



ASSESSMENT OF INDUSTRIAL ZONE WORKERS ON PRESCHOOL FACILITIES: CHILD SAFETY AND SERVICE QUALITY IN 2 PROVINCES IN VIETNAM

INTRODUCTION

According to data from the Ministry of Education in 2020, more than 5.3 million Vietnamese children are currently attending preschool. 1.2 million of these children are cared for at nearly 3,300 private schools and 16,000 independent care groups across the country. [1]. The percentage of babysitters and teachers in independent care groups with the highest degree of either a high school diploma, have not yet graduated from high school, and do not have a college degree or higher (that is, do not meet the requirements of Article 72 of the Education Law [2]) accounts for 22% in urban and 35% in rural areas. This is according to Hentschel et al's study with a sample size of 480 schools and care groups [3]. As of 2021, Vietnam has 395 established industrial zones (370 currently in operation) [4], creating jobs for 7 million workers, approximately 50% of whom are migrant workers [5]. In Hanoi alone, there are 10 industrial zones with nearly 165,000 employees (99,000 female workers) [6]. The fast development of these industrial zones has yet to be followed up with the implementation of national policies on essential services and infrastructure by the companies in these zones. This has resulted in unmet demands for housing and child care. As a result, a growing number of independent, home-based care groups have sprung up with little quality supervision, while public or licensed private institutions in the area have become overloaded. Although there have been many policies issued by the government to promote the construction and quality improvement of childcare facilities [7,8,9], the above issues have yet to be reduced and have caused serious consequences such as child abuse cases at preschools.

This article will provide an analysis of workers' experience using childcare services, drawn from the results of a joint survey between the Research and Community Development Center (RTCCD) and the Viet Nam General Confederation of Labor. The research team hopes that the results from this paper will provide policymakers with the scientific evidence to promote the improvement of childcare services for the children of industrial zone workers.



RESEARCH METHODS

A survey on child safety at daycare services was conducted with 711 workers at 10 factories in two industrial zones in 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 overall experiences and concerns related to child daycare services.

Data from the survey results of 690 workers who currently send their children to external childcare services (excluding grandparents and relatives) were included in the analysis. The child care experience questionnaire provided 21 situational questions about three criteria: a) the caregiver's concern for the child, b) mental health and safety factors, and c) environmental conditions and physical safety. Parents rated the frequency of each situation on a scale of always/ frequently/ sometimes/ never.

The chi-square test for independence was used to find associations between the situations and types of childcare facilities: public institutions, large private institutions, and small private or independent groups. If $p < 0.05$, the differences between parents' assessments of these situations in each type of facility are statistically significant.

1. Experiences with using childcare services

Table 1. Comparison of the percentage of parents who rated positive statements as frequently/always/ occasionally in three types of childcare facilities.

Positive statements	All (%)	Public (%)	Private (%)	Independence (%)
A. The caregiver's concern for the child				
The caregiver is happy to see my child.	96.1	95.7	96.8	97.0
The caregiver is warm and affectionate toward my child.	95.2	95.5	92.8	97.0
My child is treated with respect.	92.8	92.3	93.6	94.0
The caregiver takes an interest in my child.	94.4	93.6	95.2	97.0
My child gets a lot of individual attention.	87.5	86.9	88.8	89.0
The caregiver seems happy and content.	92.6	93.6	91.2	90.0
B. Mental health and safety factors				
My child feels safe and secure in care.	32.6	35.3	20.0	36.6*
My child has been happy with the arrangement.	96.4	96.3	96.0	97.0
My child feels accepted by the caregiver.	91.9	93.3	91.2	86.0*
My child likes the caregiver.	92.0	91.8	91.2	94.0
My child is safe with the caregiver.	91.5	91.4	92.0	90.0
C. Environmental conditions and physical safety				
Dangerous things are kept out of reach.	61.5	60.0	92.0	90.0

*Analyses in bold have statistically significant differences in the chi-square test at $p < 0.05$.

The results from 690 workers showed that 9 out of 10 parents reported that the caregiver treated their child with respect, took an interest in, gave attention to their child, and seemed happy (Table 1- section A). The percentage of parents who found that their children were happy when they were at the childcare facility and with the teachers is also very high: reaching over 90% (Table 1 - section B). There is no statistical difference between the 3 types of childcare facilities: public preschools; large-scale, private preschools; or small, independent care groups.

