

# Subsidized child care: For the poor, by the poor <sup>[1]</sup>

Motherlode: Adventures in parenting

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## EXCERPTS:

For a parent with a minimum-wage job in retail or fast food, finding a really good in-home child-care provider is like choosing the Auntie or Gramma of your dreams: loving, secure and available for emergencies. Find the right woman (and it is almost invariably a woman) and she's got your back. If Dunkin' Donuts calls with a shift change, or the painful tooth you couldn't afford to have the dentist treat turns into a trip to the E.R., you have one less thing to worry about.

In other words, it's like finding gold. But in-home child-care providers (sometimes called family providers, and not to be confused with the child-care provider who comes to your home, and who may be using an in-home care provider for her own children) aren't compensated according to their worth. In "Why Do the People Raising Our Children Earn Poverty Wages?," E. Tammy Kim examines the "system" of in-home-based care providers, who are licensed by their states to provide child care to a certain number of children at certain hours (depending on their accreditation) but often do much more, and for a paycheck that may not even get them off food stamps.

"The federal dream," Ms. Kim told me, "is to provide subsidized child care to every family up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level." But the subsidies don't go far. The payment to a caregiver varies from state to state (and in New York, from county to county), and is often based on an unrealistic assessment of how much child-care time a parent needs - for example, in New Jersey, "full time" child care is considered to be 30 hours a week, and for an infant, it's compensated at \$165. In other states, the rates vary from \$118.80 to \$183.80 per week for each full-time, state-subsidized child.

Few care providers stop the clock at 30 hours weekly, and few find ways to charge the parents of the children in their care for additional hours, or for late fees, or in any of the other ways their accreditation courses (which the women generally must pay for themselves) suggest they make ends meet. "The reality is, they can't pay a late fee - they can't afford to. They catch the bus to and from work," said one provider.

The result, says Ms. Kim, is that "subsidized child care" becomes the poor subsidizing the poor.

"It sounds cheesy, but in many cases, these truly are the pillars of their communities. They do after-hours, 24-hours, emergency care. They're providing the infrastructure that isn't there for these working parents." It's a cobbled-together structure that both employees and ultimately their employers have come to rely on - but the caregivers who create it aren't compensated or recognized as the resource they've become.

-reprinted from the New York Times

## Related link:

Why do the people raising our children earn poverty wages? Women who care for poor kids are often mothers living in poverty themselves

<sup>[2]</sup>

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

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