

HANGING BY A THREAD!

Los Angeles Garment Workers' Struggle to Access Quality Care for their Children



“*Hanging by a Thread!* is a groundbreaking report that examines the issue of child care through the lens of the lived experiences of garment workers, as they struggle to overcome workplace abuses, such as wage theft and long hours while trying to care for their children. We get an accurate assessment because women workers were not only surveyed, they were the researchers too. The participatory research model ensures that the results are comprehensive, inclusive and accurate.”

Ms. Foundation for Women President and CEO, Teresa C. Younger



FASHION DISTRICT

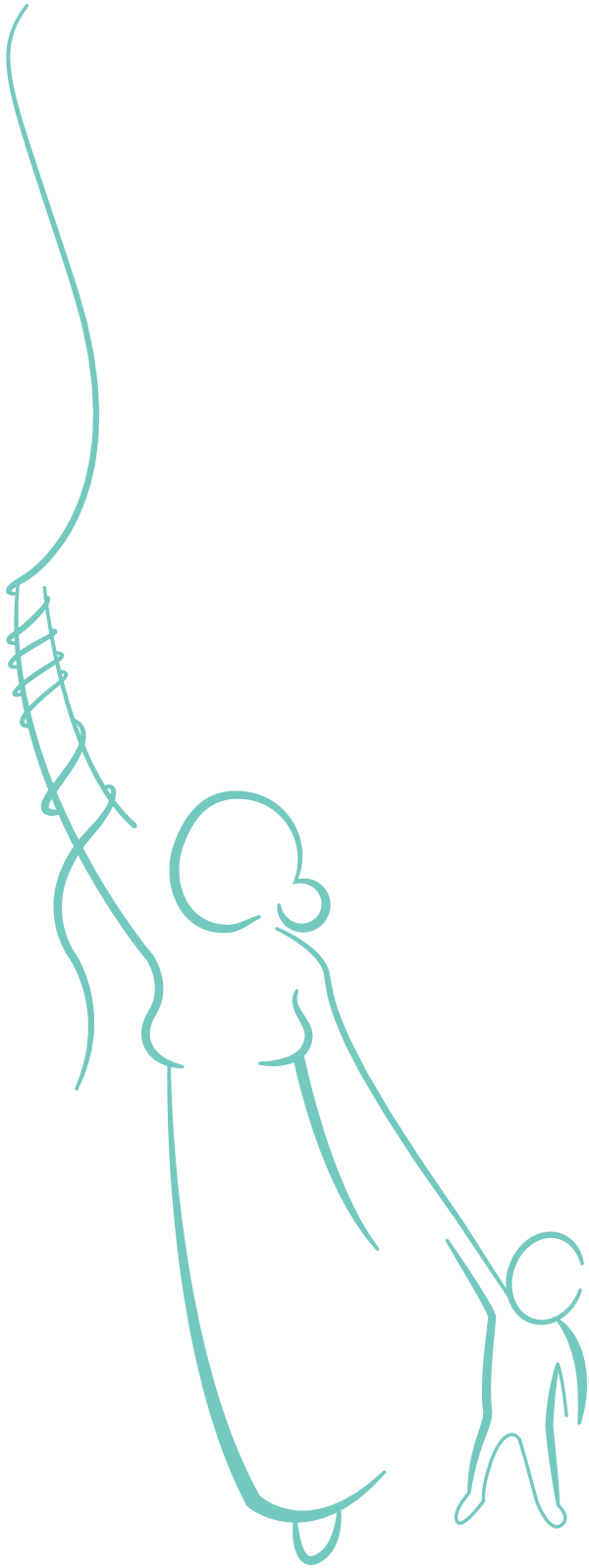
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**Los Angeles Garment Workers' Struggle to
Access Quality Care for their Children**

**A report by the Garment Worker Center, Research Action Design
and the UCLA Labor Center**

2015



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Inside cover photo (left) by: Garment Worker Center.

Acknowledgements

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Hanging by a Thread! is the culmination of an exciting collaboration between the Garment Worker Center (GWC), the UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education (UCLA Labor Center), and Research Action Design (RAD). Our partnership began in 2012, with the launch of a participatory action research project grounded in the understanding that garment workers are the experts on the apparel industry, its working conditions, and the impact the industry has on workers and their families. As a participatory action research project, we set out to train a core group of garment workers to survey their peers about their child care arrangements.

Access to child care was chosen as a key research topic to contextualize the personal and community experiences of low-wage workers in the garment industry, and to better understand the impact rampant wage theft has on workers in this sector. Our main research goal was to work closely with GWC members to analyze the survey findings and craft responses to the child care needs of Los Angeles garment workers.

