

Crowding out reciprocity between working parents and companies with corporate childcare

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Abstract

When the government and companies invest in childcare, both do it with good intentions. While politicians have the intention of enhancing fertility and well-being of families, employers expect positive responses from working parents based on the norm of reciprocity. Since industrialized countries increase public family support year by year, the question arises as to whether this may trigger unanticipated consequences. If both the state and companies invest in substitutive services, they might unintentionally spark competition. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine whether public childcare may “crowd out” the reciprocity effects of corporate childcare on working parents. In Switzerland, state family policies vary between the 26 cantons, so we are able to compare cantons with a high and low number of cantonal childcare services. Using survey data taken from 414 working parents living in different Swiss cantons, we examined whether public childcare affects organizational-related responses of working parents. Firstly, our results support the expected level of reciprocity: working parents in companies with their own childcare services show higher organizational commitment than parents in companies without this support. Secondly, we find evidence for a crowding out effect: in family-supportive cantons with numerous public childcare services, working parents’ commitment to companies with their own childcare services is lower than in less family-friendly cantons. This finding reignites an old economic debate on the crowding out of voluntary private investments due to governmental policies.

Keywords: childcare services, work-family, social exchange, crowding out, organizational commitment, public policy

Introduction

Men and women may desire to have both a career and a family - not simply sacrifice one for the other, which raises the issue of reconciling work and family life. To achieve reconciliation, working parents often need childcare services to help balance work and family matters. The main providers of such services are the state and private suppliers (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). At first glance, it might be assumed that the overall societal benefit would be greatest if all providers offered as much support as possible. This assumption may be true for employees with care responsibilities because a high variety of suppliers would allow them to select the best possible option. But how does widespread public family support affect employers who voluntarily invest in family-friendly services themselves?

A driving force behind an employer who wants to invest in family-friendly services is the business need of attracting and retaining talent in order to increase company productivity (Bloom, Kretschmer & van Reenen, 2011). Therefore, companies offer family-friendly services such as childcare services, anticipating positive employee reactions (e.g., higher organizational commitment). In other words, companies count on the norm of positive reciprocity, or the desire for someone (e.g., the employee) to be kind in response to the kind acts of someone else (e.g., the employer) (Gouldner, 1960). Although providing family-friendly services does not always foster organizational commitment (Kelly et al., 2008), a recently published meta-analysis supports the view that corporate investment in a family supportive work environment evokes a win-win-situation for both sides (Butts, Casper & Yang, 2013). Whereas family-supportive companies help working parents to reduce their work-family conflict and enhance their work-family balance (Eby, Casper, Lockwood, Bordeaux, & Brinley, 2005) the companies themselves benefit from positive work attitudes and behavior intentions such as higher organizational commitment (Thompson, Jahn, Kopelman, & Prottas, 2004), greater loyalty (Grover & Crooker, 1995) and lower turnover intentions (Allen, 2001).

Alternatively, the welfare state has the primary goal of increasing and stabilizing the social, material and cultural well-being of its citizens (Bahle, Kohl, & Wendt, 2010). Thus, as part of a welfare state, family policy focuses on the well-being of families by providing programs and facilities to encourage and support families (Kamerman & Kahn, 1978). As a result of declining birth rates in

western industrialized countries and a lack of women in the labor market (Gauthier, 2002), more and more welfare states re-enforce their public support in order to improve the reconciliation of work and family life. The Swiss government, for example, started a financial impulse program in 2003 to enhance the number of subsidized childcare services in Switzerland (State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, 2005).

A growing body of work has investigated whether companies adopt more or less family-friendly services when the state is supportive (Den Dulk, Peters, Poutsma, & Ligthart, 2010; Den Dulk, Peters, & Poutsma, 2012; Ollier-Malaterre, 2010). Findings indicate that public family support is negatively related to company involvement in family matters. However, we scarcely know anything about employee reactions to the interplay between public and corporate family support. If the state and private companies offer the same services such as childcare, both parties may (unintentionally) trigger competition for positive employee reactions. As a consequence, working parents may perceive company-sponsored services as less valuable as more public alternatives are available. For this reason, the current study examines whether a high number of public childcare services reduces the positive reciprocity between working parents and family-supportive companies with their own childcare services.

To analyze this research question, we used data from 414 working parents living in various cantons of Switzerland. Since Switzerland is one of the most federalist, multinational states in the world, cantonal family policies vary between the 26 Swiss cantons (Lijphart, 1999). In addition to loosely defined nationwide regulations, each canton has its own family support system with varying numbers of cantonal childcare services. This naturally occurring, already established variance between cantons in high and low numbers of public childcare facilities allows us to compare the effects of cantonal childcare policies on the organizational commitment and the intentions to quit of parents working in companies with their own childcare services.

The focus of this study is on collective childcare because this service is provided by the state as well as by some companies, which makes public and company-run childcare services adequate comparisons. Due to the fact that childcare services are solely for the benefit of working parents, we focus in this study on employees with childcare responsibilities. Furthermore, we focus on meaningful

factors for companies by measuring attitudes (organizational commitment) and behavioral intentions (intentions to quit) in order to understand employee reactions from their way of thinking and intended actions.

To our knowledge, no study has yet analyzed the interaction of public and corporate childcare in terms of employee responses. Therefore, this study extends previous research by analyzing the influence of different public childcare support on the employer-related reactions of working parents. Furthermore, comparing the public childcare of Swiss cantons has the advantage that many potentially relevant context variables are controlled for. Specifically, in contrast to the high degree of cantonal autonomy regarding family policy, living conditions and culture are mostly similar throughout Switzerland (Bonoli, 2008). Finally, our research responds to the call to conduct more multi-level research (e.g., Kelly et al., 2008, Ollier-Malaterre, 2010) by analyzing not only the personal and work environment context, but also the political context in Switzerland.

Childcare in Switzerland

In Switzerland, childcare is primarily a private matter that involves parents and extended family members. However, to combine work and family life, childcare services are increasingly needed, especially for dual-worker families. Childcare services can be distinguished with regard to the care situation of the children (collective or individual), as well as to the care supplier (public or private) (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2004). For the purposes of this paper, we focus on collective childcare services in Switzerland that are subsidized by the state or provided by companies.

