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Understanding who cares: Creating the evidence to address the long-standing policy problem of staff shortages in early childhood education and care [1]

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Abstract

Evidence-based policy is a means of ensuring that policy is informed by more than ideology or expedience. However, what constitutes robust evidence is highly contested. In this paper, we argue policy must draw on quantitative and qualitative data. We do this in relation to a long entrenched problem in Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce policy. A critical shortage of qualified staff threatens the attainment of broader child and family policy objectives linked to the provision of ECEC and has not been successfully addressed by initiatives to date. We establish some of the limitations of existing quantitative data sets and consider the potential of qualitative studies to inform ECEC workforce policy. The adoption of both quantitative and qualitative methods is needed to illuminate the complex nature of the work undertaken by early childhood educators, as well as the environmental factors that sustain job satisfaction in a demanding and poorly understood working environment.

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