

Policy Brief

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TRAINING CHILDMINDERS: ENSURING STAFFING QUALITY



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Introduction

This policy brief provides information about the personal and educational characteristics of childminders who participated in the Childminding Study. The indicators selected are: age, qualification, experience, previous training, source of training support and training needs. These are examined to gain an overall view of the learning background and training requirements of childminders.

The results are disaggregated by region to present a national perspective whilst at the same time studying regional variations that may guide the design of strategies to develop training programmes and modalities for delivering sensitisation, training, and professional development sessions for childminders.

Background

It has been acknowledged that one of the key factors in improving the quality of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is to have qualified staff. The quality of preschool staff training and qualifications has been showed to have a consistent association with later school performance (Pascal et. al., 2013). In Singapore, for example, there is a very stringent scheme of qualification requirements for child care professionals (Tan, 2013) and in UK one of the requirements for registration as a childminder is to have followed an approved course in child care and childminding and to have obtained the required certification.

In Seychelles, however, there is no formal qualification requirement for child care workers providing Early Childhood Care and Education

services. For Day Care Centres (which are registered) it is acknowledged that the Management Team "should be familiar with the emotional, physical, intellectual and language development of children in this age category" and, furthermore, that they should "know how to organize...various social and educational activities and have knowledge of basic First Aid and Health and Safety Procedures". For childminders registered with SENPA for the purpose of applying for a small business loan (16 of them in our study), it is stated in the general guidelines that the childminder "must have sound knowledge in infant feeding and formula preparations...." In both cases the importance of knowledge of early years child care is recognized. However, there is no mention of how knowledge in these areas is to be acquired and formalized through an approved course of study. Recent cases of neglect and accidents have brought up concerns about the quality of the practice and the knowledge level of childminders.

Selected Indicators

From a historical perspective, childminders come from diverse educational background with different experiences of working with children. Moreover, without any particular authority to regulate the service and to stipulate knowledge and training requirements childminders have been operating, freely, with very little guidance. In order to gain a better understanding of the training requirements of childminders and to explore possibilities of improving staff quality it is necessary, in the first place, to establish the educational status of childminders, and

the indicators which form the basis of this study are described below.

Age, qualification and experience

These refer to personal and educational characteristics. Information was gathered from the childminders about their age, their highest level of academic education, and the length of time that they have been working as childminders. This information was considered as fundamental pre-requisites for the development of pre-registration and training session.

Source of Support

Although the training of childminders has not been formalized, various sensitization and workshop style training programmes had been organized by health, safety and social services. Childminders were asked if they had received training by personnel from these

institutions. This information should help in gaining the support of partners both in developing and delivering a coordinated training programme.

Training Needs

In order to keep childminders abreast of current and quality childcare they also need continuous professional development. They will need opportunities to exchange experiences and to better manage their childminding operations. A range of questions were asked to find out how the childminders perceived aspects of their professional practice such as record keeping, communication, following guidelines and standards. They were also asked to give their views on care giving practices, safety issues and implementation of recommendation from relevant authorities.

Table 1: Personal Characteristics of Childminders

Region	Personal Characteristics			Training Providers			Training Needs							
	Age	secondary education	Experience in years	Ministry of Health	Community Development	Social Services	Budget Management	Record Keeping	Negotiating with Parents	Complying with Guidelines	Meeting Standards	Care-giving practices	Safe Nurturing Environment	Implementing recommendations
	Mean	%	Mean	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Central 1	43.6	65.4	13.6	25.0	0.0	14.3	58.9	100.0	33	84.0	75.0	65.4	80.8	73.1
Central 2	47.1	53.8	13.3	32.0	0.0	0.0	88.5	80.8	0	92.3	80.8	52.0	15.4	84.6
East/South	46.9	48.6	13.2	0.0	17.1	0.0	17.1	11.4	0	81.2	82.9	71.4	46.7	68.6
Islands	43.7	80.8	11.6	43.8	3.8	0.0	54.2	41.7	33	63.6	80.8	38.5	23.1	53.8
North	48.2	66.7	11.3	13.3	6.7	6.7	80.0	53.3	40	64.3	73.3	53.3	60.0	66.7
West	44.7	52.6	12.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	27.3	100.0	67	73.7	47.4	15.8	52.6	63.2
National	45.6	60.5	12.9	22	6.8	1.8	52.3	44.7	55	77.9	75.2	52.1	44.9	68.7

Key Findings

The data on the selected indicators were analysed and the results are contained in Table 1.