Public childcare

Public childcare is an example of socio-ecological interventions from a family policy in a welfare state (Gauthier, 1999). Whereas economic interventions such as family allowances have direct material impact on families, socio-ecological interventions aim to improve living conditions in order to reconcile work and family life (Kaufmann, Kuijsten, Schulze, & Strohmeier, 1997).

In Switzerland, public childcare means the provision of subsidized childcare services for preschool children (i.e., infants to kindergarten, or from birth to age 6) as well as for children of school age. While childcare services for preschool children offer to take care of children the whole day,

childcare services for school children only look after them outside of school hours. Depending on household income, parents pay a smaller or larger financial contribution for the subsidized places according to the Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs (2004).

As Switzerland is a federalist, multinational state, the cantonal family policies vary between the 26 Swiss cantons (Lijphart, 1999). In addition to the federal regulations concerning maternity leave, family allowances and tax-deductions, each canton has an autonomous childcare policy. Due to the unequal effort of cantons (including their municipalities) to improve childcare infrastructure in Switzerland, the number of subsidized childcare services differs between cantons (Thoenen, 2010). In addition to cantonal support, the federal government of Switzerland started a time-limited (eight years) impulse program in 2003 to enhance the number of subsidized childcare centers at a cost of 120 Million Swiss Francs (approximately 126 Million U.S. dollars; State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, 2005). In 2010, this financial support was extended by parliament to run until 2015 with an additional credit of 80 Million Swiss Francs (approximately 85 Million U.S. dollars). Since the start of this impulse program, childcare services from each canton are able to apply for federal financial support. The federal government itself therefore, does not interfere in the actual provision and offer of services - only in terms of financial support (Häusermann & Kübler, 2010). The initial results of this state impulse program show that more than 30,000 new childcare services have been created since the beginning of said program (Swiss Federal Social Insurance Office, 2010), which represents a 50% increase. However, at the end of 2008, the number of subsidized childcare services still significantly differs between the 26 cantons (see figure 1).

(Insert figure 1 about here)

Figure 1 shows the number of subsidized childcare services per 1000 children per canton. These numbers account for the cantonal employment rate of mothers and different demand for childcare in each canton. As figure 1 illustrates, a high concentration of state-subsidized childcare services can be found in more urban cantons such as Basel-Stadt as well as in French speaking cantons

in the western part of Switzerland (Bonoli, 2008). By contrast, a low concentration of cantonal childcare is found in the cantons of Central-Switzerland, as well as in the eastern part of Switzerland.

Corporate childcare

Corporate childcare is likely one of the most popular family-supportive services that companies can provide to support their employees (Galinsky, Friedman, & Hernandez, 1991). Corporate childcare refers to facilities at or near the workplace that care for children of pre-school and school age (Hein & Cassirer, 2010). While some companies run the facilities themselves, others outsource the management to specialists, yet still bear the majority of the initial cost for this family support. Parents' contributions and admission requirements are determined by the company, but generally to the advantage of employees (Rothausen, Clarke, & O'Dell, 1998).

In Switzerland, employer-supported childcare is purely voluntary (Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs, 2004). According to the Swiss Human-Relations-Barometer 2010, a representative survey of employees in Switzerland, 17% of Swiss employers provide their own childcare services and 20% offer financial assistance (vouchers). For example, these vouchers could fund a childcare center for their employees' children in an external, public childcare center or in an external private childcare center (Grote & Staffelbach, 2010). In contrast to other family-friendly services such as extended family leave beyond the statutory period or family-friendly work arrangements (e.g., working from home), employer-provided childcare is rather rare. However, compared with other countries, company childcare is relatively widespread in Switzerland. For example, in the Netherlands, 12% of companies have their own childcare service, while another 17% offer financial care assistance (Hein & Cassirer, 2010). In the United States, 10% of companies offer on-site daycare (Galinsky, Bond, Sakai, Kim, & Giuntoli, 2008), and in the United Kingdom, 6%-7% of companies offer such services (Budd & Mumford, 2006; Riedmann, Bielenski, Szczurowska, & Wagner, 2006). In all of these countries, public childcare support is relatively weak. In contrast, in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, childcare is mostly provided by the state with less than 10 private firms offering childcare (Green-Petersen, 2002).

Although corporate childcare grew in popularity during the 1980s and 1990s in countries including Switzerland, most on-site childcare services can be found in larger companies, often in the

financial or business services, and therefore tend to reach employees with higher levels of education and income (Grote & Staffelbach, 2010; Hein & Cassirer, 2010). Smaller companies are often unwilling to invest in childcare services because of their high fixed costs (Riedmann et al., 2006).

Theoretical framework

Corporate childcare and reciprocity

Employers' motivations to invest in corporate childcare are wide-ranging. Some perceive the investment as a generous gesture to support employees. Others aim to improve the company's reputation by acting in a socially responsible manner and providing family-supportive services. However, for the majority of employers who voluntarily offer corporate childcare, it is part of their corporate strategy and not an altruistic gift (Bloom et al., 2011). According to a company survey in the United States, employer-sponsored childcare is perceived as an effective tool to attract and retain employees. Employers expect positive employee responses such as enhanced loyalty, reduced absenteeism and turnover (Hein & Cassirer, 2010). These expectations are largely based on the norm of positive reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), a social norm that underlies the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964). Positive reciprocity describes the impulse or desire of someone (e.g., an employee) to react kindly to someone else's kind behavior (e.g., an employer) (Fehr & Gächter, 1998). This social norm functions to help establish expectations with respect to the behavior of others (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007). Specifically in the context of corporate childcare, employers create expectations of their employees' reactions as a result of their investment in corporate childcare services. Considering this investment to be a generous support for working parents, employers expect working parents to react kindly to them in response.