Research Partners

Garment Worker Center: The Garment Worker Center (GWC) is a worker rights organization that organizes with low-wage garment workers in Los Angeles in the fight for social and economic justice. The GWC addresses the systemic problems of wage theft, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, and the abusive and inhumane treatment faced by workers on-the-job. GWC strives to provide a space where workers are empowered to organize collectively toward just working conditions in the garment industry.

Website: www.garmentworkercenter.org

Research Action Design: Research Action Design (RAD) uses community-led research, transformative media organizing, technology development, and collaborative design to build the power of grassroots social movements. RAD is a worker-owned collective. Its projects are grounded in the needs and leadership of communities in the struggle for justice and liberation.

Website: www.rad.cat

UCLA Labor Center: The UCLA Labor Center creates innovative programs that offer a range of educational, research, and public service activities within the university and in the broader community, especially among low-wage and immigrant workers. The Labor Center is a vital resource for research, education, and policy development that helps create jobs that are good for workers and their communities. It also improves the quality of existing jobs in the low-wage economy, and strengthens the process of immigrant integration, especially among students and youth.

Website: www.labor.ucla.edu

Researchers and Authors

Primary surveying was done by Garment Worker Center members and undergraduate students in the UCLA Labor and Workplace Studies minor from Gaspar Rivera Salgado's 2014 winter course titled, Applied Research Methods and the Los Angeles Labor Community. Special thanks to the following students: Lizeth Elena Baez, Janice Dayanne Castro, Karen Cazares, Rocio Katherine Herrera, Deborah Maria Membreno, Pasha Alexander Parvin, Graciela Ramos, Sarah Shin and Mariana Zamboni. We appreciate the efforts of the following Garment Worker Center members who surveyed their peers: Isidro V, Guillermo G, Maria E, Maria G, and Remigio A.

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Rubén Hernández-León (UCLA Department of Sociology) contributed to the Spanish translation of this study.

Lucero Herrera (UCLA Labor Center) produced the report graphs and Nicolás Zúñiga designed the full report.

Special thanks to the National Women's Law Center (NWLC). This report is part of a larger national study and our findings are highlighted in NWLC's recent report, *Listening to Workers: Child Care Challenges in Low-Wage Jobs*.

http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/listening_to_workers_child_care_challenges_in_low-wage_jobs_6.24.14.pdf

Executive Summary

Every day working parents in the U.S. struggle to find quality, affordable child care. These families are often trapped by the work demands of an unequal global economy and the pressing need to provide care for their young children. The tensions between work and family are clearly felt by workers everywhere and are especially prominent amongst low-wage garment workers in Los Angeles, the largest manufacturing center in the United States.¹

Many of the industrial jobs in the greater Los Angeles region are in the garment sector, which accounts for more than 45,000 of the area's 500,000 manufacturing positions.

Many of the industrial jobs in the greater Los Angeles region are in the garment sector, which accounts for more than 45,000 of the area's 500,000 manufacturing positions.² In the region's Downtown Fashion District, a vast network of garment factories and sweatshops anchor the fast fashion production end of a global supply chain in which massive quantities of overseas fabrics are assembled by recently arrived Latino and Asian immigrant workers. Notable fashion labels like Forever 21, Charlotte Russe, Papaya, and Wet Seal are just a few of the brands these garment workers sew every day.

With funding support from the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Garment Worker Center, the UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education (UCLA Labor Center), and Research Action Design surveyed 82 garment workers in LA's iconic garment district about their experiences accessing child care. The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of child care demands on low-wage workers in the garment industry, in order to inform policy makers and the public about the needs of low-income working families. Workers' responses offer a glimpse into the difficult choices working parents, particularly immigrant women, face as they attempt to care for their children and earn a living in the shadows of the 21st century global economy.

Survey respondents were employed in the Los Angeles Downtown Fashion District. The district is located around major transportation hubs, apparel wholesalers, and around a readily available pool of recently arrived immigrants, often undocumented workers. Women, predominantly immigrants from Mexico, comprised 80 percent of survey respondents.

¹ Hsu, Tiffany. "Los Angeles is the largest manufacturing center in the US, government says." Los Angeles Times. 1 Sept. 2014. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2011 County Business Patterns 1 Jan. 2011. Web. 8 May 2014. <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/msanaic/msadetl.pl>

² Ibid.



