



WeProsper

GLOBAL COALITION FOR
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

WeProsper Research Salon Brief: Childcare

WeProsper's Research Salons offer an opportunity for coalition members to share research on thematic areas of joint interest in order to expand the knowledge base and inform coalition advocacy on women's economic empowerment, justice, and rights.



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Research Takeaways and Policy Insights

On October 19, 2022, WeProsper hosted a session focused on childcare, featuring research presentations by the International Center for Research on Women, the Center for Global Development, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), Initiative for What Works to Advance Women and Girls in the Economy (IWWAGE), and Uthabiti Africa. Following the presentations, discussants from ActionAid International and Oxfam International provided reflections and connected research to ongoing global advocacy on childcare. Below, key takeaways from research presented by each organization is outlined, followed by policy and advocacy implications shared by the discussants.

Global Assessment of Care Services: Current Status, Impact, and Policy Recommendations¹

Mary Borrowman, International Center for Research on Women

- A review of evidence found that providing quality and affordable childcare is a highly effective way to support women’s labor force participation, reduce gender pay gaps, and increase individual and household income; more evidence is needed to understand impacts on time poverty and quality of employment.
- Financing for childcare was not found to be a priority in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), as levels of domestic financing were low. Financing was also low in official development assistance (ODA). However, it is becoming an increasing priority in some international financial institutions (IFIs).
- As provision gaps in LMICs are large, significant

expenditures are required to meet childcare needs. The benefits of these investments in social infrastructure are different from traditional infrastructure, generating more employment, particularly for women, and higher rates of self-financing through tax revenues.

Policy implications:

- Policies should be designed in a gender-responsive way, and with an intersectional lens, to reach the most excluded and create the greatest gains for women’s economic empowerment.
- There are a range of policies, such as paid parental leave and flexible workplace policies, that will support an enabling environment for utilizing childcare services.
- To fill provision gaps and provide quality and affordable services, childcare must be prioritized with available domestic resources. As many LMICs face resource constraints, financing from ODA and IFIs can supplement domestic financing to support a range of development outcomes.



Childcare’s Return on Investment: A Synthesis of Global Evidence (forthcoming)²

Shelby Bourgault, Center for Global Development

- Evidence from multiple contexts shows that investing in childcare has a significant, positive impact on maternal employment and gross domestic product (GDP).
- The evidence is less clear on the impact of childcare investments on maternal income; some studies show a significant increase, while others show no increase.
- The economic benefits of investing in childcare often exceed the costs, and some program models can finance themselves over time through increased tax revenue

Policy implications:

- Investing in childcare brings clear and demonstrable economic and social benefits across generations. Governments, bilateral donors, and multilaterals should utilize new investment vehicles, such as the World Bank’s [Invest in Childcare](#) initiative, to increase and improve these investments.
- With limited fiscal space, the economic and social benefits of investing in childcare should be weighed against the benefits of investing in other sectors; through modeling different policy options, policymakers may find that childcare is a “best-buy.”



Photo: Yagazie Emezi/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

Emerging Insights from Randomized Evaluations on Childcare and Women’s Economic Empowerment

Megan Morris, J-PAL

- Childcare may help women enter and remain in the workforce. Specifically, childcare may improve women’s economic empowerment by enabling them to participate in paid work. Four randomized evaluations from Brazil, Kenya, Nicaragua, and Chile found that free or subsidized childcare increased women’s labor force participation.³
- However, childcare may not increase employment in all contexts, as the care burden may not be the only limiting factor for women’s participation in the labor force.
 - » Childcare had limited impacts on women’s work in India, where researchers suggest that limited employment opportunities could hinder the effectiveness of childcare on women’s labor force participation.⁴
 - » Childcare had different impacts across subgroups of women, for example: married vs. single women; mothers vs. grandmothers; and mothers employed outside the home vs. mothers not working outside the home.⁵
- Childcare may allow women to be more productive at work or shift to more desirable work.
 - » In Uganda, mothers who were offered childcare for children ages 3-5 increased their self-employment revenues and business profit despite working the same number of hours, suggesting that childcare increased mothers’ productivity at work.⁶
 - » In Kenya, subsidized childcare services allowed single working mothers to work fewer hours without loss in wages by taking up jobs with more regular working hours.⁷

Policy implications:

- Childcare programs may better serve women’s needs if they feature coordinated programming across children’s age groups and childcare schedules that cover standard working hours.
- Open questions remain about the cost-effectiveness of different childcare models.
- When working to increase women’s labor force participation, childcare is only one factor and should be considered in the broader context with an intersectional lens.

Center-based Quality Childcare: A Case for Public Investment for Improved Maternal Employment and Early Childhood Development⁸

Shreya Ghosh, IWWAGE

- Acknowledging the burden of unpaid care work and a mother's role as a breadwinner while designing Early Childhood Development (ECD) policies and programs is key to ensure it supports maternal employment.
- Availability of quality care services and ensuring continuity is essential for child development as well as women's labor force participation.
- Designing iterative programs in collaboration with researchers from local and global universities enables improvement and effective scale up. It is important to capture a wide range of structural and process indicators to ensure quality service delivery and continuous improvements.

