

# Childcare workers' pay remains stagnant, study shows

January 22 2015, by Kathleen Maclay

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A busy classroom at the Bahia School Age Program – Centro VIDA in Berkeley, CA. Credit: Elizabeth Camacho.

In a couple of weeks, U.S. workers will receive their W-2 statements of earnings for 2014. For 2 million teachers in early child care, preschool and kindergarten in the United States, it will be a bit like Groundhog Day.

Costs of early-childhood services may have climbed nearly twofold for parents over the last 17 years, but most of these workers have overall seen no change in their real earnings in the same period, according to a

recent report from UC Berkeley's Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, "Worthy Work, Still Unlivable Wages."

In fact, "Worthy Work" researchers report that childcare workers – mostly women – today earn barely more than fast-food cooks and less than workers who take care of non-farm animals. Mean hourly wages in 2013 stood at \$10.33 for childcare workers, \$15.11 for preschool teachers, and \$25.40 for kindergarten teachers. Fast-food cooks are paid \$9.07 an hour, bank tellers \$12.62 and non-farm animal caretakers \$10.82.

Today, 46 percent of childcare workers, compared to 25 percent of the overall United States workforce, live in families participating in at least one of four major support programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance/t Program (SNAP or food stamps), Medicaid or the federal Earned Income Tax Credit. The researchers said the cost to American taxpayers is close to \$2.5 billion a year.

Here in California the situation is also grim, they found. Almost half of childcare workers' families rely on at least one of the assistance programs. State-by-state data show that the 2013 mean hourly wage for childcare workers in California is \$11.86, embarrassingly indistinguishable from the \$11.26 they earned 25 years ago, in 1988 dollars.

"Early-childhood services intended to ameliorate poverty should not generate it," says Marcy Whitebook, director of the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, which she established at the campus's Institute for Research on Labor and Employment 15 years ago, and lead author of "Worthy Work." She also led research on the same topic that produced a landmark report in 1989 that brought attention to poverty-level wages and high turnover among early-childcare teaching staff.

"Nobody employed full-time to educate our children during their most critical period of development should struggle to feed and house themselves and their own families," says Whitebook. "But our latest research suggests many early-childhood teachers are caught in such a struggle."

The situation does not just impact workers, say Whitebook and study co-authors Deborah Phillips, a psychology professor at Georgetown University, and Carollee Howes, a research professor of education at UCLA. The three note that improving early- childhood teaching jobs and pay to attract and retain a well-prepared workforce is important to having early-childhood teachers who foster children's learning, health and development, for providing support for parental employment and a strong economy. This may be underscored by the more than 8,000 downloads of the "Still Worthy" report from the center's website the first month after its release.

The researchers recommend developing a sustainable, dedicated public funding source to improve the pay of childcare teachers, as well as setting up guidelines for regionally based, entry-level wages and salary increases that are based on education and training, experience and seniority.

As an example, she and her co-authors cite efforts since 1997 by the U.S. Department of Defense, which promised service members that their children would receive dependable, high-quality care and education. The department has set early-childhood teacher salaries at levels similar to other department employees with similar education, such as bachelor's degrees and training, while at the same time limiting costs for parents to no more than 10 percent of their income. These efforts have led to a 76 percent increase in base pay of new hires among frontline early-childhood teaching staff at child development centers on military bases and improved, more affordable services for families.

**More information:** "Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages: The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years after the National Child Care Staffing Study": [www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/20 ... ill-unlivable-wages/](http://www.irle.berkeley.edu/cscce/20...ill-unlivable-wages/)

Provided by University of California - Berkeley

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