

Policy Brief

Number 1 (November 2013)

LEVELS OF PROVISION: QUALITY OF CHILDMINDING



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Introduction

The nation-wide study on the childminding service recently carried out by the Institute for Early Childhood Development (IECD) was the first ever such comprehensive survey carried out in the Seychelles. The study covered 147 child minding providers and 763 parents.

The main aim of the study was to gather and provide "accurate and comprehensive information on the conditions and quality of childminding services in the country for policy actions" (IECD, 2013). This stems from the fact that childminding service remains informal and unregulated but is nevertheless a source of income for service providers as well as a contributor to the country's economic growth.

This brief will attempt to address the following questions:

1. What are current provisions for child care and development in child minding establishments?
2. What are the minimum standards which should be promoted?

In this paper, the results obtained from field observations carried out on location at each childminder during one working day and the results are presented for Seychelles as a whole, and are further disaggregated by region.

Background

There are different reasons for parents to decide to use childminding services and facilities. On the one hand it is important – especially for working parents – that childminding service is affordable and accessible. On the other hand, the quality of the service provided is also of significant importance.

The quality of childcare has to do with factors that contribute to the social, emotional, health and cognitive development of a child. It also relates to the concept of the first three to five years of a child's life which is a period of tremendous growth and development. This brief focuses on some of the aspects of childcare, which can be assessed and regulated by the concerned authorities. These aspects are further discussed in detail in the section that follows.

Although the debate on quality is evident in many developed countries, there is a severe lack of harmonized information and statistics, and coordination on this matter. The simple fact remains that care facilities and provisions, quality measures, requirements and monitoring of childcare standards differ across countries (OECD, 2001). Being a small island state, Seychelles is not an exception and hence, the rationale for such a study.

Why minimum standards of provision?

An interesting case is that of the Netherlands, where childcare was almost completely deregulated in 2005. It was recognised that after this change, the

quality childcare provision dropped dramatically in terms of the quality of the physical environment and also in the quality of the interactions between childminders and children. This forced the Dutch government to reverse the decision on deregulation (Policy briefing, 2012).

Research also reveals that minimum level of provisions, include, among others, a quality environment which is well suited for children's learning and overall development, feeling of security within the childminding setting, curriculum and learning where developmentally appropriate play-based activities are promoted along high quality interactions (Southern Area Children Partnership, 2002).

Therefore, the results of this study on childminding service should provide a platform on which to develop a sound regulatory framework and operational guidelines for all operators and help address some of the issues highlighted in the IECD Project Memorandum (2013).

Developing a framework on childminding standards

The nation-wide study on the childminding service The main instrument used in developing a framework on standards for childminding services was the observation schedule. A trained fieldworker spent one working day in an assigned childminder to conduct a thorough observation of what happened from the time the children arrived up to when they departed.

There were four main areas of focus and these were:

1. Space and Furnishings
2. Health and Safety
3. Learning Programme
4. Interaction

From these four main areas of focus, several indicators were developed, for example, under Space and Furnishings there were further four indicators as follow:

- Quality and availability of indoor space designated for children during the day
- Quality and accessibility of general indoor area
- Quality and suitability of general outdoor area
- Quality and availability of furniture

The fieldworkers were further guided by pointers of what to look for when observing.

A rating scale was applied to the indicators and this ranged from 1 to 5 while the pointers were assigned "Yes" if they were present and "No" if absent. This also helped in determining the overall rating for the indicator where a rating of 5 was the highest.

Using modern analysis techniques, it was possible to determine the indicators on which the childminders met all the criteria for a high standard of service and those on which standards were low or even non-existent.

Four levels of services were derived and a selection of standard descriptors is described below:

Level 1

A childminder at this level would be providing all the essential facilities and these would include, for example,

The quality and accessibility of indoor area characterised by its

- ❖ Organisation and setting
- ❖ Items that posed low or no risk to health and safety of children
- ❖ Lighting and ventilation
- ❖ Access to facilities such as toilet, bath, bedroom etc.

Level 2

A childminder at this level would meet all the criteria for essential facilities outlined in Level 1 and in

addition it would also provide facilities that are recommended such as, for example,

The quality and availability of educational materials characterised by,

- ❖ Adequate learning materials for children to use
- ❖ Availability of toys for play activities
- ❖ Easy accessibility to educational materials to the children
- ❖ Toys that are in good condition
- ❖ Availability of child-related displays or posters

Level 3

At Level 3, a childminder would have met all the requirements of Level 1 and Level 2 and in addition would be offering enhanced service of excellence, for example,

The quality of language learning experiences, characterised by

- ❖ Providing opportunities for conversations that allow talking and listening;
- ❖ Use of existing materials to develop children's language;
- ❖ Encouraging children to talk through situations and explain their reasoning;
- ❖ Use of non-verbal communication, physical touch, gestures and facial expressions to encourage children;
- ❖ Use of positive reinforcement strategies (praise, pat, token etc.)

The completion of the framework on standards for childminders will further assist in identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses in the quality of services being delivered and also it can serve as a regulatory tool, for example, in establishing the minimum level of provision required to be granted a childminding establishment certificate or license in order to operate.

