



Brief & to the Point

Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership

Issue Brief No. 1 July 2001

Who Cares for Wisconsin's Children?

Education & Experience of the Child Care Workforce

In Wisconsin, approximately 190,000 young children attend some type of out-of-home child care in regulated group child care centers or family child care homes. About 40,000 of these children, whose families have low incomes, receive state child care subsidies. The research focus of the Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership is on the quality of child care for low-income children.

Research indicates that high quality early care and education produces greater child development gains than low quality child care^(1,2,3). High quality care is characterized by features that include education and training, and child care experience⁽⁴⁾.

Education

The effect of specialized training upon job performance is more strongly established in early childhood education than in almost any other occupation. This may seem surprising, because it disproves the myth that child care is a low-skilled job that "anyone can do." According to research⁽⁵⁾, child care teachers have an immense impact on children's futures, and that impact is more positive when the teachers have received more education and training.

Training

Wisconsin state law requires that caregivers of young children have training in child development. Child care staff in licensed programs must attend continuing education classes every year, and many

providers throughout the state attend conferences and workshops. There is an emphasis in the state on professional development, with new state-funded programs to increase educational levels among child care staff.

Higher quality of child care is evident in both centers and family child care in states where education and training requirements are higher⁽¹⁾. One study of preschool teachers found that specific early childhood education training accounted for almost two-thirds of the variance in teacher responses to children⁽⁶⁾.

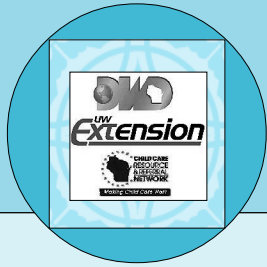
Child Care Experience

Years of experience in the field is not a good indicator of teacher behavior⁽⁴⁾ and years of experience, without additional training, are unlikely to lead to higher quality care⁽²⁾. In fact, years of experience may be a misleading variable because it combines caregivers who have continued to grow on the job with those who have drifted along (or moved from place to place) while staying in the field.

We may well ask: when it comes to child care subsidized by the state, how well qualified are the teachers, directors and family child care providers? In this issue brief, we describe the education, training and experience levels of a random sample of caregivers that work with low-income children in Wisconsin.

"A provider who is offering poor quality care is unlikely to get better at it by simply staying in the field. Providers improve with training -- not by experience itself."

Galinsky et al, 1994, p. 40



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Wisconsin Data

Characteristics of the Child Care Workforce

We randomly selected 2,000 programs from the population of regulated child care settings serving low-income children in Wisconsin. We mailed 815 questionnaires to child care centers and 1,185 questionnaires to family child care providers. We included separate “workforce questionnaires” to assess providers’ job satisfaction, education and experience. We obtained a 40% return rate on the program surveys to centers, and received over 1,200 individual workforce questionnaires. Findings are shown separately for center-based providers and family child care providers

Few providers have college education

The highest level of education for the majority of child care providers caring for subsidized children in Wisconsin was a high school diploma. About one in every four center-based teachers had a 2-year or 4-year degree (27.7%), while one in every five family child care providers had a degree (20.4%)

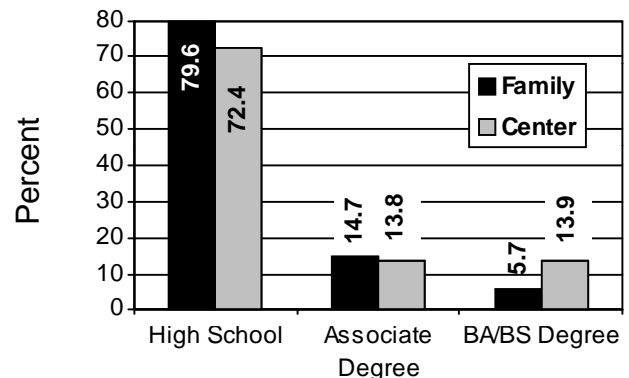


Figure 1.1 - Education Levels

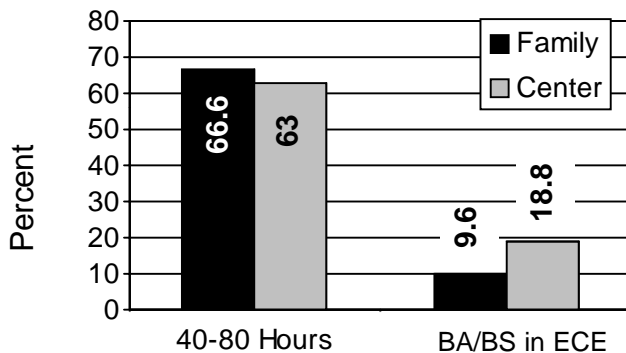


Figure 1.2 - Child Development Training/Education

Few have child development backgrounds

In Wisconsin, training in child development is required within the first 6 months of employment. Assistant teachers and lead teachers in centers must have 40- or 80-hour courses (or equivalent training), and most family providers must have 20- to 40-hours of such training. Of those who have college degrees, only a small fraction of the child care workforce has degrees in early childhood education (ECE).

