

# Childcare workers undervalued and underpaid, Victorian study reveals <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS:

Early childhood educators feel they are perceived as being "just babysitters", with little respect and recognition for their qualifications, years of experience and talent, research has shown.

A study of Victorian-based childcare workers found that a majority felt they were being driven out of the workplace because of both low wages and people - including the parents of children they cared for - considering their work menial.

"Staff are keenly aware of the low value attributed to their work by others, and usually talked about this through the idea of childcare work as just babysitting," report author and former childcare worker Yarrow Andrew said.

The study included interviews with 23 childcare staff from six centres in low, middle and high-income areas and found educators' low wages resulted in workers feeling demoralised and lacking motivation to advance their career.

"It's defeating. People have been promised higher wages for so many years and, in the focus groups, people said they felt depressed thinking about how bad their wages were," said Yarrow, now a researcher with Flinders University.

"They would talk about how they could get better wages if they worked at Coles or selling clothes in a shop ... also about having younger and less qualified friends and family earning more than they are."

The study comes as the Productivity Commission is reviewing the early childhood education and care sector.

Early Childhood Australia chief executive officer Samantha Page said the study was reflective of a problem facing childcare workers.

"This is part of the challenge in convincing everybody that this is hard work that needs to be remunerated," she said.

Tania Sewell, of Sanctuary Lakes Children's Services, said when she first started her career in childcare more than 20 years ago the public perception was that workers were "very much seen as glorified babysitters who were lucky to sit around playing with children all day".

She said many still think of the profession this way despite workers having become more skilled. Seventeen of 25 staff at her centre hold a diploma qualification and five have or are working towards university qualifications.

Yarrow said people's responses to her career as an academic, as opposed to a childcare worker, has been telling.

"At dinner parties, when I would say I worked in childcare, there would be this silence, a 'moving right along. Now, people ask about what kind of research I do, what university I work for, what my colleagues are like. It's a job that gets respect - and I'm not used to it."

-reprinted from the Age

**Region:** Australia and New Zealand <sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** staff <sup>[3]</sup>

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/14/04/childcare-workers-undervalued-and-underpaid-victorian-study-reveals> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/australia-and-new-zealand> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/staff>