Policy implications:

- Creating an enabling environment with a strong national policy focus that includes binding regulations for public and private provision, adequate national funding, incorporation of training of staff, or development work in the budget is critical.
- Childcare must be synchronous with working hours of parents. In the Indian context, it would be worth exploring center-based childcare models that are open for seven to eight hours a day in collaboration with the government.
- Since social norms and preferences to use childcare in India have been shown to have negating effects on the utilization of center-based childcare, there is a need for social messaging and awareness campaigns on how quality center-based childcare can support mothers and older siblings, while also ensuring benefits to the child.

Collaborative Action for Childcare in Kenya: Preliminary Findings from Research on Women in Childcare in Kenya⁹

Asayya Imapa, Uthabiti Africa

- Women-led childcare in Kenya, mostly through micro-enterprises, is predominant but in crisis. Providers have little to no access to financing, and there is no regulation or registration. Further, there is little resourcing to build the capacity of childcare service providers to offer quality and affordable childcare services.
- Nannies in Kenya often do not have access to training on Early Childhood Development or caregiving skills, though access to training would serve as a motivator to improve caregiving practices.

Policy implications:

- Policy and regulatory reforms at the national and county level should be conducted to better support women working in childcare. Caregivers should be brought into the policy and regulatory design, implementation, and regulatory reform process to accelerate quality and affordable childcare and create an enabling environment for childcare workers and entrepreneurs to thrive.
- There are opportunities to connect the policy conversation on childcare with dialogue focused on women's economic empowerment and the need to further nuance the conversation around childcare and unpaid care in that context.



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Research to Advocacy Connections and Insights

Wangari Kinoti, ActionAid International

Childcare financing is central, and focusing advocacy on illicit capital outflows can help.

Estimates are needed on costs of providing childcare in various countries and what financing is available. A cross-issue advocacy component of this is illicit capital outflows due to tax practices, theft, corruption, etc. Stopping those outflows can help to fund care services and fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals. In fact, each year Africa loses 3.7% of GDP, or over \$88 billion USD, which is roughly equivalent to combined annual inflows to ODA and through Foreign Direct Investment.¹⁰ Thus, bringing together various advocacy campaigns on childcare, curbing illicit capital outflows, and domestic resource mobilization can be very impactful.

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) can lead to a decline in quality of services.

In the Global South, there are issues associated with PPPs, including poor priority setting, higher costs in the long run compared to traditional government investment, and impacts on women's livelihoods. Due to end users' inability to pay for services out-of-pocket, there is both a risk of loss and decline in quality of services, which can result in worse conditions overall and increase unpaid care work. So, it is critical to consider both where financing is coming from and where it is going, and our advocacy on childcare services needs to align with that focused on public financing.



Photo: Yagazie Emezi/Getty Images/Images of Empowerment

Fiana Arbab, Oxfam International

Public financing is critical.

Sources of finance for childcare and where it is directed matters. Childcare, unpaid care, and broader care services should be a publicly-provided good. Investments can, and should, encourage national care models that are truly accessible to all. Caution is needed where private providers are involved, especially those that are for-profit. We can draw lessons from evidence on primary and secondary education, which shows that when there are fees, no matter how low, certain income groups are excluded, the quality of service suffers, and workers in that sector who are overwhelmingly female are paid low wages¹¹.

A broader and stronger framing is needed when talking about childcare.

The “gender angle” to childcare and care labor should not just be about freeing up women’s time for female labor force participation in formal sectors, an approach which instrumentalizes women. A broader and stronger framing is needed in order to:

- Underscore the fact that care-givers themselves are most likely to be women and most often are poorer and racialized women down the global care chain.¹²
- Take into consideration the “5Rs” of care – by Recognizing, Reducing and Redistributing unpaid care work; Rewarding by providing more and decent work for care workers, and Representing, including social dialogue and collective bargaining for care workers.¹³
- Establish care work, whether it is unpaid, underpaid or paid, as a critical social and economic good¹⁴ and as a barrier to advancing gender equality.¹⁵
- Link conversations about childcare with the ongoing movement to count productive labor outside of and beyond formal labor sectors in GDP and alternatives to GDP.¹⁶
- Center the care conversation around choice and social protection, which enables empowerment and liberation for people, no matter their class or income status.¹⁷

Endnotes

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About WeProsper

WeProsper is a global coalition that promotes women's economic empowerment (WEE) by engaging in strategic advocacy to advance gender equality, address structural barriers, and foster women's and girls' voices and power as economic actors. Together, we work to build and utilize the global evidence base on women's economic empowerment using a feminist and intersectional approach to meaningfully inform global policy, increase funding for WEE, and support prosperity for women and girls in all their diversity.

Please scan to view our ever-growing member base:





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