Directors must cope with many new staff

Child care center directors were asked to categorize the number of years of experience at this center for each of their teaching staff. The results indicate that the majority of child care center staff in Wisconsin (59%) had been working at their current centers for less than two years.

Directors themselves were also relatively new; 28% of center directors had been at their centers for two years or less, and only 15% held the 18-credit Child Care Administrator’s Credential. Approximately 32% of family providers had begun their child care businesses within the last two years, though 18% had been operating their family child care homes for over 10 years.

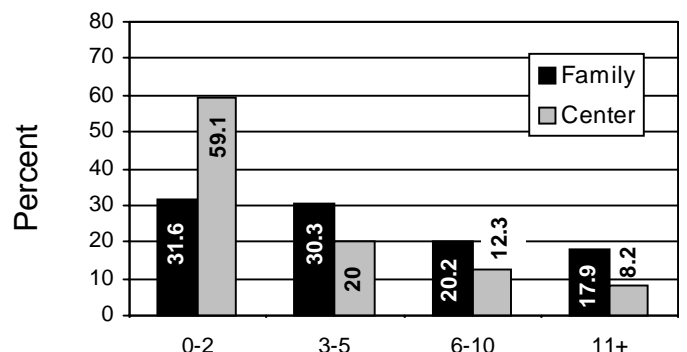
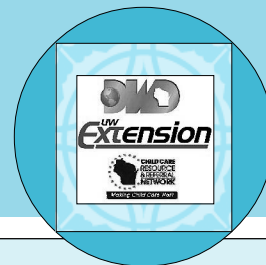


Figure 1.3 - Years of Experience

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Policy Implications

1. Child care for low-income children is offered primarily by people who have not had the enhanced experiences of higher education. The threshold for doing child care work is made low, in part, by training and regulatory requirements, which allow an individual to work in a child care center for up to six months without the required child care course.
2. The findings on college degrees justify the state's recent funding of a new program to provide scholarships for child care staff to take college courses in child development and early education, in exchange for a promise to remain working in the field. The current findings, in fact, suggest a dramatic need to expand this program.
3. The key to high quality centers may be having highly educated and experienced directors. As the early education field becomes increasingly demanding with staff shortages and wage issues, having increasing numbers of administrators of child care programs with the Child Care Administrator's Credential -- the equivalent of an Associate degree in topics specific to child care administration -- will be essential.

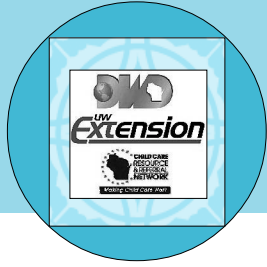
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**A highly trained
child care workforce
positively impacts
children's development.**

End note: These data suggest a pattern of low education and high turnover. Issue Brief #2 will assess the impact of staff wages on the child care workforce in Wisconsin.



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Background

The Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership was funded by the federal Child Care Bureau in October, 2000 as one of nine Research Partnerships across the United States.

University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX), Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Office of Child Care, and Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R) Network have joined in partnership to assess the quality of child care in the state, with a particular focus on child care for low-income children.

Principal investigators for the Research Partnership include Mary Roach, Diane Adams, and Dave Riley (UW-Extension), David Edie (Department of Workforce Development), and Jane Penner-Hoppe (Child Care Resource & Referral Network). Data collectors include staff from Wisconsin CCR&R agencies. Data analyses are conducted by Diana Durant, Bong-Woon Ha, George Hagenauer and Dong Min Kim. "Brief & to the Point" is produced by Susan Angell and Deb Zeman.

We are grateful to the child care programs and providers who enthusiastically responded to our research requests, and we dedicate our findings to the young children in Wisconsin who depend upon high quality child care for their "good beginnings."

Research Objectives

The Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership is conducting several interrelated studies of child care:

- **What Does Child Care Look Like? – Study 1** uses information from the state's child care Data Warehouse to assess the demographic, geographic, and composition characteristics of the population of approximately 40,000 children and 9,500 child care providers who currently access state child care subsidies in Wisconsin. Data from the state CCR&R Network are also being used to describe the child care marketplace within which state-supported low income families make their child care choices.
- **Characteristics of Child Care – Study 2** involves analyses of the child care workforce and the quality of child care using state-wide data from demographic and attitudinal questionnaires mailed to 2,000 regulated child care programs and family child care providers randomly selected from the state child care Data Warehouse.
- **Child Care Quality – Study 3** involves direct observations of approximately 150 randomly selected child care classrooms and 75 family child care programs across the state. Environmental rating scales used in many previous research studies are being used to assess child care classroom quality.

Suggested citation: Adams, D.B.; Roach, M.A.; Riley, D.A.; and Edie, D. (2001). *Issue Brief #1: Who Cares for Wisconsin's Children?* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Extension.



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A series of "Brief and to the Point" issue papers summarizing research on Wisconsin child care plus detailed data from each of the studies will also be available on the Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership website:

www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/resources/parent.html

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