From the perspective of working parents, the availability of corporate childcare might be interpreted as a signal of favorable treatment of employees with childcare responsibilities (Grover & Crooker, 1995). As a consequence, working parents may feel obliged to reciprocate in ways that are beneficial to the company. Additional support for this premise comes from the organizational support theory (Eisenberger, Fasolo & Davis-Lamastro, 1990), which is based on social exchange theory and the norm of positive reciprocity. This theory predicts that working parents form a general belief regarding the extent to which a company cares about them. The availability of corporate childcare

offered to help working parents may increase working parents' perception of organizational support. When they feel supported by the company, they may identify with the company and feel the obligation to reciprocate (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

According to the social exchange theory, such a reciprocal act is nonmaterial (Blau, 1964), and working parents may reciprocate through more positive work attitudes and behavioral intentions (e.g., higher organizational commitment or lower intentions to quit). Empirical research confirms that enhanced organizational commitment and reduced turnover intentions are two important outcomes of employees' obligation to reciprocate favorable treatments (Rhoades, Eisenberger & Armeli, 2001). Similarly, a number of studies indicate that employees who work in a company with corporate childcare report higher organizational attachment (Grover & Crooker, 1995; Goldberg, Greenberger, Koch-Jones, O'Neil, & Hamill, 1989; Orthner & Pittman, 1986). Employees with childcare responsibilities are especially likely to report high levels of commitment (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Prottas, 2002; Thompson et al., 2004), and they also tend to remain at a company if childcare services exist (Allen, 2001; Kossek & Nichol, 1992). Furthermore, research in the United Kingdom indicates that women are twice as likely to return to work for an employer who offers childcare support than one who offers no childcare support (Unison, 2004).

Importantly, the effects of corporate childcare on organizational commitment and intentions to quit are not only explained by the norm of reciprocity. Payne, Cook and Diaz (2011) remark that the effect of corporate childcare relates to employee outcomes such as organizational commitment and intentions to quit through reduced work-family conflict. Corporate childcare has a positive effect on employees as it helps them balance work demands and the care of their children (Eby et al., 2005; Morrissey & Warner, 2011). Working parents report that they are satisfied with on-site childcare because they are close to their children and are able to react quickly in the case of an emergency (Hein & Cassirer, 2010). At the same time, if employees are satisfied with the care situation of their children, employers benefit from increased organizational commitment and reduced intentions to quit (Abt Associates, 2000; Buffardi & Erdwins, 1998).

Despite the above mentioned findings, scholars are not in complete agreement that corporate childcare generates commitment and reduces turnover intentions of working parents (Kelly et al.,

2008). First, there is a difference between corporate childcare being available and being used.

Employees on the waiting list of a company-run childcare service may have very different experiences than employees already benefiting from this service (Kossek & Nichol, 1992). However, a recently published meta-analysis by Butts and colleague (2013) indicates that the availability and the use of work-family policies (such as corporate childcare) are generally positively related to organizational commitment and intention to stay. Further, results show that program availability was more strongly related to both outcomes than was actual program use. Therefore, we argue that availability of corporate childcare is more important in triggering positive reciprocity responses (e.g., organizational commitment), because it signals corporate concern. Second, corporate childcare may create dependency. Ollier-Malaterre (2010) predicts that employees benefiting from corporate childcare may remain with the company because of the childcare rather than the company. This may create a dependency, which can be detrimental to positive work attitudes such as organizational commitment. However, in line with the organizational support theory, we argue that loyalty is created by services such as corporate childcare. When corporate childcare is perceived as organizational support, it may reduce feelings of entrapment that occur when employees feel obligated to stay with their current employer because of high leaving costs (Shore & Tetrick, 1991). Therefore, when working parents perceive corporate childcare as a supportive act, they may feel emotionally attached to the company despite a certain dependency. In summary, we predict a positive reciprocity effect of company-run childcare services on working parents' organizational commitment and their intention to stay in the company. In detail, we postulate the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: The availability of corporate childcare is positively related to working parents' organizational commitment to their company.

Hypothesis 1b: The availability of corporate childcare is negatively related working parents' intentions to quit their company.

Effects of substitutes on reciprocity

An implicit assumption underlying the norm of positive reciprocity is that the resources exchanged are valued by both parties. According to Eisenberger, Armeli, Rexwinkel, Lunch and Rhoades (2001), employees are motivated to repay offers from their employers that they value by

acting in ways that are also valued by the company. For our example, this would mean that employees react to offers of corporate childcare with increased commitment and reduced intentions to quit. However, this consequence is based on the assumption that the employer's offer is valued by the employees. If the offer is not actually valued (or not valued enough) by the employee, then the employee may not be willing to reciprocate with a valuable resource. As noted by Gouldner (1960), goods are more valued when the recipient (e.g., the employee) is in greater need of those specific goods. Therefore, the greatest need occurs if no one else offers a suitable alternative.

The microeconomic consumer theory defines a substitute as a good that may replace another similar good, for example a black tea may replace coffee (Nicholson, 1998). The consumer then prefers the one good that appears more valuable and attractive. If an employee as a consumer values an external substitute (e.g., a public childcare service) more than the employer's offer (e.g., a corporate childcare service), the external substitute "crowds out" the positive reciprocity that the employer expected when investing in the initial offer.

This crowding out hypothesis is supported by a well-established economic theory, the theory of crowding out, which describes how private investment can be destroyed by public contributions (Barro, 1974; Bergstrom, Blume, & Varian, 1986; Roberts, 1984; Warr, 1983). Economists argue that if welfare states provide public goods, free-riding for all occurs. As a consequence, private investors (e.g., employers) lose their interest in investing in public goods (e.g., childcare services), because the positive effects of their investment are crowded out by the state involvement.

Empirical studies also support this theory. For example, Abrams and Schmitz (1978) found that a one dollar increase in governmental social welfare transfers lowered private charitable contributions by about 28 cents. Andreoni (1993) also tested this theory with a laboratory experiment and found that 71% of private investors disappeared following state involvement. Andreoni concluded that government contributions partially crowd out the positive reciprocity effect, which private investors count on.

