online Assistance

In this final section, participants mention ways to make resources accessible. Many suggested a one-stop website. The community wants to go to a website to find all the resources related to early childhood care and education. Many also mentioned making sure the sources are available in different languages. For example, many individuals are older and need guidance on using Zoom, but most videos are set up in English. Aside from the website, they also want to be informed about it. They tirelessly expressed how they need First 5 L.A. to outreach, not just families but the entire community.

Figure 3

Problem: Issue: There are not culturally accessible resources for people to turn to	**Idea:** "Have a list of resources for people, so they feel comfortable/open to sharing with people who speak their language and/or have been through similar experiences (like CalWorks, direct aid, etc.)."

Source: First 5 - *Best Start Master IC Table BSCLB Year 3 File*

Discussion

The results indicate that the members of Region four (Long Beach and Wilmington, CA) want to be actively involved in the community; however, individuals feel restricted one way or another. In the previous section, the results of this study were presented in four themes. This segment includes discussing the results and website proposal based on interviewees' responses and the literature review. The findings reinforce the importance of quality ECCE. The section concludes with recommendations for future research in the areas of early childhood resources within marginalized communities.

Lack of Voice and Funding

Theme one first discussed the lack of emotional support within the families in early childhood care. The effects of lack of support are shown in this theme; many individuals felt disregarded in organizations meant to be an aid system. This is significant because most research discussions regarding early childhood care only mention the raised issues with child-care workers and tend to leave out or mitigate parent's concerns. Discussing and presenting their ideas may further help these studies.

The second part of this theme revealed the consequences of a shortage of financial resources. On the one hand, there is a discussion about non-profit organizations like *First 5 L.A.* relocating their funds based on their member's requests. However, there is also a more prominent discussion regarding the inadequate government assistance offered to people. As mentioned in the result section, grandparents requested food security because they did not have the means to get it themselves. This highlights the lack of poorly funded government resources, such as the retirement crisis. A Berkley study notes that three out of ten seniors in California do not have enough to cover their necessities (Ebner, Rhee, 2015). This shows that ECCE is more than resources for children □ resources for guardians are essential to improve ECCE development. Therefore, the website should have a section for food insecurity resources.

Mental and Physical Trauma

Theme two reveals that even busy working parents are aware and concerned about the overall well-being of themselves and their families. This section is regarding workshop and program ideas that interviewees suggested. Most of the proposed workshops are about mental and physical seminars. The previous analysis discusses how families need more health care resources due to the limitations of U.S. health care. This data shows that these local families want to improve the quality of their mental and physical well-being and are open to in-person workshops as the pandemic restrictions loosen. This informs organizations like *First 5 L.A.* that the community wants to be actively engaged and be committed. Subsequently, future funds can be allocated to the community, which will benefit them positively. Interview members highlight a significant point; they suggest outreach to community businesses like Zumba or boxing; this way, the community supports each other.

Additionally, a similar workshop as the ones mentioned earlier are workshops based on good parenting skills. Several individuals said they were new parents still with intergenerational trauma. This sort of trauma can affect the entire family and, more importantly, affect the child's state of mind. As a consequence, children grow up into adults with unsolved issues (Osofsky, 2013). This is worth remarking because the *First 5 L.A.* mission is to prepare young children into future adequate society members. Based on the interviewee's responses, the children they are striving to shape are not currently adequately supported. The first five years are the most significant years of any individual (Rolf et al., 2013). Providing resources for families dealing with generational problems can be a step closer to their vision. It would be ideal to have a counselor available on hand for families provided by *First 5 L.A.*; however, that project is challenging to acquire due to its limited financial resources. In mind with the website, another suggestion is to provide health care insurance resources and create a step-by-step on how to access the mental health office; this research assumes most of the families in Region four qualify for Obama Care subsidize health insurance.

Pervasiveness and Lack of Empowerment

This theme is surprisingly similar to the first theme regarding governmental aid needs to improve. Immigrants have historically silently endured racial and institutional discrimination and judgment. This is primarily due to a language barrier and fear of the consequences if they report wrongdoing. Suppose a large portion of immigrants continues to live in fear of the unknown. As mentioned in the literature, governmental and organizational resources are already hard to access for citizens. In that case, it can lead to a drop in violent reports from immigrants and an increase in targeted violence among immigrants. The Trump administration and the harsh immigration enforcement in recent years also play a role; it created a hostile environment for immigrants.

There is a need to outreach to immigrant families and immigrant community members to familiarize them with migrant law protections. More importantly, it is vital to empower immigrants through peer support groups and notify them that they have access to fundamental human rights. Regarding citizens, it is critical to stress that established intuitions such as social services are not perfect and reassure parents not to be afraid to ask questions or stop a process. Empowering parents allows for the First 5 L.A. intentions to progress. Families will be able to defend themselves and others.

Untapped Ideas for Community Engagement

This section is the most relevant to the scope of this research, and it is the implications of this research. Surprisingly, various individuals stated how they wished to obtain information online. Before examining the data, this study presumed a low probability of individuals suggesting website approaches. However, this was not the case. The first portion they addressed is the language barrier many individuals in the community face. Many of their issues could have been avoided if the resources being provided were in their dialect. Spanish translation versions are not sufficient for this community; other cultures feel overlooked. If the information was accessible in different languages, this could increase active participation with *First 5 L.A.* There were several interviews with individuals who expressed they needed more language preferences than English and Spanish.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study, including time constraints. Due to collaborating with multiple organizations, it was challenging to meet up and discuss the project. As a result, it was difficult to assess this research's purpose promptly. Also, additional surveys were wished to be conducted to give some insight on how the Wilmington community uses

technology and understands data. However, the pandemic and its restrictions limit both organizations and this study from carrying this out. Lastly, this study wanted to examine more policies regarding ECCE; however, time constraints now allow this project to further explore. In conclusion, the Central Long Beach and Wilmington, CA community has been holding several solutions many studies have been seeking. In simple terms, they explained how inaccessible ECCE was affecting their families, and most of their suggestions are double—for example, implementing target programs for such as teen parents and undocumented families.

Recommendations

Although this may not be as easy, politicians still need to push politicians to advocate for a higher budget within ECCE federal and state funds. As for recommendations for future studies, a study should be conducted with an intersectional background to understand better how different groups are affected.

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