Introduction

Today, the regulations of most child care programs, which include centers and homes, are each State’s responsibility. During the first few years of life, research has showed that children’s healthy development depends on safe and positive experiences. Researchers have identified 13-indicators of quality child care to consider when evaluating child care programs. As state child care agencies revise their regulations, the purpose of the research is to provide guidance. The Stepping Stones to Using Caring for Our Children (1997) has provided a synthesis of literature for the health and safety standards for out-of-home child care.

The Instrument Based Program Monitoring Information System (IPM) and the Indicator Checklist (IC) are two tools for the state management of child day care services. When the Weighted Licensing Indicator system was just being developed in Pennsylvania (Fiene & Nixon, 1981), it was a new methodology which seemed like a potential solution for the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements (FIDCR) standards. The methodology used in this research began to gain attention in the early 1990’s by national organizations, which were interested in utilizing it outside the licensing area.

Many years of thorough research has contributed to the development of the 13-indicators along with the possibilities for them to be a basis for the future development of state and national programs. This research clearly documents the importance of the 13-indicators in determining the health and safety of young children in child care and the overall quality of a program to meet the child’s needs. The development of a streamlined tool for conducting monitoring reviews has been a lengthy process, which was started in 1979.

Methodology

A Federal demonstration grant was awarded to Pennsylvania to develop a weighted licensing indicator system methodology and to begin pilot testing it in a consortium of States from 1980 through 1985. After 1985 it became clear that the monitoring focus for child care programs was shifting from the Federal government to the States. There are two licensing measurement methodologies, which include the weighted licensing and the indicator systems (Fiene & Kroh, 2000). The licensing weighting and indicator systems are two licensing measurement tools that have been utilized in the licensing literature for the past 20 years. These two methodologies are part of the Licensing Curriculum developed by the National Association for Regulatory Administrator. These two methodologies are used for conducting inferential inspections by licensing agencies.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) wanted to assist States in their monitoring efforts and thought that the weighted licensing indicator system was an innovative means for going this. During the 1980s and early 1990s, many States utilized this methodology to help streamline their licensing enforcement systems; in 1994, a study by the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) estimated that 30 States were using the methodology in one form or another. During this time, a national database was established at the Pennsylvania State University in order to track the various State regulations that constituted respective States’ weighted licensing indicator systems. From this data base, 13 key indicators consistently appeared.

An Indicator Checklist is a questionnaire or checklist that contains selected, predictive systems from a larger, comprehensive instrument that a state uses to monitor child day care providers’ conformance to state day care regulations. An Indicator Checklist contains items that have been determined to be most effective in discriminating between providers that typically receive high overall scores on the comprehensive instrument and providers that typically receive low scores.

Employing the indicator system methodology, a research brief funded by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and titled Thirteen Indicators of Quality Child Care (Stepping Stones, 1997) Update built upon an earlier tool developed by the National Resources Center for Health and Safety in Child Care (NRCHSCC) that focused on those standards that protect children from harm in child care. These standards are also key predictors regarding children’s positive outcomes while in child care and are statistical indicators of overall compliance with child care regulations.

The following indicators have gone through a weighting consensus based on risk factors as well as an indicator methodology that selects standards on the basis of being able to predict overall compliance with standards and positive outcomes for children.

Advantages of the Weighted Risk Assessment System:
- Identifies regulations that may present the greatest risk to children if they are not met
- Provides empirical evidence for making revisions in regulations based upon relative risk factors

Advantages of the Indicator Checklist System:
- Measure compliance with quality licensing regulations is maintained
- Reduces the system costs
- Assist with achieving a balance between the program quality and its compliance
- Target the predictor regulations that can be connected to outcomes

The 13-Indicators

What can each program do?

1) Child abuse indicator
   - Inform caregivers of their legal responsibilities, their rights, and protections under the law
   - Focus on positive behavior
   - Evaluate program with feedback to staff
   - Provide sufficient training opportunities
   - Written policy and support and other social support
   - Parent networking
   - Child care application
   - Informal counseling to troubled parents
   - Child never alone without someone
   - Caregivers gone through a background check and have clearances
   - Training for caregivers on how to prevent and see signs of child abuse along with how to report suspected child abuse
   - Consumer orientation

2) Immunizations indicator
   - Reviewing and monitoring child care center records for immunizations
   - Child never sleeps without care
   - Records for all children in the child care program having completed the series
   - Statewide systems
   - Early childhood linkage system

3) Staff: child ratio and group size indicator
   - Improves the behavior of the staff as caregivers
   - Health and safety of children
   - Number of children being cared for in the program
   - Number of caregivers compared to the number of children
   - More secure attachments
   - School readiness and mental health

4) Director qualifications indicator
   - Experienced and educated directors
   - Directors appropriately monitor their staff
   - Director’s understanding of what children need to grow and learn

5) Teacher qualifications indicator
   - Education and experience caregivers
   - Child care teachers have a bachelor’s degree in a child-related field
   - Teacher experience and length of working experience in the child care field
   - Encourage children
   - Child care teachers who are in restrictive behavior with teacher direction
   - Provide children with the lessons and toys they are age appropriate

6) Staff training indicator
   - Training built on one another and actively involve the participants in learning
   - Monitoring programs
   - Training caregivers to keep children healthy and safe from injury and illness
   - Conducting first-aid and rescue breathing
   - Training to understand and meet the needs of different ages
   - Training to facilitate a positive learning and socialization environment
   - All individual’s lending to children should be trained on and be able to inform infant back sleeping along with safe sleep policies to reduce the risk of SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome)

7) Sanitation and hygiene indicator
   - The type of discipline the caregivers use toward the children
   - Disagreement on discipline
   - Lessen certain behavioral problems
   - Negative effects of verbal reprimands and corporal punishment
   - Children being supervised at all times along with when they are sleeping
   - Sanitation of toys, apparatus, clothing

8) Fire drills indicator
   - Plan in case of a disaster (i.e., fire, tornado, flood, blizzard, or earthquake)
   - Practice drills once per month and fire safety
   - Administration of medication indicator
   - Written permission of the parent or guardian along with instructions from a physician
   - Designated staff to administer medication
   - Written policy and clear procedures on giving medicine along with the proper storage
   - Medication out of reach from children and proper storage
   - Caregivers trained along with any other licensing requirements
   - Caregivers to prevent any child from getting the right amount at the correct time

9) Emergency plan & contact indicator
   - Staff trained in first-aid and CPR and any emergency situations or injuries
   - Emergency medical policies and protocols in place
   - Critical information for teachers and staff organized and available
   - Accurate information in file along with any necessary paperwork
   - Emergency plan if a child is sick, or lost
   - First-aid kits in the child care program
   - Information on file about who is in contact in an emergency

Conclusion

The importance of the 13 indicators in determining the health and safety of young children insures that their child development needs are being met while in child care. The indicators also are important in determining the quality of each program. These statistical indicators are key predictors of overall compliance with child care regulations and also with children’s positive outcomes while in child care.

This research is a major step forward in support of state child care agencies as they attempt to ascertain which standards are primary to protecting children. One goal is to impact the State’s regulations as they are being rewritten for conducting monitoring reviews of child care centers. The 13-indicators have provided a focus and support for protecting children from harm while in child care.

References

Stepping Stones to Using Caring for Our Children, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care, 1997.

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The Child Care Quality Indicators Scale is located at: http://ecti.hbg.psu.edu/publications/index.htm along with other articles.