



WAGES FOR CHILD CARE WORKERS: THE LINK WITH QUALITY

Despite the studies in the last decade confirming the extreme importance of the early years and of child care, Canadian society continues to pay lip service only to the value of childhood educators. The working conditions and pay levels of child care workers remain at very low levels.

The recent OECD report on early childhood education and care policy in Canada (2004) points to the need for a coordinated strategy to develop a properly funded and supported system of early childhood education and care in Canada. Public funding to improve wages and quality for Canadian child care is recommended by the OECD.

Studies show the importance of wages

The *You Bet I Care!* studyⁱ reports on a 1998 survey on wages and working conditions of teaching staff and directors in child care centres. The study makes the link between wages and quality of care. The researchers concluded that a child care centre is likely to be high quality when:

- Staff have two years or more training in Early Childhood Education
- Staff are better paid (leading to less turnover and more stability)
- Staff morale and satisfaction are high
- The centre is run as a non-profit organization

The average annual wage for a child care worker in Canada in 1998 was \$22,717. The report compared that to the average wage of \$21,308 for a parking lot attendant.

On a Canada-wide basis, 22 per cent of child care staff quit their jobs each year, and most who leave do not stay in the child care field. A main reason for this high turnover is low pay, benefit levels and working conditions. Most do not receive paid benefits such as sick leave, retirement and pension plans, and medical benefits.ⁱⁱ

In both 1991 and 1998 both child care teachers and directors said that a better salary was the most important thing needed to make child care a more satisfying work environment.

The union advantage was significant for child care workers : teachers in unionized centres made 30% more than non-unionized workers. The average union rate was about \$14.24 hourly compared to the non-union rate of only \$10.92. However, union density in the child care sector is very low : only 16% of the work force belongs to a union.

Unionization and Quality

A CUPE commissioned study, *Unionization and Quality in Early Childhood Programs*ⁱⁱⁱ, carried out by two leading academics shows that unionization not only has a positive impact on child care workers, but also on children in unionized centres, their parents and society. In other words, unionization of child care workers is good public policy. Specifically, the study found that:

- Wages and benefits for teaching staff are substantially better in unionized centres.

ⁱ Doherty et al., 2000; Goelman et al., 2000.

ⁱⁱ http://www24.hrdcdrhc.gc.ca/def/profind/ind2540.asp?Param_Lang=0&VarParam=33&VarSectionG=186&VarReportC=2540&Switch=ind2540.asp&VarBar=P

ⁱⁱⁱ Doherty, G. (2002). *Unionization and Quality in Early Childhood programs*. Ottawa, Canada. CUPE

- Turnover rates for teachers are lower in unionized centres.
- A significantly higher proportion of unionized centres act in ways that predict or are associated with higher levels of quality.
- Unionized centres score higher on an overall program quality measurement than non-unionized centres.

Not-For-Profit Delivery

The 2004 OECD report noted the continuing strong contribution made by non-profit, community organizations to regulated early childhood provision. The services provided by these organizations account for nearly 80% of subsidized child care provision.

A recent study on auspice - or who runs the service - reinforced previous research that has consistently suggested that child care services operated for-profit are less than likely to deliver high quality care in which young children will thrive. In other words, a market model for child care is less than adequate for giving children the best start in life.^{iv}

Wages In 2004

Even where child care is unionized and delivered on a not-for-profit basis, wages remain extremely low, especially outside of large urban centres. Data from the CUPE Collective Agreement Information System (CAIS) reports the following wage data:

Job Title	Wage	City
Early Childhood Educator (ECE)	\$17.64	Toronto
Early Childhood Educator (ECE)	\$10.51	Halifax
Early Childhood Educator (ECE)	\$18.22	Ottawa
Early Childhood Educator (ECE)	\$13.85	Windsor
Early Childhood Educator (ECE)	\$13.00	Winnipeg
Early Childhood Educator (ECE)	\$19.00	Vancouver
Early Childhood Educator (ECE)	\$11.32	Saskatoon

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^{iv} Child care by default or design? An exploration of differences between non-profit and for-profit Canadian child care centres using the *You Bet I Care!* data sets by Gillian Doherty, Martha Friendly & Barry Forer. Occasional paper 18, Childcare Resource and Research Unit, August 2002