In the current study, we argue that positive reciprocity occurs because working parents appreciate corporate childcare while employers value positive employee reactions including higher organizational commitment and lower intentions to quit. However, by referring to the study of

Gouldner (1960) mentioned above, working parents may only value the supply of corporate childcare if they are in need of this offer because no other valuable substitute exists. The substitute to employer-supported childcare would be a subsidized public childcare service. If public childcare is available in the vicinity of where working parents reside, the state and companies may find themselves in (unintentional) competition. Thus, the need of working parents for employer-sponsored childcare may decrease as the number of public substitutes increases. Combined with this decrease in need, employer-sponsored childcare could also decrease in value for working parents. As a consequence, the expected positive employee reactions such as lower intentions to quit and higher organizational commitment to companies with their own childcare may be crowded out.

In the light of these considerations, we hypothesize that working parents living in cantons with a high number of cantonal childcare services report lower positive reciprocity (lower organizational commitment and higher intentions to quit) to companies with their own childcare services than working parents living in cantons with a low number of cantonal childcare services. This leads us to the following two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a: Public childcare moderates the relationship between corporate childcare and working parents' organizational commitment. Specifically, working parents living in cantons with many public childcare services report lower commitment to a company with its own childcare service than working parents living in cantons with few public childcare services.

Hypothesis 2b: Public childcare moderates the relationship between corporate childcare and working parents' intentions to quit. Specifically, working parents living in cantons with many public childcare services report higher intentions to quit a company with its own childcare service than working parents living in cantons with few public childcare services.

Methods

Procedure

To measure the effect of competing childcare support on working parents' organizational commitment and intentions to quit, we used the Swiss Human-Relations-Barometer, a survey that annually measures employees' perceptions of their current work situation in Switzerland (Grote & Staffelbach, 2010). Specifically, we analyzed data from the Swiss Human-Relations-Barometer 2010,

which focused particularly on the topic of work-family support. Data was collected between March and June 2009 in Switzerland. Qualified telephone interviewers contacted employees at home using a random sample of all registered telephone numbers in the German and French speaking areas of Switzerland. The interviews were conducted in German and French. The items were translated and back-translated to ensure they retain their meaning.

Employees were included in the sample if they were between 16 and 64 years of age, had a dependent, paid employment, and were employed at least 40% per week. Additionally, we focused only on employees who reported having childcare responsibilities for at least one minor child. Employees with care responsibilities for the elderly or those without care responsibilities were excluded from this study, because they do not benefit directly from childcare services (Brummelhuis & van der Lippe, 2010). Centering on this specific employee group, we were able to analyze the postulated reciprocity effect of company-provided childcare services on working parents. Furthermore, we combined the employee data of the Swiss Human-Relations-Barometer with data from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office. Thus, we were able to combine the responses of the working parents with data from their canton of residence – including the cantonal number of public childcare services – because parents reported the zip codes of their residential district. This allowed us to analyze whether public childcare has a moderating effect on the relationship between corporate childcare and the attitudes and behavioral intentions of working parents.

Sample

Our final sample included 414 working parents in Switzerland. Descriptive analyses indicate that 21% of our sample worked in a company with its own childcare service. Almost half of the working parents were female (49%). The average age of the employees was 42.74 years ($SD = 6.40$), and the average organizational tenure was 9.48 years ($SD = 7.57$). Sixty-two percent worked full time and 43% were in a position of leadership. In terms of formal education, 39% had a college degree or higher (bachelor's degree or above). Sixteen percent worked in micro companies (< 10 employees), 50% in small / medium sized companies ($\geq 10 - 249$ employees), and 33% in large companies (≥ 250 employees). Only 2% of the companies were in the primary sector (agriculture), 23% were in the secondary sector (industry), and 75% were in the tertiary sector (services). Cantonal statistics indicate

that all Swiss cantons (with exception of the canton Ticino) were represented in the sample. Of the working parents interviewed, 64% lived in cantons with more than 400,000 inhabitants such as Zurich or Geneva, 31% were inhabitants of cantons with a population of 100,000 to 400,000 people (e.g., Fribourg or Solothurn), and 5% lived in cantons with a population of less than 100,000 people (e.g., Uri, Appenzell, or Innerrhoden). On average, 78.58% (SD = 20.07) of the working parents interviewed lived in urban areas or in towns with more than 10,000 residents.

Measurements

Corporate childcare. The availability of a company-sponsored childcare service was measured with a dummy variable (1 = with company-sponsored childcare, 0 = without company-sponsored childcare). As in Galinsky et al. (1991), employees were asked: “Does your employer provide its own childcare service?”

Public childcare. To measure the public childcare support of each canton we used the number of subsidized childcare services per 1,000 children per canton (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2008a). This number accounted for the cantonal employment rate of mothers and the different demand for childcare services in each canton (Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2008b). The Swiss Federal Statistical Office collects the data on cantonal childcare services (for preschool and school children) that are able to apply for subsidies every four years. Company-run childcare, babysitters, or parent-run childcare services are not included in these statistics. Moreover, our data only contains information about the number of childcare services, but not about the number of locations they offer. By clustering the number of public childcare services per canton based on a median of 3.92, we created two groups: cantons with many public childcare services (3.92 – 10.00) and cantons with few public childcare services (0 – 3.91). We also checked for robustness of the group subdivisions (inclusive or exclusive median), but found no different effects. Finally, we defined a dummy variable (high concentration of cantonal childcare services = 1, low concentration of cantonal childcare services = 0).

Organizational commitment. Of all of the components of Allen and Meyer’s multidimensional model of organizational commitment, the affective commitment component shows the strongest positive correlations with organizationally salient outcomes (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnysky, 2002). Therefore, we evaluated the working parents’ commitment to their company using 3 items

developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) for affective organizational commitment (e.g., “In my company, I feel part of a big family.”). Respondents rated their agreement with the statements on a five-point scale (1 = I strongly disagree, 5 = I strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha indicates high internal consistency ($\alpha = .89$).

Intentions to quit. We used 2 items from Guest and Conway (2004). First, respondents answered the following question on a four-point scale (1 = low, 4 = high): “How likely is it that you will leave this organization in the following year voluntarily?” Second, respondents were asked to choose 1 of 4 statements that best reflected their current status in terms of intentions to quit their job (e.g., no thoughts about quitting, sometimes thinking about quitting, currently searching for other jobs, and currently trying to quit). These stages were scored from 1 to 4, respectively. Internal consistency was acceptable (Pearson’s $r = .61$).

