

Actual circumstances of childcare seen from this survey

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This study investigated the actual circumstances of kindergartens, daycare centers and certified ECEC centers, from national surveys. The first survey was conducted in 2007/2008, the second one in 2012, and this third one in November 2018, which was a full-scale survey held at the time when the Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-rearing took root and certified ECEC centers became established. Another important point is that it was held prior to 2019 when early childhood education and care became free of charge later that year. The trend of the times was clearly indicated in the results of this survey. I would like to discuss the actual circumstances from the key results. 1) Certified ECEC centers seem to have become established to a large degree. From their benefits and good-design in management, positive opinions about their features score highly; integration of early childhood education and care, availability of consistent childcare from infancy to preschool period, etc. For that purpose, integration of kindergartens and daycare centers have been accomplished. 2) Overcapacity is observed in classrooms for 1-year olds and 2-year olds, while a significant shortage of applicants is observed in classrooms for 0-year olds and 3-year old children and older. This may be only a slight shortage in some classrooms, but classroom integration may become an issue if a lot of facilities have such a shortage, in particular with local communities. 3) Facility open hours are becoming longer. In reflection of the Comprehensive Support System for Children and Child-rearing which sets the standard childcare period as 11 hours, childcare hours are becoming longer. Extended childcare at kindergartens is increasing, resulting in longer facility open hours. 4) Lunch served by the facility has become more prevalent, also at private kindergartens. 5) Special needs education is now commonplace, irrespective of whether the facility is a kindergarten or daycare center. 6) As for the IT environment, it still remains in the framework of PC for office work. Introduction of tablets, etc., has only just begun. The use of a management system for attendance/absence, etc., is gradually spreading among private

facilities, and is expected to become more prevalent in the future. 7) The ratio of permanent employment and temporary employment among teachers/caregivers reveals the predominance of temporary workers in public facilities. There are certain percentages of temporary workers in private facilities, who may be serving in assistant positions, not necessarily as classroom teachers. 8) The idea of putting play in the center comes at the top for the principle or goal of facilities. Many facilities list more specific items, which correspond to the ideal image of how children should be by the end of the early childhood. 9) Training for course of study/guidelines is well provided, which seems to be put into good use for reviewing the overall plan and/or childcare at the facility. 10) A lot of facilities have interaction with elementary schools or send childcare facility-school documents, but the percentage has yet to reach 100%. 11) Gymnastics, music and English lessons are provided as special activities at more than half of the facilities. 12) Almost all private kindergartens provide extended childcare. Moreover, an increasing number of facilities provide rather prolonged childcare every day, of which the activity contents may present issues. 13) More and more kindergartens provide childcare for 2-year olds. 14) Maintaining and improving the quality of teachers/caregivers score highly among issues in practice, reflecting the issues and willingness associated with facilities. 15) Supporting parents and communicating information with parents is done in a diversified manner, and is expected to develop even further.

The above summary well present the circumstances of facilities trying to come up with ways to cope with the changing times. At the same time, there are numerous issues, in particular quality improvement in childcare. Facilities are providing caregivers with expanded training to improve the quality of caregivers and/or team childcare. They are also focusing on collaboration with parents. We need to develop more surveys on the connection of such practical measures with childcare quality.

Accurate description of actual circumstances and some issues are revealed in this survey

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Surveys on the actual circumstances of early childhood education and care in the field or awareness of the issues by the national government or public authorities are generally insufficient. This survey reveals them to a certain extent, which makes it important.

This is the third survey, however, the first after the three documents of guidelines, course of study and childcare facility-School Documents were revised. Also it was right before early childhood education and care became free of charge. Therefore it is very important to identify the actual circumstances and issues of childcare in the field. When read carefully, the survey results have potential clues for future practice and facility management.

First of all, I had a strong impression that certified ECEC centers earned improved or more favorable evaluations than they did before. When the system started in 2006, it was not easy to integrate the respective cultures of kindergartens and daycare centers. Moreover, the administrative side often remained redundant, resulting in cumbersome procedures or frequent trouble-like incidents. Though the issues of integrating the two cultures of kindergartens and daycare centers remain, numerous facilities acknowledge merits occurring after the revision of the laws, which is clearly indicated in the survey results. If the financial aspect is improved somewhat, there is a possibility of increase in such merits.

Meanwhile, it is becoming apparent that there is another issue of significantly prolonged open hours for childcare, in particular at daycare centers and certified ECEC centers. This survey finds that the national average daily open hours at private daycare centers are over 12 hours, while certified ECEC centers are open for almost 12 hours. Even in kindergartens, private facilities are open

for around 9.5 hours. Unconsciously, children become more nervous and feel stressed in daycare centers, certified ECEC centers or kindergartens than they do at home, however carefully they are cared for, when they are in groups and the teachers are not their parents. Granted that some stress helps children grow, how should we face the fact that a large number of children are receiving over 12 hours of childcare in so-called developed countries?

Work style reform is the topic of today. However, it seems that its purpose has yet to penetrate the world of early childhood education and care. I feel we need to build a new framework now, for example, making a law to restrict the work style of parents while their children are young.