However, the results in Table 1 - section B show that only 32.6% of parents reported their children feeling safe and secure at the daycare facility. Further analysis of these parents' responses yielded a rate of 35.3% feeling safe and secure at public schools, with only 20% at large, private schools and 36.6% at independent care groups. The differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The percentage of parents reporting that their children felt accepted by the caregiver was the lowest in the independent group at 86.0%, compared with 91.2% and 93.3% in the large private group and public group ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2 presents parents' reports on certain negative behaviors or conditions after being in care at the current childcare arrangement. Overall, 52.3% of parents believed that babysitters or teachers had to simultaneously take care of too many children. In the small care group, 6 out of 10 workers (59.0%) reported that there were too many children being cared for at once. In public schools, 5 out of 10 workers reported this (54.0%) and the rate in private schools was 4 out of 10 (40.8%). The differences were statistically significant between the three groups ($p < 0.05$).

Regarding children's safety and mental well-being, 1 in 4 workers (25.5%) reported their child being irritable since kindergarten (Table 2 - section B). The ratio in public preschools was 1:4 (24.7%), 1:5 (20.8%) in large, private preschools, and 1:3 (35.0%) in small, independent care groups ($p < 0.05$).

Table 2. Comparison of the percentage of parents who rated negative statements as frequently/ always/occasionally in three types of childcare facilities.

Negative statements	All (%)	Public (%)	Private (%)	Independent (%)
A. The caregiver's concern for the child				
There are too many children being cared for at the same time.	52.3	54.0	40.8	59.0*
The caregiver needs more help with the children.	52.0	50.5	50.4	61.0
B. Mental health and safety factors				
My child has been irritable since being in this arrangement.	25.5	24.7	20.8	35.0*
My child feels isolated and alone in care.	12.3	12.9	8.0	15.0
The caregiver gets impatient with my child.	17.3	18.7	9.6	20.0*
I worry about bad things happening to my child in care.	40.3	41.4	32.0	47.0
C. Environmental conditions and physical safety				
The children seem out of control.	31.0	31.8	24.0	36.0
The condition in classrooms is unsanitary.	14.6	14.4	10.4	21.0
Children watch too much TV.	32.0	34.6	20.0	35.0*

*Analyses in bold have statistically significant differences in the chi-square test at $p < 0.05$.

17.3% of parents reported seeing the babysitter lose patience with their children, posing a potential risk of child abuse. There are statistically significant differences between this rate among the three types of institutions: 18.7% in public preschools and kindergartens, only 9.6% in large private schools, and 20.0% in small childcare centers. Children sent to small-scale daycare facilities and public schools are more than twice as likely to encounter an impatient teacher than children sent to large-scale private institutions.

4 out of 10 parents (40.3%) were worried that something bad might happen to their child in class (Table 2 - section B), while 96.4% of parents reported that their child was happy at the daycare facility (Table 1 - section B). A potential reason for this discrepancy is the media reporting of widespread child abuse cases at daycare centers, having had an impact on parents' anxiety about their children's safety.

14.6% of parents reported that their children's environmental conditions were unhygienic and 32% reported that their children watched too much television. This rate is much higher (approximately 35%) at public preschools and independent care centers (Table 2 - section C).

2. Overall quality

The survey asked 3 questions about service quality and participants answered definitely yes (agree with the assessment given), maybe, or disagree with each statement. The research team used the chi-square test of independence to examine the relationship between the evaluation statements and the type of childcare facility (public, private, independent).

The results in Table 3 show that about 40% of parents believe that the current daycare facility has what their child needs. The rate of dissatisfaction is very small (<1.7%), and 58.6% of parents remain unsure about the quality (the facility needs further improvement). Statement (2), regarding whether parents would still choose the current facility if they can pick again, is an indicator that they are completely satisfied with the current childcare facility. This percentage is only 34% of all participants.

