

EARLY DAYCARE FOR CHILDREN OF INDUSTRIAL ZONE WORKERS

A Survey in Ha Noi City and Ha Nam Province

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education and daycare services have always been the top priorities for parents with young children. In particular, parents who are labor workers, a group with typically low income and long working hours, face various challenges when finding high-quality kindergartens or daycare centers. Difficulties with childcare services have become a pressing concern for workers in the industrial areas of Viet Nam. This is partly due to the lack of planning in terms of essential services and infrastructure by companies operating in these zones [1]. Since 2021, Viet Nam has built 395 industrial zones and export processing zones. 370 industrial zones have come into operation [2], providing jobs for 7 million workers, 50% of whom are migrant workers [3]. However, the shortage of high-quality childcare services near industrial zones has resulted in a rising demand for independent daycare centers with inadequate legal authorization. In a 2016 UNICEF Viet Nam survey, independent, private care groups in industrial zones lack quality-controlled care services and safety measures [4]. An unfortunate consequence of these issues is child abuse by preschool teachers in many provinces and cities across the country.

In order to better understand the current state of childcare services for workers in industrial zones, the Research and Training Center for Community Development (RTCCD), in collaboration with the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, has conducted a survey for labor workers with young children who are currently attending preschools. This article discusses the main difficulties that industrial zone workers face when choosing childcare services.

RESEARCH METHODS

A survey on child safety at daycare services was conducted with 711 workers at 10 factories in two industrial zones of Ha Noi city (urban region) and Ha Nam province (rural region) from 11/2022 - 01/2023. Participants are workers with children aged 6-60 months and are currently sending their children to a paid childcare facility (public preschool, private preschool, independent care group). The research team designed an online interview questionnaire based on the Early Childhood Program Participation questionnaire by Natzke, J. C. & L. (2021) and the questionnaire by Emlen, Koren, & Schultz (2000). This was translated and modified by the research team to better fit Vietnamese participants [5,6]. Parents (industrial zone workers) participated in the survey by answering online questions about their use of childcare services, issues when choosing a care facility, and their experiences and concerns related to child daycare services.

RESULTS

1. USE OF CHILD CARE SERVICES

Data from survey responses of 690 workers were included in the analysis with the following results:

Age at first time attending preschool

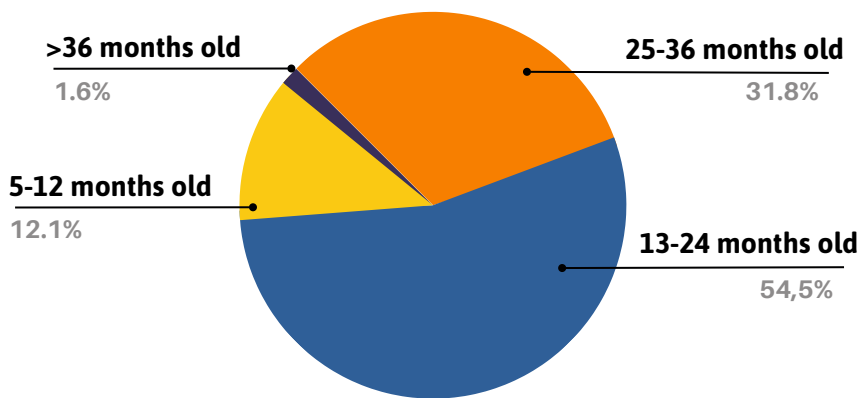


Figure 1. Age when the child was sent to a child care institution for the first time.

a. For every 10 workers who send their children to preschools, 7 send their children to public schools (69%). The number of parents who send their children to large-scale private kindergartens accounted for 16% and independent groups (small-scale centers) accounted for 15%.

b. Children attended preschool for the first time on average at 23 months old. Nearly 66.2% of parents started sending their children to kindergarten before the age of 24. 12.1% of children went to daycare for the first time at the age of 5-12 months; 54.5% at 13-24 months of age; 31.8% at 25-36 months of age and 1.6% at >36 months of age (Fig. 1).

c. 38% of children attend preschools 6-7 days per week. On average, they spend 8.5 hours per day there. 34.3% of children spend 9 hours or more per day and 2.7% (18/690) spend 11-14 hours a day. There were 4 cases (0.6%) of children staying overnight, spending from 18-24 hours per day at a care center (Fig. 2).

d. Special needs children:¹ 10% of workers reported having children in groups requiring special education programs.

1. In this survey, special needs include children with intellectual disability, developmental delay, autism, ADHD, speech or language impairment, serious emotional disturbance, and physical disability.