Additionally, the survey revealed the reality that more caregivers are in temporary employment than in permanent employment in public daycare centers, for example. How to evaluate this reality is also an issue. Raising expertise, i.e. improving childcare quality contradicts increasing the number of caregivers in temporary employment. What to do with this? Since efforts in the field alone cannot solve this issue, it will present a major issue in childcare administration. About one third of public kindergartens listed "acquire thinking skill" as one of the points to focus in childcare, while the percentage is around 20% among daycare centers. One of the goals in childcare is to nurture and develop the capabilities of children, thus development of thinking skills is a very important point. We need to recognize the fact that there is a difference in focus between daycare centers and kindergartens.

I hope you will take in much more from this survey and make use of it in practice and management in the field.

Issue of improving quality of caregivers in facility management, and expectation for new measures

Kaori Shioya, Professor, Kokugakuin University

1. Findings from the survey results

I feel we can see a further advance in the declining birthrate and new issues of childcare from the results of this survey. Particularly in kindergartens, the big issue is naturally the survival of facilities, making it increasingly difficult to give critical decisions at turning points. Meanwhile, in daycare centers and certified ECEC centers, further training is in demand in childcare for those “with special needs” as is the case in kindergartens, in addition to long childcare hours and childcare for infants. In the circumstances, it is a matter of course that the issue of keeping and improving the quality of caregivers is emerging.

2. Understanding and care for children with special needs

The fact that approximately 70 to 80% of facilities chose “understanding and care for children with special needs” as necessary training for caregivers regardless of facility type means that it is becoming difficult to provide childcare in the field. It is not only the issue of children with a so-called “disability”. There are issues of children with specific ways to understand and/or behave, or behavioral issues rooted in a complex family environment. In addition to dealing with such children individually, various issues occur when providing childcare in groups with such children. I can almost feel the pain of caregivers who are unable to respond to each child due to a constant labor shortage and a rigorous work

environment. I think it is important not to lose sight of these things at the heart of the problem.

3. To improve the quality of teachers/caregivers

Many facilities list “developing culture of teachers/caregivers mutually learning at the facility” as a requirement for improving the quality of caregivers. Any caregiver would feel that teamwork in the field is more important than anything else in order to solve issues in childcare. Needless to say, preparing a system for caregivers to participate in training and seminars or securing a budget for training is important. However, it is the sharing issues among staff in the organization and learning together that is definitely important. New methods including online training have begun to be considered. That being said, it is important to closely inspect how this teamwork, a feature of childcare in the field, helps improve the capability of individual caregivers while it is activated.

For example, numerous measures such as enrichment of case conference can be considered for children with difficulty in dealing with things. It is essential to have leadership of the principal, supervisor or skills of experienced staff. From now on, development of staff organization with good human relations needs to be accomplished, as well as efforts and inventive ways for human resources development. I have high hopes for the new measures to be taken in the field.

Support for child rearing and collaboration with parents

Misako Aramaki, Associate Professor, Mejiro University

From the viewpoint of the general trend, we can see “child rearing consultation,” “providing information on childrearing,” and “seminar and/or lecture on childrearing” are basically conducted for parents of enrolled children, while “open playground,” “open facility such as childcare rooms,” “temporary childcare,” and “parent-child trial visit” are often conducted more for parents in the local community than for enrolled children. Roughly said, the former is considered as emotional or informational support, while the latter is instrumental support. The target seems to differ depending on the contents and purpose of the support. It can be considered that the facility type may affect the difference in role and strength requested for in childrearing support. In comparison with kindergartens and daycare centers, both public and private certified ECEC centers are actively engaged in support for parents in the local community, indicating they are expected to play a central role in childrearing support in the community. Public kindergartens show a high percentage of lectures, indicating their provision of active information on childrearing and early childhood education and care to the parents. However, in comparison with the cases of certified ECEC centers, their service seems to be limited to parents of enrolled children. I hope they open their doors to parents in the local community as well.

As for specific means to communicate information to parents, the overall feature is an increasing percentage of holding “Individual parent-teacher conference.” As the needs of parents are becoming more diversified, the necessity and importance of

dealing with each family is growing. Also, the use of “paper-based parent-teacher notebook” for 3- to 5-year olds seems to be declining, which may be interpreted as a part of more efficient clerical work. As for the information communication method to all parents, so-called documentation including display by facilities (photographs and bulletin boards) seems to be widely used, however, private kindergartens seem to make more use of the facility website. It may be because of the underlying reality that their children use the school bus in higher percentages.

Finally, generally speaking, all the facilities seem to feel that the parents ask them to develop social skills and good daily habits among children based on the experience in communal life. Such a trend coincides with the survey aimed at parents (for example, “Survey on Children’s Everyday Life V” by Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute (2016)). This survey for parents showed strong affirmative responses to such questions as “more intellectual education,” “extra-curricular lessons after standard childcare hours,” especially among parents using daycare centers scoring around 20% for both items. Moreover, the percentage is increasing every year. When compared with these results, there is a slight gap in the understanding of facilities shown in this research. If there is a gap between actual requests of parents and the understanding of facilities, compromising will become an important issue for gaining understanding of parents for childcare practice in the facilities, as well as for increasing cooperation with parents to support the development of children.