Control variables. We controlled for a number of personal and organizational variables, which have been shown in previous research to influence organizational commitment (Meyer et al., 2002) and intentions to quit (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Additionally, we controlled for two cantonal variables that could influence the outcome variables.

Person-related control variables included sex (1 = male, 0 = female), age in years, employment (1 = full time, 0 = part time), leadership position (1 = with, 0 = without leadership position), organizational tenure in years and months, monthly income, highest educational attainment (1 = high: bachelor, master and above, 0 = low: compulsory school, apprenticeship / vocational, high school). Additionally, we asked about family childcare support (childcare support of partner / grandparents as a percentage) or third party support (e.g., a nanny) to control for a potential decreased need for corporate or public childcare (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Organization-related control variables included company size, which was measured with 3 dummy variables: micro (< 10 employees, reference group), small/medium-sized ($\geq 10 - 249$ employees), large companies (≥ 250 employees), and sector, which was also measured with 3 dummy variables: primary (reference group), secondary, and tertiary sector.

Cantonal controls included cantonal economic interventions for families to control for the additional monetary support parents receive such as monthly child allowance (Swiss Federal

Department of Home Affairs, 2004). Such monetary support makes working parents more independent from corporate childcare, which may influence their intentions to stay or leave their company. As public childcare infrastructure is more common in urban centers than in more rural regions (Armingeon, Bertozzi, & Bonoli, 2004), we controlled for the urbanization of respondents' residential district using the percentage of the resident population living in urban areas or in towns of more than 10,000 residents similar to Bonoli (2008).

After an initial analysis of the above mentioned control variables, we excluded controls that were not significantly related to the dependent variables based on the recommendations of Becker (2005). According to Becker, including control variables that are uncorrelated with the dependent variable reduces power and may lead to misinterpretations of the results. Therefore, we excluded the following uncorrelated control variables from the analyses: sex, age, monthly income, highest educational qualification, third party support and cantonal controls.

Analytical procedures

We used multivariate linear regression analyses to measure the effect of corporate childcare (company-run childcare) on working parents' organizational commitment and intentions to quit (hypotheses 1a and 1b). We also analyzed whether public childcare moderates the relation between corporate childcare and the outcome variables (hypotheses 2a and 2b). To identify a potential moderation effect, we followed the three-step process of Baron and Kenny (1986).

First, the dependent variables (organizational commitment, intentions to quit) were regressed on corporate childcare (1 = with, 0 = without corporate childcare service) and the control variables in order to analyze the main effect of corporate childcare. In this first step, we tested hypotheses 1a and 1b. Second, we included the moderating variable public childcare (1 = many public childcare services, 0 = few public childcare services) in the regression model to analyze the main effect of public childcare. Third, the interaction term of corporate childcare and public childcare was entered in the regression model to test if there was a moderation effect. In this third step, we tested hypotheses 2a and 2b.

According to Baron and Kenny (1986), a moderating effect exists if two conditions are fulfilled. The first condition is that the interaction term must have a significant effect on the dependent

variable, while the independent and moderating variables are controlled. The second condition is that entering the interaction term should significantly increase the explained variance.

Results

Descriptive results

Correlations are reported in table 1. As expected, the bivariate correlations show that working parents' organizational commitment is significantly positively related to the availability of company-sponsored childcare ($r = .130$; $p < .01$). For intentions to quit, the relation was negatively related to availability of company-sponsored childcare as expected, however, it was not significant ($r = -.023$; $p > .1$).

(Insert table 1 about here)

To analyze the descriptive findings under controlled circumstances, we used multivariate regression analyses as a next step. Results are presented regarding the effects of corporate childcare and public childcare, as well as their interaction, on organizational commitment and intentions to quit.

Test of hypotheses

Results from the multivariate regression analyses for organizational commitment are shown in table 2. As a first step, the main effect of corporate childcare on organizational commitment is shown. Working parents are significantly more committed to the organization if the company provides its own childcare than if the company provides no childcare (model 1: $\beta = .200$, $p < .05$). This finding supports hypothesis 1a, based on the norm of positive reciprocity. As a second step, we analyzed the main effect of cantonal childcare. Having many public childcare services in the canton of residence is significantly negatively related to organizational commitment in contrast to there being a low number of public childcare services in the canton of residence (model 2: $\beta = -.189$, $p < .05$). As a third step, we entered the interaction term of corporate childcare and cantonal childcare in order to test hypothesis 2a: Results indicate that the interaction term of corporate childcare and public childcare significantly and negatively affects organizational commitment (model 3: $\beta = -.439$, $p < .1$). Moreover, inclusion of the interaction term results in a significant increase in explained variance ($F_{\text{change}} = 3.4$, $p < .05$). Findings indicate that the two conditions for a moderation effect according to Baron and Kenny (1986) are fulfilled, supporting hypothesis 2a.

To advance further interpretations of the moderating effect, we plotted the interaction of corporate childcare and public childcare according to Aiken and West (1991b). Figure 2 demonstrates that working parents' organizational commitment to companies with their own childcare differs with respect to public childcare in the canton of residence. Working parents living in cantons with many public childcare services show lower commitment to companies with their own childcare services than working parents living in cantons with few public childcare services. Moreover, in cantons with a many public childcare services, working parents' commitment to companies with their own childcare services has a similarly low level to the commitment of parents working in companies without childcare services. In contrast, in cantons where public childcare is weak, working parents' commitment to their company is higher if they offer their own childcare than if they do not offer childcare. In other words, the reciprocity-based positive relationship between working parents and companies with their own childcare service disappears in cantons with strong public childcare (i.e., many cantonal childcare services). In cantons with low public childcare (i.e., few cantonal childcare services), the reciprocity-based positive relationship remains.

(Insert table 2 here)

(Insert figure 2 here)

The multivariate regression analyses for intentions to quit indicate different results from those for organizational commitment (see table 3). As the first step shows, the main effect of corporate childcare on working parents' intentions to quit is not statistically significant ($\beta = -.056$, $p > .1$). Therefore, hypothesis 1b is not supported by our data. As a second step, we measured the main effect of public childcare on intentions to quit. Results indicate that many public childcare facilities significantly increases working parents' intentions to quit ($\beta = .162$, $p < .05$). This effect remains significant in the third step after entering the interaction term in the regression model. Contrary to our postulation, the interaction term of corporate childcare and public childcare has no significant effect on intentions to quit. Similarly, entering the interaction term does not explain additional variance. Therefore, the conditions for a moderation effect are not fulfilled, and hypothesis 2b must be rejected.

