

Examining the everyday life of child care workers: How low wages and the lack of benefits affect their lives and decisions about employment ^[1]

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Excerpted from abstract

Child care workers' wages have been an issue that has plagued the early childhood education field for over five decades. Although research exists on child care workers' low wages, turnover rates, and lack of benefits, the details of daily life experiences from child care worker perspectives are scant. This study aims to add a lived experience perspective to the child care worker research, as well as provide stories which may be used as examples to inform policy change.

This qualitative Participatory Action Research entailed semi-structured interviews with 14 child care workers to investigate: (a) the everyday life of child care workers; (b) how low wages and the lack of benefits affect child care workers' decisions to either switch between jobs within the field or leave the field; (c) what child care workers would like others to know. Fourteen child care workers who either worked in centers, owned Family Child Care Homes, or were nannies in Greenville County, South Carolina participated. Data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using an iterative process.

Child care workers indicated that low wages and the lack of benefits are major factors in how they live their everyday lives, make employment decisions regarding staying in or leaving the field, and what they would like others to know. Major themes included low wages and the lack of benefits, emotional investment, turnover, lack of respect, need for training, and motivation to stay in the field. Emotional investment as a contributor to why child care workers leave the field, in combination with poor treatment, low wages, and the lack of benefits is proposed for future research. Policy and advocacy recommendations are included in the Discussion and Recommendations Chapter (5).

Child care workers need advocacy and action to improve their wages and access to benefits, particularly health care. Continued failure to pay child care workers a living wage, offer benefits, or show appreciation for the work they do will perpetuate turnover and the loss of the child care workforce's most highly educated and trained members. The work of child care providers is important, deserves respect, and should be compensated for the value it brings to society.

Region: United States ^[4]

Tags: child care workforce ^[5]

wages ^[6]

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[5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-care-workforce>

[6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/wages>

[7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/benefits>

[8] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/professionalization>