CHILD CARE WORKERS’ SALARIES

Child care work is a large and growing occupation:

- There are about 8 million children under 5 with working mothers. Fifty to 60 percent of these children are cared for by paid child care workers, either in group facilities or private homes.
- In 1987, there were an estimated 1.6 million child care workers, .6 million working full time. The number of full-time workers increased by 38 percent between 1983 and 1987.
- Available statistics classify child care workers in three categories: pre-kindergarten teachers; child care workers not in private households; and child care workers, private households.

Child care workers salaries are shockingly low. Census Bureau data from 1986 show:

- Average earnings of full-time child care workers, including kindergarten and pre-kindergarten teachers, are $198 weekly, less than $5.00 per hour. For comparison, for all U.S. workers, average weekly earnings are $358 or about $9.00 per hour.
- For child care workers other than teachers average weekly earnings are only $136, or less than $3.50 an hour.
- Only 14 percent of all full-time U.S. workers have earnings as low as $5.00 per hour. In child care work, however, the comparable figures are 30 percent for teachers, 59 percent for child care workers not in private households, and 91 percent for child care workers in private households.
- Nearly two-thirds of child care workers work part-time and their earnings are even lower: on average, part-time child care workers earned 35-40 percent less than full-time workers in the same job classifications.
- Average annual earnings of child care workers were below the poverty level for a family of four in 1986 and barely above the poverty level in 1987.

The low earnings in child care work are coupled with poor or nonexistent "fringe" benefits:

- Most U.S. workers in other industries have health insurance at least partially paid for by the employer, but only one-third to one-half of child care workers have any employer-provided coverage.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research is an independent nonprofit research institute dedicated to conducting and disseminating research that informs public policy debates affecting women. This fact sheet is based on the IWPR report High Skill and Low Pay: The Economics of Child Care Work, by Heidi Hartmann and Diana Pearce.
Many child care workers do not receive paid holidays and vacations.

About a third of child care workers are not compensated for overtime, often working a 10 to 12 hour workday.

The low level of earnings is not fully explained by the preponderance of females in child care work or by the characteristics of child care workers:

- In other predominantly female occupations earnings are not equally low; for example, telephone operators (91 percent female) earn about 60 percent more than child care workers.

- Despite the low wages, those who take care of children, and particularly teachers and administrators, are very well educated. In total, child care workers average 14.6 years of education compared with 12.8 years for the average U.S. worker.

- In 1984, wages under $5.00 per hour were reported for 89 percent of child care aides, 81 percent of assistant teachers, and 42 percent of teachers; nevertheless, some education beyond high school was reported for 54 percent of aides, 77 percent of assistant teachers, and 93 percent of teachers.

- Wages do not increase greatly with experience or with the length of time on the job, especially for workers other than teachers.

Low earnings of child care workers have a harmful effect on the quality of child care and pose several important public policy questions:

- Turnover rates are very high: 2/5 of child care workers have one year or less on the job and 2/5 have two to three years. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers may be developing shorter tenure over time.

- Work in a school setting, work in the public sector, and unionization are associated with higher wages and reduced turnover.

- Potential solutions to problems in child care work involve greater public subsidies in some form, i.e., getting more money into child care through expansion of existing programs, development of new programs, and expanded tax credits.

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About this study: This study was conducted for the Child Care Action Campaign with additional funding from the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees—Women's Rights/Community Action Division, and the International Ladies Garment Workers Union—Professional and Clerical Employees (PACE). Data used in this study came from many sources, including the 1980 Census of Population, the Current Population Survey (CPS)—a monthly Census Bureau survey of approximately 60,000 households, and unpublished data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics—based on the CPS. Local and state salary surveys of child care workers were provided by the Child Care Employee Project. All views expressed here are the authors' and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funders.