(Insert table 3 here)

Regarding the person-related control variables, leadership position and tenure were significantly and positively related to organizational commitment, which is in line with the literature (Becker, 1960). As expected, family childcare support also enhances organizational commitment (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Regarding the organization-related control variables, company size is significantly related to organizational commitment and intentions to quit. Additionally, parents working in the tertiary sector have a significantly lower level of commitment in contrast to the reference group (primary sector).

Discussion

The goal of this study was to analyze how public childcare affects the positive reciprocity between working parents and companies with their own childcare services in contrast to weak public childcare. In many countries such as Switzerland, the government has enforced the expansion of public childcare (e.g., childcare centers) with financial support in recent years. This development raises the question of how much involvement the state should have, and how much should be left to the market.

Our results support the expectations of positive reciprocity between working parents and companies with their own childcare. Working parents' organizational commitment to companies with corporate childcare is higher than the commitment of parents working in firms without this support. This finding is consistent with hypothesis 1a and the organizational support theory, which predict positive employee reactions when the company shows concern about employees' well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1990). However, the positive reciprocity effect could not be replicated for intentions to quit, which is contrary to hypothesis 1b.

Further, our study provides evidence that corporate childcare and public childcare are not independent from each other. Our empirical findings support the theoretical assumption of Barro (1974) as well as hypothesis 2a, which state that public interventions can crowd out the positive reciprocity between employees and employer. Company-sponsored childcare centers seem to (partially) lose their value for working parents once the government provides enough substitutes. Being able to choose between a large number of childcare facilities means that working parents are in less need of a corporate childcare. As a consequence, the higher level of commitment to companies

with their own childcare centers is crowded out. However, we found no evidence to support our hypothesis 2b, which postulates a crowding out of reciprocity-based reduced intentions to quit in parents working in companies with their own childcare facilities. The reason for this lack of effect is most likely due to the lack of effect of corporate childcare on intentions to quit. Nevertheless, we found a significant effect of public childcare on working parents' intentions to quit their job, indicating that working parents have higher turnover intentions if they live in cantons with many public childcare centers.

Theoretical contributions

Our findings have several theoretical contributions. First, our study contributes to social exchange theory and work-family research by showing that corporate childcare services do enhance organizational commitment. This result is in line with previous findings about positive reciprocity between working parents and companies with their own childcare services (e.g., Bond et al., 2002; and Thompson et al., 2004). However, our study was not able to replicate the reciprocity effect for intention to quit. One possible explanation for the lack of reciprocity concerning intentions to quit is provided by Kossek and Nichol (1992), who found that company-run childcare centers have a stronger effect on retention-related attitudes than on behavioral intentions.

Second, our study responds to the call from work-family researchers to conduct more multi-level research (e.g., Kelly et al., 2008; and Ollier-Malaterre, 2010). We analyzed the effects of several context levels on organizational commitment and intentions to quit. Results indicate that the situational context (such as public childcare policy), in addition to the work environment (such as corporate childcare) and the personal context (such as family childcare support), shape working parents' organizational commitment and intentions to quit. Specifically, public childcare affects the positive reciprocity between working parents and companies with their own childcare, depending on the concentration of public childcare in the canton of residence. As our results indicate, parents' commitment to their employers is highest if the company offers its own childcare and the parents live in a canton with few cantonal substitutes. In contrast, the commitment of parents employed in a company with its own childcare is significantly lower if their canton of residence provides many cantonal substitutes.

These findings contribute to the debate concerning the impact of public provisions is on employer programs. Employers are primarily interested in investing in programs such as childcare centers if they can increase their attractiveness as an employer. In the case of a widespread public childcare infrastructure, positive employee reactions to company-sponsored childcare centers disappear. This crowding out of positive reciprocity may lead to a second crowding out phenomenon: the loss of voluntary corporate childcare services. For example, Den Dulk et al. (2010) analyzed company data in 19 European countries and found that employers are less willing to offer family-supportive services when the state takes the main responsibility for the provision of work-family policies. This phenomenon was also mentioned in the OECD Employment Outlook (2001). According to the analyses of the OECD, employers in countries with a socio-democratic childcare policy are the least likely to provide corporate childcare services voluntarily (OECD, 2004). In Denmark, for example, a country with a strong public childcare policy, less than 1% of employers provide their own childcare. In such countries, the government has to bear the majority of the costs for childcare infrastructure. Therefore, a growing number of politicians in welfare states with strong public childcare policies seek to adjust family policies by contracting out and privatizing public childcare in order to share the social costs with private investors (Green-Petersen, 2002). However, the results of Den Dulk et al. (2012) indicate that private investors such as companies do not automatically step in when governments step back in terms of work-family support.

Third, we contribute to research on childcare-related public policy by showing that a high concentration of public childcare support is associated with several unintended consequences. As discussed above, a high concentration of public childcare crowds out the organizational commitment between working parents and companies with their own childcare support. Therefore, giving control of childcare completely to the government may mean losing the interest of companies to invest voluntarily in substitutive services. However, a widespread public childcare has a significant negative effect on working parents' intentions to quit. Working parents living in cantons with many public childcare centers report higher turnover intentions compared to those parents living in cantons with few public childcare centers. A possible explanation for this result could be that having many public childcare centers affords parents more geographical and job mobility (Kübler, 2001). Living in

cantons with few public child care centers may complicate the desire to change jobs or move residences for parents because it would be more difficult to find a new childcare center near the new job or residence. Thus, this may reduce their intentions to quit. Alternatively, living in cantons with many public childcare centers may facilitate changes in employment or residence for working parents. From a policy perspective, high employee mobility can be seen as desirable for the economy, because it enables an appropriate flow of labor (Solimano, 2008). Therefore, this result can be interpreted as an unintended benefit of a widespread public childcare support.