In the case where a childminder or the establishment did not meet the standards at Level 1, it was

classified as a provider with **Limited Provisions** or **LP** for short.

Key Findings

The data on the four main areas of focus were analyzed and the results are depicted in Figures 1 to 4.

Space and Furnishings

This area of focus comprised four indicators and these were:

- Quality and availability of indoor space designated for children during the day;
- Quality and accessibility of general indoor area;
- Quality and suitability of general outdoor area and
- Quality and availability of furniture.

Table 1: Percentage of child minders rated highly on Space and Furnishings by region

Indicator	Central 1	Central 2	South East	Island	North	West	SEY
Indoor space designated for children during day	46.4	63.0	54.3	57.7	92.3	52.6	58.1
General indoor area	57.1	68.0	54.5	57.7	53.8	36.8	55.6
General outdoor area	25.0	38.5	32.3	14.3	25.0	16.7	26.5
Furniture	53.3	77.8	47.1	48.0	53.8	33.3	53.1

As presented in **Table 1**, for the first indicator, over 90 percent of childminders in the Northern region were rated highly. This meant that the quality and availability of indoor space were excellent. 63 percent of childminders in the Central B region also received a high rating compared to only 46 percent in Central A region. In fact this was lowest percentage, well below the national average of 58 percent.

On quality and accessibility of general indoor area, the national average was around 56 percent with around 55 percent of childminders in most regions posting a high rating. The two exceptions were Central B region with 68 percent rated excellent and West with just over a third of childminders rated highly. It is quite evident from the same table that a majority of providers across all regions were not rated highly on the third indicator, implying that the quality and suitability of the general outdoor area at most service providers need to be addressed. However, this is understandable somehow, as most providers are home-based and as such, with limited outdoor space.

For the last indicator under this area of focus, that is quality and availability of furniture, childminders in Central B region came out top with about 78 percent of them receiving an excellent rating. For childminders in the West region however, only a third of them received such a rating and that was 20 percentage points below the nation average of 53 percent.

Health and Safety

The second area of focus was concerned with health and safety provisions. The results are presented in **Table 2** and five indicators made up this area of focus. These were:

- Nutritional quality;
- Quality of food preparation and storage facilities;
- Accessibility and quality of personal care facilities and practices;
- Quality of provisions and practices for sanitation and hygiene and
- Quality of health and safety practices and provisions.

Table 2: Percentage of child minders rated highly on Health and Safety by region

Indicator	Central 1	Central 2	South East	Islands	North	West	SEY
Nutrition	46.4	81.5	62.9	34.6	76.9	44.4	57.1
Food Preparation	82.1	88.5	77.1	84.0	75.0	66.7	79.9
Personal Care Routine	46.4	63.0	45.7	42.3	45.5	50.0	49.0
Sanitary and Hygienic Practices	70.4	70.4	72.7	73.1	92.3	68.4	73.1
Health and Safety Practices	14.3	8.0	6.7	3.8	0.0	0.0	6.4

As can be seen in **Table 2**, the national average on this indicator was 53 percent. However, there was a fair amount of variability in the percentage of childminders who were given an excellent rating on this same indicator across the regions, ranging from 35 percent on the Islands to about 82 percent in Central B.

For the second indicator, that is, food preparation and storage facilities, the percentage of child minders rated highly is pleasing to report, with a national average of 80 percent. In most regions over 75 percent of child minders received an excellent rating on the quality of food preparation and storage facilities with the exception of child minders in the West for which two thirds got this rating.

On accessibility and quality of personal care facilities and practices, the results suggest that there is scope for improvement. The national average seemed to indicate that just below 50 percent of child minders were offering high quality personal care to children under their care. The percentage of childminders who were rated highly varied from 42 percent on the Islands and 63 percent in Central B.

Another area where the majority of child minders appeared to be making excellent provisions was in the quality of sanitation and hygiene. The national average was 73 percent. For childminders in the North in particular, the result was outstanding with 92

percent of those observed providing excellent sanitary and hygienic facilities.

The results for the final indicator in **Table 2** are a cause of concern as this indicator addressed health and safety practices which is critical in the context of childminding services. The national average was only six percent, but more worrying is the fact that in two regions, North and West, no provider received a rating of excellent and in most of the other regions, the percentage was less than ten. Nonetheless, it is pleasing to report that generally, food preparation and sanitary and hygienic practices were rates highly in most childminders.

Programme

The area of focus was concerned with quality of education programmes being offered by the childminders. Three indicators made up this area and these were:

1. Quality of language learning experiences;
2. Quality of learning activities, and
3. Quality and availability of educational materials.

The results are presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Percentage of childminders rated highly on Programme by region

Indicator	Central 1	Central 2	South East	Islands	North	West	SEY
Language development	51.9	77.8	57.6	34.8	41.7	50.0	54.3
Learning activities	42.9	36.0	50.0	41.7	30.8	33.3	40.4
Educational materials	50.0	33.3	38.7	28.0	41.7	16.7	35.5

As can be observed, for the first indicator, the national average was close to 55 percent. However, the variability in the high ratings was quite obvious, from a low of 35 percent in the Island region to a high of almost 78 percent in the Central B region.