Personal Characteristics

At the national level the average age of childminders was about 46, the average years of working as a childminder was around 13 and just over 60 percent of them had at least completed secondary education. Further analysis of the age and length of experience data shows that a large proportion of childminders (about 65%) were between 30 and 50 years old and that about two-thirds of them (over 60%) had been a childminder for at least five years. Moreover, just over 60 percent of childminders had completed secondary education. The indications are that childminding operations were being undertaken by matured or maturing women and that childminding as a business has been operating for a considerable time. One of the striking features of the findings (columns 2, 3 and 4) is the results for Islands region. This region has a younger population of childminders (mean average age of 43), with the least experience (mean years 11) (apart from childminders in the North) and most of them are educationally qualified with over eighty percent of childminders having completed secondary education. Overall, the results are encouraging in terms learning potential of childminders and they can be used to inform programme development.

Training Providers

The participation of the different institutions in training and supporting childminders has been assessed and the percentage of childminders who responded affirmatively has been recorded in columns 5-7. It is clear that the participation rate of sectors (that is, health, community development and social services) is rather poor. However, the Ministry of Health seemed to have taken a leading role with a figure of 22, at the national level. Moreover, the training has been carried out mostly in Central regions (Central 1, 25%; Central 2, 32%) and Island region where 42 percent of childminders have received training from personnel in that Ministry. On the other hand, Community Development and Social Services sectors have done

minimal training, mostly, for childminders in East/South (about 17%) and Central 1 (about 14%). Overall, the general impression is that very few childminders received assistance from personnel from those institutions. The training of childminders has been sporadic and inconsistent. This can be understood since there has not been any formal plan to train childminders. What is of importance from the data is that there has been some involvement of the major institutions and this can pave the way for collaboration in developing training support partnership to deliver a coordinated programme.

Training Needs

An overwhelming majority of childminders (95%) affirmed the importance of professional development. In order to identify areas of priority, the childminders were asked how challenging they found key aspects (listed in the second row of the last eight columns) of their professional practice. The percentage of childminders who identified these topics as challenging has been recorded for the six regions.

The responses can be placed in three categories: those professional activities linked to regulation and standards; those with a communicative and interactive dimension and those which it appeared that the childminders took for granted. Nationally, it is apparent from the findings that 'Complying with Guidelines', 'Meeting Standards' 'Implementing Recommendations' were challenging to a large proportion of childminders (78%, 75%, and almost 70%, respectively): Generally, these figures do not vary very much across regions except for 'Meeting Standards' in the West region where less than half of the childminders found this challenging. As for 'Negotiating with Parents', and 'Care-giving Practices', more than half of the childminders rated those aspects as challenging. However, the results for 'Record-keeping' and 'Safe and Nurturing Environment' need to be interpreted with care. One would have expected those to be challenging for more childminders since most of them kept limited records and the safety aspect of their environment were poorly rated by field observers. This in itself point to a training gap where childminders were not aware

of the importance of keeping records and all the components of safety or a safe and nurturing environment. However, the responses would indicate that most childminders have a very good idea of the areas of professional challenge which will need addressing.

Recommendations

- Recruit an expert in ECCE training and professional development to conceptualise a training framework, develop certification procedures taking into consideration emerging professional needs, personal characteristics, multi-sectoral inputs and findings from this brief.
- Finances and resources should be made available for IECD to coordinate, with the assistance of a specialist and trainers from the different sectors, a training and continuous development programme for childminders.
- Adopt a “train-the-trainers model” to implement the training programme in a phased approach by lead training institution in collaboration with partners identified in this brief, and other concerned NGO’s.
- Implement pre-registration training and work experience for prospective childminding practitioners.

Conclusion

All childminders need to follow training and continuous professional development programmes to deliver an improved service and to keep abreast of good practices. It is evident from this study that the training of childminders has not been adequate, accessible and consistent. This is a concern. Moreover, the majority of childminders possessed the necessary educational background, rated highly the importance of professional development, and most of them were aware of their training needs. Action should include securing and strengthening inter-ministerial partnership, consultative programme development, and involvement of the local district community.

References

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
IECD	Institute of Early Childhood Development
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
SEnPA	Small Enterprise Promotion Agency

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