

POLICY BRIEF

Mobile Creches

In its current strategic curve, Mobile Creches is trying to harness the knowledge about young child issues – gained from decades of engagement with parent communities, businesses, practitioners, advocates, programme implementers and policy makers – in the form of a biennial Report on the State of the Young Child in India. The **State of the Young Child in India** (SOYC) Report is the first such major knowledge product in this direction. Taking a step further, the Report is complemented by a series of policy briefs, drawn from the Report's findings, with an intention to reach policy makers and other relevant stakeholders who are in a position to influence changes on behalf of the young child in India.

02

Policy Brief 02

Ensuring respect and recognition where due: Professionalise the childcare workforce

Brief Summary

Childcare workforce forms the backbone of a stable, quality early childhood development ecosystem. In the critical early years of life when foundation is laid for physical health, cognitive, linguistic, socio-emotional development, it is the caregivers who provide the necessary stimulation, interactions and nurturing care for these early experiences. However, the lack of acknowledgement and professionalisation of this workforce, their weighty responsibilities not being in line with the remuneration, results in severely impacting the quality of ECCE services and the respect the profession deserves. Addressing these challenges necessitates

the recognition of, and respect to, this out-of-home relationship for the young child, through investments in a well-trained, well-equipped cadre of childcare workforce with adequate remuneration and streamlined responsibilities.

Introduction

Drawing upon MC's grassroots work in early childhood period, the State of the Young Child in India Report advocates professionalisation of childcare services and the fulfilment of the unmet need for quality creches and day-care services. This Policy Brief calls for a professional cadre of childcare workers with supporting

evidence on how due acknowledgement and remuneration of their role, in line with their responsibilities, and community engagement can bring multiple benefits in the delivery of quality, accessible and equitable ECCE services, and improvements in the development of the young child.

The positive transformation of a child's development trajectory, combining efforts both within and outside the home, necessitates adequate nutrition, hygienic environment, early education, nurturing care and safety and protection. The childcare workforce forms one of the central components outside the home that marks the quality of such interventions and the consequent outcomes for a better early childhood care and development. The workforce includes caregivers in homes, anganwadi workers (AWW) and helpers (AWH), Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA), pre-school teachers, creche workers, supervision and administrative incharges, teacher trainers.

This policy brief highlights the importance of a trained, professional cadre of childcare workforce to ensure optimal development of the young child. It analyses the current scenario of lack of respect and due remuneration for their challenging working conditions, in addition to a low priority of the sector for policy makers, with the resulting low morale of the workforce. This brief highlights an urgent need to professionalise the childcare sector, duly recognized by the State, where the current system of honoraria is replaced with fair remuneration for the work being done, well-functioning systems of training, and better working conditions for the childcare workforce.

Envisioning a Dedicated ECCE Workforce: Mapping the Benefits

Over the decades, strong evidence has emerged of early childhood development services having a positive impact on children's developmental outcomes, provided the level of service quality is high.ⁱ There is also enough research that has highlighted the significance of the early childhood workforce in influencing the quality of ECD services. For example, it has been noted that the level of education and participation in training of the personnel engaged in ECD services is a better predictor of the overall quality of the programme as compared to other factors such as the child-worker ratio or the group size.ⁱⁱ

Studies have demonstrated the efficacy of better trained and duly qualified childcare workforce in delivering key services. A study conducted in the US found that 'staff with a higher level of formal education had more specialized child-related training, held less authoritarian child-rearing beliefs, and worked in settings rated as more safe, clean, and stimulating.'ⁱⁱⁱ Higher teacher qualifications have also been linked to improved supervision, room arrangement and a warm, child-friendly environment for interactions to take place.^{iv} However, not only is pre-service training important, the quality of such a degree programme is more critical to ensure better grounded knowledge in early childhood development. Further, in-service training is also important to improve knowledge and skills, to learn diverse and emerging practices in the field of engagement and to ensure that the workforce, despite diverse backgrounds, is imparted a core

skill set to systemize the approach.

In an era of globalization, where market forces have significantly altered family functioning, pushed men, women, or even entire families to migrate in search of better economic opportunities, both parents being engaged in work, or the inability of families to cope with the changing socio-economic dynamics, affects childcare significantly. Where multiple factors of poverty, and other intersecting marginalities, render families unable to provide the required childcare, it is necessary for the State to provide services both within the home as well as in institutional settings through a well-trained, qualified, recognized, dedicated and sufficiently motivated ECD workforce for universalized service provision. A fuller understanding of the needs of children in such settings can also come through a properly trained workforce. This recognizes the importance of an enabling environment for the young child, founded on inclusion, social justice, safety and well-being of the young child, and a gender-transformative childcare approach.^v

Low paid, hardly acknowledged: The Limits of Childcare Work

Despite the criticality of a professional workforce to optimise the outcomes of ECD interventions, the overall childcare ecosystem is severely under-resourced and weighty expectations are placed on the workforce even as they are paid little and not seen in the paradigm of a professional workforce. Every anganwadi centre comprises of the AWW, who is given the responsibility to not only take care of the

children and plan the menu based on locally available food but also collect health and nutrition data on both mothers and children as well as educating the community, rendered support by anganwadi helper, auxiliary nurse midwife and ASHA worker as a community health advocate. However, the multi-faceted responsibilities of the childcare worker within the home and in institutional settings are hardly acknowledged. The common perception around the childcare worker is that of "least valued employees" which is made evident by the low salaries^{vi} resulting in low morale, even as there is a growing awareness regarding the criticality of their role. ICDS has treated the frontline workforce as part-time, 'honorary' workers with compensation even below the minimum wages in most states. For AWWs, the average national income is 4,500 INR while for ASHA it is 1,800 INR along with incentives. Such treatment has severely undermined the overall perception of childcare.