Average time per day spent at a childcare center

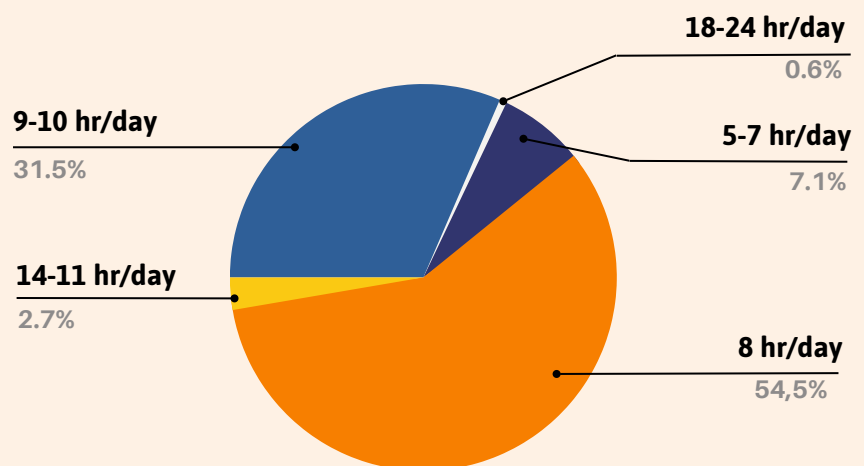


Figure 2. The average time per day the child spends at a childcare center.

2. COST OF CHILDCARE SERVICE

a. The average childcare fee is more than 1.5 million VND/month [95% CI: 1,444,130 - 1,623,073], accounting for, on average, 21% of workers' personal income. Childcare fee ranges from 200,000 VND/month to 8,000,000 VND/month.

c. On average, workers in surveyed factories spent nearly 55 hours per week working to earn income. This is equivalent to 9.2 hours per day, 6 days per week.

b. Only 1.3% of workers in the survey group received financial support from the government for childcare expenses (ranging from 35,000 VND - 2,000,000 VND).² 22.8% received childcare benefits from employment with an average of 110,000 VND/child/month [95% CI: 91,223 - 129,929] (ranging from 10,000 VND - 1,000,000 VND).

2. This financial support may come from sources other than Decree 105/2020/ND-CP on development of early education, such as government policies for low income family.

3. CHOICE OF PRESCHOOL

a. When considering childcare options, location (proximity to home and convenience for transportation) was the main factor in workers' decision on where to send their children, according to more than 60% of the workers who responded to the survey.

b. The biggest challenge parents face when choosing their children's preschool is the cost is too high for the family's financial ability. Nearly 38% of workers said they had the most difficulty with childcare fees; followed by an inconvenient location with almost 24% of workers. Other difficulties include pick-up and drop-off times (14%), overcrowded classrooms with few toys and little outdoor space (9%), lack of formal education (8%), and lack of special education programs (5%). Only 3 workers (0.4%) of the total survey respondents did not have any difficulty finding childcare centers.

DISCUSSION

In general, daycare centers are of high demand among industrial zone workers. The average time participants spent working is 55 hours per week, higher than the 47.44 hours per week of workers in Vietnam, according to data from the International Labor Organization in 2019 [7]. In addition, the majority of workers (66.2%) use childcare services before the child turns 2 years old, of which 10.9% send their children to a nursery before 12 months old. Affordable and accessible childcare facilities in the area are critical.

From the survey results, location and cost were the main difficulties and the deciding factors for parents choosing childcare arrangements. Due to the isolated nature of industrial zones, workers often live in residential areas near the factories. However, childcare facilities and many other essential services have received little attention, forcing parents to accept sending their children to nearby independent, home-based care groups without proper qualifications. Decree 404/QĐ-TTg dated March 20, 2014 of the Prime Minister has set a target that by 2020 70% of children under 36 months should be sent to quality-controlled care centers. In addition, 500 independent, private care groups should be built and supported [8].

In fact, in 10 industrial zones in Hanoi, no childcare facility has been built to serve nearly 165,000 workers employed there, according to a report by the Hanoi Federation of Labor in 2022 [9].

Similarly, no company currently operating in these zones has built or cooperated with a preschool to provide childcare services for children of more than 87,000 workers in 8 industrial zones in the Ha Nam province. This shows the lack of urgency in establishing quality-controlled childcare facilities for workers in the industrial zone.

In addition to the challenges of finding preschools close to home, the pressure of high childcare costs is also a primary concern for workers. According to Decree 105/2020/ND-CP dated September 8, 2020, workers with preschool children in industrial zones are entitled to a minimum financial support of 160,000 VND per month [8]. In fact, the survey results show that very few children (1.3%) are entitled to this allowance. The reason is that this policy only applies to children attending licensed preschool educational institutions, which include public kindergartens and some private daycares. Moreover, the registration process for workers to receive benefits is cumbersome. They only accept applications in August every year, with only a 15-day window for parents to prepare and submit documents. Faced with the shortage of kindergartens in the industrial zone, along with the high demand from workers for early child care (before 36 months of age), workers have to accept high-cost child care at external facilities.



RECOMMENDATION

The research team has made the following recommendations to address these pressing issues

First, improve the amount and quality of childcare facilities in industrial zones

A system should be established to allow businesses to cooperate with private preschool educational institutions near the factory and provide safe, high-quality child care centers. In particular, it is necessary to establish facilities with qualifications and resources to accept children under 36 months of age, to help meet the needs of workers.

Secondly, make the application process for financial benefits more convenient

The policy should be widely disseminated to workers and other beneficiaries of financial support. In addition, simplify the steps of receiving and reviewing applications while extending the deadline to receive monthly in August, instead of only 15 days.

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