Practical implications and conclusions

The findings from this study have clear practical implications for Human Resource (HR) officers. For example, when the state provides widespread childcare support, HR officers should focus instead on other work-family initiatives where there is potentially less competition and more value, for example, flexible work arrangements and employee assistance programs. According to Esping-Andersen (1990) and Gauthier (1999), a widespread public childcare system corresponds to a socio-democratic family policy, which is driven by social regime attributes and a high commitment to gender equality. From the point of view of socio-democratic welfare states, public childcare has some advantages over corporate childcare (Kübler, 2001). First, all working parents have an equal opportunity to receive a place of care for their child. According to previous research, having access to corporate childcare likely means being a well-educated employee with a higher income, perhaps also an employee working in a large company or in the financial sector. This is important to consider given that working parents with lower income and education are more dependent on public childcare support (Hein & Cassirer, 2010). Second, having children in company-sponsored childcare may lead to a dependent relationship between working parents and their employer. The integration of the child in company-provided childcare makes it difficult to change working situations while a public childcare center may provide more flexibility. Third, public childcare centers have the advantage of often being close to the place of residence. A childcare center near one's home may help children to settle down in the area where they will later go to school. In addition, a childcare center near one's home also allows both parents to pick up flexibly the child after work.

Despite the advantages of public childcare centers, implementing a socio-democratic childcare policy is not without its hidden challenges. As our results indicate, widespread public childcare support negatively affects family-friendly companies that voluntarily provide their own childcare. Furthermore, as experienced by the Netherlands, a widespread public childcare system may also have unforeseen consequences for the state. In 2005, a new childcare law was introduced in the Netherlands to establish uniform rules regarding quality, safety, and the funding of childcare. The goal of this new law was to distribute the costs of public childcare services to the state, to the employers (but voluntarily), and to the parents. The law, however, led to a rapid cost increase for the government over just a few years as fewer employers contributed voluntarily to the cost of childcare, which was contrary to the expectations of the government (Noailly & Visser, 2009).

Overall, our findings reignite the classic economic debate about the potential crowding out of private investments due to state interventions. Although strong public childcare may crowd out positive reciprocity, and in consequence, the corporate interest to invest voluntarily in childcare, companies are still able to evoke positive reciprocity with other family-friendly services. Flexible work arrangements or family-friendly work culture are unique employer offers that cannot be provided by the state, and thus, would not be in competition with the state. Nevertheless, the question remains open as to how much social cost a state should bear and what the ideal combination of public and corporate childcare should be.

Limitations and future research

Although this study has revealed some interesting findings, there are also some limitations, and these generate ideas for future research: A first limitation of the present study relates to the measurement of public childcare. Due to a lack of publicly accessible information, we used the number of cantonal childcare centers as the indicator of public childcare. Considering that the number of subsidized locations per childcare center may differ, this indicator is relatively imprecise. Furthermore, parents have to pay a share of cost for a subsidized childcare center, and this can vary depending on the local childcare center fees. In many cantons, the municipalities are also in charge of subsidizing childcare, which is why the number of childcare centers may differ between the municipalities within the same canton. Until now, however, there is no available data providing a clear

overview of childcare support in the 2596 municipalities in Switzerland. For future research, it would be interesting to replicate our findings with more precise indicators for cantonal as well as municipal childcare, such as the number of subsidized childcare places per municipality and the share of cost parents have to pay for a subsidized childcare place.

A second limitation relates to the measurement of corporate childcare. Participants reported whether or not their employer provides its own childcare. Therefore, we did examine whether the working parents actually used corporate childcare, would like to use the childcare but cannot (because they are on a waiting list), or whether they would prefer another childcare provider. Although we found a positive reciprocity effect between working parents and companies providing their own childcare, the effect we observed could be greater for working parents who actually use this offer as they directly benefit from this service. Furthermore, it would be interesting for future research to analyze if working parents in cantons with strong public childcare support use fewer company-sponsored childcare centers than working parents living in cantons with weak public childcare support. Additionally, company-sponsored childcare centers may differ in terms of price or in their quality. Further, Buffardi and Erdwins (1997) showed that childcare satisfaction is an important predictor of various work attitudes. Thus, these factors could also be assessed in future research.

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Figures

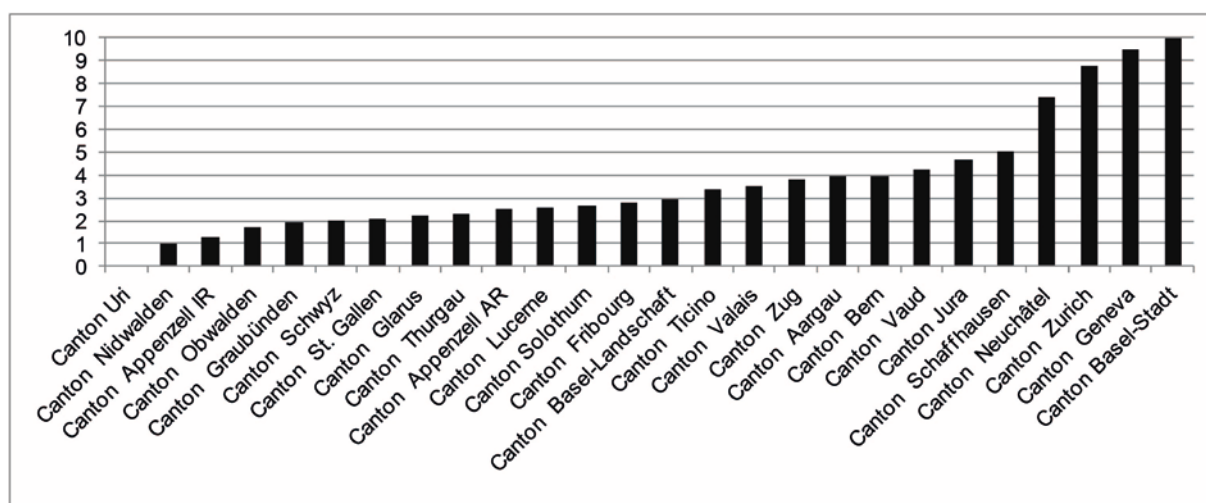


Figure 1: Relative number of cantonal childcare centers per 1000 children (Source: Swiss Office for National Statistics, 2008a)