For the second indicator, that is, the quality of learning activities, there was little variability across regions. The national average was 40 percent.

As for the last indicator, the national average was about only 36 percent. Most of the childminders were not rated highly on quality and availability of educational materials. While this is understandable, given that a significant number of childminders are not necessarily “educationally” oriented, the results seemed to suggest that this remains another area where more needs to be done in order that children get a good head start before entering crèche.

Interaction

This was the fourth and last area of focus. It consisted of three indicators and these were:

1. Quality of supervision;
2. Quality of interaction, and
3. Quality of social exchange on arrival and departure.

The results are presented in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Percentage of childminders rated highly on Interaction by region

Indicator	Central 1	Central 2	South East	Islands	North	West	SEY
Supervision	78.6	81.5	80.0	84.6	92.3	78.9	81.8
Relationships	82.1	81.5	82.9	76.9	75.0	84.2	81.0
Arrival and departure	67.9	73.1	60.6	76.0	54.5	78.9	69.0

As depicted in **Table 4**, on the first indicator, it appeared that the level of supervision offered by most service providers received an excellent rating, as reflected in the national average of over 81 percent. There was little variability across regions.

Indicator 2 was also highly rated with a national average of 81 percent. Again, there was little variability across regions with a minimum of 75 percent recorded in the North and a maximum of just over 84 percent in the West.

With regards to the third indicator of this of focus area, which is on the quality of exchange on arrival and departure of children to their respective childminders, the rating was reasonably high with a national average of 69 percent. Again, there was little variability across regions. 55 percent of childminders in the North were rated highly on this indicator and about 79 percent were rated as excellent.

Level of Service

As stated earlier, four levels of services were derived and the percentage of childminders by level by region is presented in **Table 5**.

Table 5: Percentage of childminders meeting the different levels of provisions by region

Indicator	Central 1	Central 2	South East	Islands	North	West	SEY
Level 1 (Essential)	21.4	7.4	14.3	19.2	15.4	26.3	16.9
Level 2 (Recommended)	32.1	51.9	48.6	61.5	61.5	52.6	50.0
Level 3 (Excellent)	28.6	29.6	17.1	7.7	15.4	5.3	18.2
Level LP (Limited Provisions)	17.9	17.9	20.0	11.5	7.7	15.8	14.9

To start off, nationally, it can be observed that close to 15 percent of childminding establishments were offering limited provisions across all the four focus areas. Another 17 percent were at least offering the essential or minimum level of service. 50 percent went a bit further by offering more quality services and a further 18 percent were classified as excellent service providers.

Summary of Findings

❖ From the results obtained from the observations, it appears that a satisfactory number childminders were rated highly on provisions such as designated indoor space

for children and on furniture. However, the ratings on outdoor space were not as favorable.

- ❖ Food preparation and sanitary and hygienic practices were also highly rated in most childminding establishments. While this commendable, there is still an improvement to be made to in the quality of nutrition offered. Further still, the issue of health and safety was given a very low rating and this is an area requiring urgent attention and redress.
- ❖ The quality of the interactions between childminders and children were generally rated highly. These were characterised by very good relationships and effective supervision.
- ❖ The evidence also suggest that childminders were making an effort to create an environment in which children could begin develop early learning skills including language development. However, this is an area where a framework is much needed, with a strong support and training programme put in place, as there was considerable variability across regions.
- ❖ Finally, the results also suggest that there was a fair degree of variability in the quality of service offered across regions. For example, in the central region, about 30 percent of childminders were offering a service considered as excellent while the figures for Island and West were only eight percent and five percent respectively.

Recommendations

Being the first such comprehensive study carried out in the Seychelles with regards to childminding services, coupled with the fact that the IECD was recently set up, it is important at this juncture to consider the need to establish a regulatory structure with appropriate resources to develop and improve the childminding programme. The IECD in collaboration with concerned partners should consider the following recommendations:

1. Establish a standards framework to guide the operation of childminding services and for regulatory purposes.
2. Build capacity for childminders to meet at least all essential indicators in the short to medium term and promote the holistic development of children and for responsible citizenry.
3. Ensure surveillance and compliance to assure quality.
4. Map out a strategy, based on available evidence, to empower all childminders to deliver superior services.

Conclusion

This paper attempted to address two issues, the first being concerned with current provisions for child care and development in childminding establishments and the second about the minimum standards to be promoted.

With regards to the first issue under consideration, a composite index derived by averaging the ratings on the 15 indicators revealed produced a mean of just over 50 out of a possible maximum of 75. This indicated that the level of provisions seemed to be acceptable. This was evident, for examples, on provisions for indoor space and furnishings, nutrition, food preparation, the level of hygiene, and on the quality of interaction between childminders and children. However, there are areas of concern, for examples, on health and safety practices, on which all childminders did not score well, and on the quality of the programmes offered to provide the foundations for all children to make a strong start in their overall development.

On the second issue, half of the childminding providers surveyed reached a level of provision that can be considered above the minimum standard with a further 18 percent reaching a level of excellence. However, around 15 percent were offering limited provisions, implying that many attributes were not observed.

References

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