

# Researchers to Probe Effect of Seattle's Minimum Wage Hike on Child-Care Workers <sup>[1]</sup>

**Author:** Christina Samuels

**Source:** Education Week

**Format:** Article

**Publication Date:** 29 Jun 2017

## AVAILABILITY

Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

A team of researchers at the University of Washington, studying the impact of the city's minimum wage hike, plan to take a closer look at how the wage change has affected child-care workers in the city.

The researchers' latest report, released on Monday, garnered a lot of attention for its findings: as the city's minimum wage moved from \$9.47 to its current level of \$13 per hour, low-wage workers saw their hours cut. The result is that low-wage workers as a whole were bringing home \$125 less per month, even though their hourly wages had increased. Under the law, Seattle businesses must raise the minimum wage to \$15 for all workers by 2021.

The findings are not yet peer-reviewed, and other economists have raised methodological concerns. But many have interpreted them as a blow to advocacy organizations like Fight for \$15 that have been campaigning for higher wages. The child-care field has been a particular focus-workers are often earning poverty-level wages, even as there's widespread recognition of the importance of high-quality care.

But the experience of Seattle's minimum wage hike on child-care workers may be different from the effects on low-wage workers overall, said Jennifer Otten, an assistant professor in the school of public health at the University of Washington. She is leading the deeper dive into the minimum wage's effect on the Seattle child care market.

### Differences in the Seattle Child-Care Market

For example, while a restaurant owner can decide to hire fewer waiters or charge more for appetizers, child-care centers have to maintain certain child-to-adult ratios. They also may have limited wiggle room in how much they can charge their families, particularly if they are serving a low-income clientele. And in Seattle, a new universal preschool program set to be fully operational by 2018 offers another variable.

A city-funded survey of 13 providers in 2015 found that child-care centers were paying a median wage of \$16 an hour, which means that many workers in that group are already above Seattle's new minimum. But half of workers in those centers are earning less, so the wage hike will have some impact.

Researchers have already conducted some interviews with child-care providers, which will be explored in depth in the future report, Otten said.

"A lot of [providers] were saying that some of the areas where they could potentially cut costs is in their training budgets," Otten said. Another provider said that she might stop offering food at the center, requiring parents to pack lunches for students. Many providers feared that raising fees would drive low-income clients to unlicensed care providers.

The 51 centers that will be part of the University of Washington study employ between 9 to 50 people, with 17 employees on average, Otten said. And the study will also focus on examining the mental and physical well-being of the child-care workers themselves. One question to explore: does an increase in salary lead to more satisfaction and stability among the child-care workforce, which is then passed on to the children in their care? Or is some of money immediately taken away by other costs, such as the high rents in Seattle and the surrounding communities?

The study of child-care centers and employees will be funded by a \$729,500 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

-reprinted from Education Week

**Related link:**

**Region:** United States <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** wages <sup>[4]</sup>

income <sup>[5]</sup>

social policy <sup>[6]</sup>

---

**Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022):** <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/17/07/researchers-probe-effect-seattles-minimum-wage-hike-child-care>

**Links**

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/17/07/researchers-probe-effect-seattles-minimum-wage-hike-child-care> [2]  
[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/early\\_years/2017/06/researchers\\_to\\_probe\\_effect\\_of\\_seattles\\_minimum\\_wage\\_hike\\_on\\_child-care\\_workers.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/early_years/2017/06/researchers_to_probe_effect_of_seattles_minimum_wage_hike_on_child-care_workers.html) [3]  
<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7865> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/wages> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/income>  
[6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/social-policy>