While the number of AWC has grown over the years, it has been reported that there is a hard struggle when it comes to hiring and retaining enough frontline workers. Owing to their working conditions, lack of training opportunities and recognition, absenteeism and vacancy rates have been found to be quite high in certain states.^{vii} The discontent has been visible in large scale protests by these workers across India, and needless to say, affects childcare interventions.

There is also a dearth of supportive supervision that could enable better performance and accountability as well as help with problem solving at the supervisory level. There is a severe lack of recognised

institutes for training for the ECD workforce, such that it hampers capacity development towards delivering good quality ECD services. There are no attempts towards the development of capacities and competencies of AWWs and ECCE teachers, as per requisite norms of NCTE for pre-school teachers.

The increase in salaries of frontline workers would be the first step in treating them as professional childcare workers. As the fiscal analysis in Chapter 6 of the SOYC Report notes, assuming the sanctioned AWWs as 1,400,000, a proposed salary of 10,000 INR per month would mean 77 billion INR expenditure while for 900,000 ASHA workers, a proposed salary of 8,000 INR would mean 66.96 billion INR, resulting in a total expenditure of 167.76 billion INR per annum. The analysis also highlights that a child budget of INR 12.5 billion annually, amounting to 20% of the social sector outlay, would provide adequate provision for all the funding gaps including for professionalization of childcare services. Such an investment will be critical for a professional, well-trained ECD workforce providing equitable, quality ECCE services.

This additional investment in childcare services is critical, and as the SOYC Report has noted returns on investment in the child would exceed budgetary spends on any alternate government infrastructure or welfare programmes.

Policy Recommendations

- The recognition of ECD workforce as professional by the State must operationalize systems for training and accreditation. For the Anganwadi Centres, two workers need to be employed for the

under 3 and 3-6 year age groups respectively. One must be specifically trained to work with children under 3 years and the second as an ECCE teacher for children in the 3–6 year age group, with remunerations as per qualification and roles.

- In line with their weighty responsibilities, a full time role as professionals and the intensive community engagement envisaged for such a role, their remuneration must be enhanced. For the AWWs, the Central government should raise its share in payment from the existing national level average remuneration of INR 4,500 to INR 10,000, benchmarked to the wholesale price index (WPI) and increased on a pro-rata basis for each rise in the WPI. For the Anganwadi Helper and creche worker, the payment should be 10,000 and 8,000 INR respectively.

- For ASHA workers, the monthly honorarium of INR 4,500 in addition to the incentives should be increased to INR 8,000 in addition to performance incentives, with pro rata revision of the remuneration with increases in WPI. The total expenditure for such remuneration is detailed in Chapter 6 of the Report.

- Despite the focus on universalization of ECCE in the National Education Policy 2020 it does not provide any policy roadmap of financial commitment to achieve this. The Government of India must expand the scope of RTE to under sixes^{viii}; as a justiciable right, it will be a critical step to ensure increased budgetary allocations for quality ECCE, including for due remuneration to the ECCE workforce and to ensure equitable ECCE services across settings.

Endnotes:

ⁱ See Shonkoff, J.P. and A.D. Philips (2000), *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods*, National Academy Press, Washington DC; also see, Sammons et al. (2002), *The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Technical Paper 8a - Measuring the Impact of Pre-School on Children's Cognitive Progress over the Pre-School Period*, London: DfES/Institute of Education, University of London.

ⁱⁱ Burchinal et al. (2010), "Threshold Analysis of Association between Child Care Quality and Child Outcomes for Low-income Children in Pre-kindergarten Programmes", *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, No. 25, pp. 166-176.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) (2000), cited in Mitter, R., & Putcha, V. (2018). *Strengthening and supporting the early childhood workforce: training and professional development*. Washington, DC: Results for Development Institute.

^{iv} Manning, M., Garvis, S., Fleming, C., Wong, T. W. G., (2017). The relationship between teacher qualification and the quality of the early childhood care and learning environment. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*.

^v A gender transformative approach in ECCE programmes, as the SOYC Report notes, is one where they engage parents, caregivers, community leaders and educators so that unequal gendered norms and beliefs are challenged from an early age and equal care and opportunities are provided to children of all genders in addition to promoting men's involvement in parenting as well as supporting women's right to health, and empowerment, including promoting their participation in the workforce.

^{vi} <https://www.cyc-net.org/profession/pro-whitehead.html>

^{vii}

<https://qz.com/india/1584703/indias-icds-anganwadi-system-is-a-challenged-but-impressive-effort/>

^{viii} For more on this, see, Mobile Creches (2020), *Making ECCE a Justiciable Right: Extend RTE to children under six years*. Policy Brief 01.