Table 3. Parents' evaluation of overall quality

Evaluation	All (%)	Public (%)	Private (%)	Independent (%)
1) This childcare center has what my child needs.*				
Yes	39.7	43.0	28.8	38.0
May be	58.6	56.3	66.4	59.0
No	1.7	0.7	4.8	38.0
2) If I had to choose again, I would still choose this arrangement.				
Yes	33,6	34,8	26,4	37,0
May be	63,8	63,4	69,6	58,0
No	2,6	1,7	4,0	5,0
3) I could recommend this place to other parents.				
Yes	50,4	51,6	49,6	46,0
May be	46,2	45,2	46,4	51,0
No	3,3	3,2	4,0	3,0

*The chi-square results of (1) show statistically significant differences between childcare facilities at $p < 0.05$.

For the overall assessment of care quality, 12.0% of parents rated it as perfect, excellent (7.1%), good (56.7%), good (18.7%), poor (5.4%) and only 1 person rated it bad (0.1%).



In general, according to parents' reports, children of industrial zone workers have a good experience in preschool. Most children regularly receive attention, care, and affection, and are treated with respect. However, more than half of parents feel that preschool teachers need extra help and they have to take care of too many children at once. Data analysis suggested a relationship between the type of facility (public, private, and independent) and the frequency of classrooms being overcrowded. According to data from the Ministry of Education and Training in 2020, Vietnam lacks more than 45,000 preschool teachers [1], reflecting the analysis of this survey.

Regarding physical and mental health, the survey shows that children are not completely safe at care centers. More than 90% of parents rated their child as liking the teachers, being happy, safe, and loved by caregivers. However, only 32.6% of parents said that their children felt safe and secure. 1 in 4 children often appeared irritable after going to kindergarten. 40% of parents worry that something bad might happen to their children in class. In the three situations mentioned above, the results also

DISCUSSION

show that the rate of negative indicators in small, independent care centers is always the highest. In other words, carrying the most safety risk.

In terms of service quality, about 4 out of 10 workers feel that the childcare facility has met their child's needs (39.7%), and 1 in 3 workers would continue choosing this facility again (33.6%). But 50.4% said they would recommend the facility to others, indicating that a recommendation from a parent who has sent their child there should not be a guarantee of the provider's quality. Parents need other measures to assess childcare quality before deciding to send their children.



DISCUSSION

Decision 1677/QĐ-TTg dated December 3, 2018 of the Prime Minister on the development of preschool education, from 2018-2025, has encouraged investments from businesses, organizations, and individuals in preschool education in industrial zones and export processing zones [12]. Decision 655/2017/QĐ-TTg dated 12/05/2017 also promoted the construction of trade union institutions, including housing and kindergartens, in industrial zones and export processing zones [13]. But up to now, there is only one policy: Decree 105/220/ND-CP dated September 8, 2020, providing specific guidelines for private and independent preschool educational institutions in regions with industrial zones or a high population of labor workers. This includes Article 5 (financial support of 20 million VND per childcare facility), Article 6 (policy to encourage investment in early childhood education development), and Article 8 (financial support of 160,000 VND/month/child) [14].

The supervision of professional and technical quality of small-scale private childcare facilities (independent care) is assigned to the local People's Committees at the commune level. In Binh Duong and Dong Nai, two provinces with a large number of industrial zones, on average, each commune has 7-11 groups of independent, home-based care centers.¹ The quality assurance of private and independent childcare facilities, both at large and small scales, requires more thorough policy and technical guidance from the Ministry of Education and Training. The expansion of coverage and quality improvement for preschools (serving children aged 6-36 months), especially in industrial zones, demands additional attention to ensure that the policy is enforced.

(1) Data from Ministry of Education and Training in Binh Duong province and in Dong Nai province, 2022.

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AUTHORS

Doan Quynh Chi, Researcher at RTCCD

Do Hong Van, Head of Women Workers and Policy Department at Viet Nam General Confederation of Labor

Huynh Thi Hai Van, Senior Officer at Viet Nam General Confederation of Labor

Tran Thu Ha, Director of RTCCD

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ORGANIZATION CONTACT INFORMATION

Research and Training Center for Community Development (RTCCD)
46/6 Tran Kim Xuyen St, Yen Hoa Ward, Cau Giay Dist., Ha Noi
Tel: +84 24 36280350
Email: office@rtccd.org.vn
Website: www.rtccd.org.vn

Viet Nam General Confederation of Labor
82 Tran Hung Dao St, Tran Hung Dao Ward, Hoan Kiem Dist., Ha Noi
Tel +84 24 39421181
Email: congthongtincdvn@gmail.com
Website: www.congdoan.vn