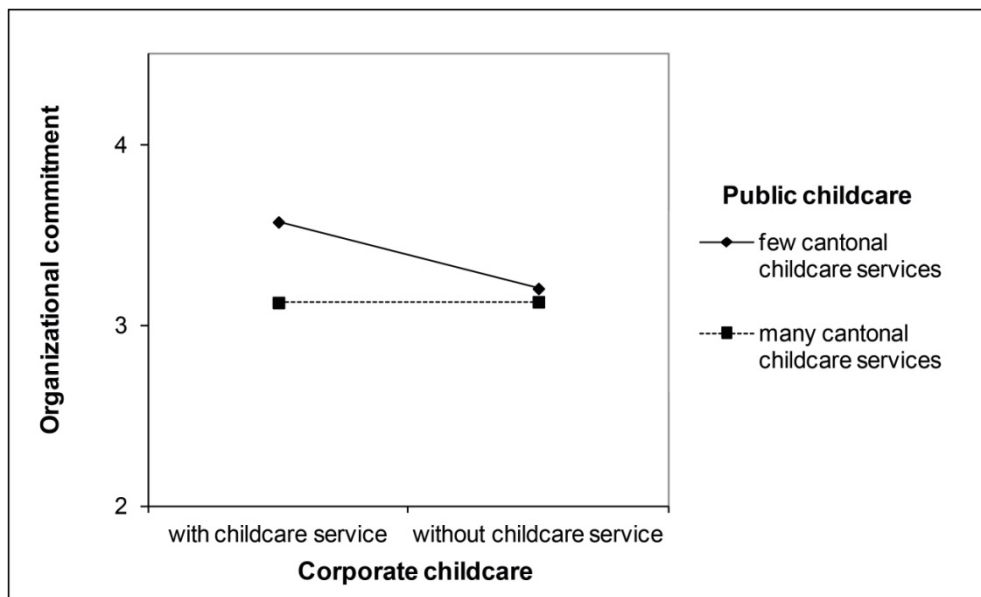


Figure 2: Moderating effect of public childcare on the relationship between corporate childcare and organizational commitment

Tables

Table 1: Means, standard deviations, and correlations among study variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Position ^a	.45	.498								
2. Tenure	9.72	7.61	.135**							
3. Family care support (%)	48.17	31.71	.310*	.106						
4. Company size	2.77	.50	.017	.095	.094					
5. Sector	2.76	.45	-.091	-.115*	-.162**	.058				
6. Corporate childcare ^b	.19	.39	.034	.048	-.058	.190**	.097			
7. Public childcare ^c	.54	.49	.010	-.052	-.065	.062	.080	.054		
8. Commitment	3.57	1.06	.134**	.114**	.105*	-.176**	-.108*	.130**	-.160**	
9. Intentions to quit	1.78	1.79	-.064	-.109*	-.052	.051	.116*	-.023	.120**	-.407**

Note: N = 414; ^aposition: 1 = with, 0 = without leadership; ^bcorporate childcare: 1 = with corporate childcare service, 0 = without corporate childcare service; ^cpublic childcare: 1 = many cantonal childcare services, 0 = few cantonal childcare services; significance is denoted as: * < .05; ** < .01

Table 2: Regression of corporate and public childcare and their interaction on working parents' organizational commitment

	Organizational commitment		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Main and interaction effects</i>			
Corporate childcare (C)	.200 (.121)**	.204 (.120)**	.462 (.184)***
Public childcare (P)		-.189 (.092)**	-.115 (.100)
Interaction C x P			-.439 (.238)*
<i>Control variables</i>			
Position	.271 (.097)**	.282 (.097)**	.280 (.096)**
Tenure	.018 (.006)**	.017 (.006)**	.018 (.006)**
Family childcare support	.005 (.002)**	.004 (.002)**	.004 (.002)**
Company size (ref. micro)			
small/medium	-.622 (.133)***	-.621 (.133)***	-.622 (.132)***
large	-.851 (.142)***	-.828 (.142)***	-.825 (.142)***
Sector (ref. primary)			
secondary	-.194 (.216)	-.237 (.217)	-.240 (.216)
tertiary	-.343 (.200)*	-.374 (.199)*	-.371 (.199)*
ΔR^2	.150***	.009**	.008**
R^2	.150	.157	.164
adjusted R^2	.134	.141	.150
N	414	414	414

Note: standard errors in brackets. Corporate childcare: 1 = with, 0 = without corporate childcare service; public childcare: 1 = many, 0 = few cantonal childcare services; position: 1 = with, 0 = without leadership position; significance is denoted as: * < .10. ** < .05; *** < .001

Table 3: Regression of corporate and public childcare and their interaction on working parents' intentions to quit

	Intentions to quit		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Main and interaction effects</i>			
Corporate childcare (C)	-.056 (.099)	-.052 (.099)	-.061 (.152)
Public childcare (P)		.162 (.075)**	.130 (.082)*
Interaction C x P			.193 (.196)
<i>Control variables</i>			
Position	-.018 (.080)	-.028 (.079)	-.027 (.079)
Tenure	-.009 (.005)	-.009 (.005)	-.009 (.005)
Family childcare support	-.001 (.001)	-.000 (.001)	-.000 (.001)
Company size (ref. micro)			
small/medium	.193 (.109)*	.192 (.109)*	.192 (.109)*
large	.208 (.117)*	.189 (.117)	.187 (.117)
Sector (ref. primary)			
secondary	-.118 (.178)	-.081 (.178)	-.080 (.178)
tertiary	.009 (.164)	.036 (.164)	.034 (.164)
ΔR^2	.056**	.010**	.000
R^2	.056	.067	.068
adjusted R^2	.043	.054	.054
N	414	414	414

Note: standard errors in brackets. Corporate childcare: 1 = with, 0 = without corporate childcare service; public childcare: 1 = many, 0 = few cantonal childcare services; position: 1 = with, 0 = without leadership position; significance is denoted as: * < .10, ** < .05; *** < .001