Photo by: Raising California Together

These figures correspond with regional demographics that show immigrants and their children, (primarily from Latin American and Asian countries), make up 52 percent of the population in the Greater Los Angeles area.³

Additionally, the flow of migrants to California since the 1970s has been highly feminized and according to the University of Southern California's Center for Immigrant Integration, nearly 1 in 10 workers in the state are undocumented. Undocumented immigrants generate \$130 billion of the annual gross domestic product, and their labor is vital to the high profits the garment industry reaps in Los Angeles.⁴

While Los Angeles has experienced significant demographic changes over the past 20 years, it has also been the site of increasingly high levels of economic inequality, an inequality that is growing at a faster rate than many other U.S. cities.⁵ Many studies document the rampant wage theft, low wages, and poor working conditions that are common in the Los Angeles garment industry.⁶ However, this is the first study that examines the challenges LA garment workers face when accessing child care.

Rampant wage theft, low wages, and poor working conditions are common in the Los Angeles garment industry. Garment workers face major challenges when accessing child care.

3 Sanchez, Jared et al. Looking Forward: Immigrants Contribution to the Golden State. Los Angeles: USC Center for the Study of Immigrant Intergration (CSII) and the California Immigrant Policy Center (CIPC), 2014.

4 Ibid.

5 Berube, Alan. "All Cities Are Not Created Unequal." Brookings Institute Metropolitan Opportunity Series, 51. February 20, 2014. <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2014/02/cities-unequal-berube>

6 Hsu, Tiffany and Chris Kirham. "Southern California is a hotbed for wage theft in garment industry." Los Angeles Times. 15 Nov. 2014.

Surveyed garment workers spend one-third of their weekly income on child care.

Many workers compensate their providers by paying their utility and grocery bills or by engaging in other informal exchanges.

The garment workers we surveyed reported that the cost of child care consumed one-third of their weekly income, a significant portion of their salaries considering most garment workers earn wages well below the minimum wage. As a result, workers stated they were often unable to pay their child care providers and instead compensated them for their services with food, by paying for utility bills or through other exchanges.

For many garment workers, accessing quality and affordable child care is further complicated by the mixed citizenship and immigration status of their family members, as well as language, literacy and cultural barriers.

In addition to the difficulties garment workers experience when navigating the child care system, most receive little to no financial support to manage their child care needs. Only 4 percent of surveyed workers access government subsidies or other assistance programs to pay for child care, and a small 1 percent utilize federally-subsidized Head Start programs despite qualifying for these programs. Only 6 percent of garment workers access day care centers altogether. To manage the demands of family and work, garment workers depend on friends and neighbors (43%), and relatives (40%) to provide child care. Yet, the majority of respondents expressed the need and desire for their children to be in child care programs with structured learning activities.

Garment workers also spoke of the unreliability of depending on relatives, friends and neighbors to provide child care. Forty-two percent of those surveyed missed work because their child care providers were not available or canceled during their work hours.

This report provides a window into the growing crisis of affordability and access to child care in the U.S. As women continue to enter the workforce at historically high levels, national child care policies have not fully addressed the growing need for affordable and accessible child care services. Instead child care costs have risen over the last few decades, outpacing college tuition.⁷ This situation is made worse by shrinking federal block grants for child care subsidies in the wake of government budget cuts following the 2008 economic recession. California alone cut 1 billion dollars in early childhood education funds and more than 300,000 parents and children are currently on the waiting list for child care subsidies.⁸

7 Child Care Aware of America. "Parents and the High Cost of Child Care." 2013. Web 1 Sept. 2014. http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf

8 National Women's Law Center. "Additional Child Care Funding is Essential to Stop State Cuts." Washington DC: NWLC, 12 July 2012. Web 1 Sept. 2014. <http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/childcarecutsfactsheetjune2012.pdf>



Photo by: Raising California Together

The child care crisis has become too large of a problem to ignore and it has garnered national attention. In 2012, the Obama Administration launched the Race to the Top Fund - Early Learning Challenge that aims to increase access to high-quality, early education programs and services for low income and English language learners who are infants and toddlers. Unfortunately, these federal programs have been limited in scope and are spread thin across many communities in need. As a response to the needs of low-wage workers in the garment sector and beyond, we conclude with the following key recommendations:

- Promote child care assistance programs through public education and outreach programs that are linguistically and culturally appropriate for immigrant communities.
- Increase funding for child care subsidies to ensure low income families receive assistance to pay for child care.
- Raise the minimum wage to ensure low-income households are able to afford child care.
- Expand enforcement of labor laws in the garment industry and similar sectors to improve working conditions; including paid sick leave, wage and hour standards, and health and safety conditions in the workplace.
- Increase access to certification, educational opportunities and subsidies for informal child care providers.
- Integrate child care centers into local economic policy and urban planning processes.

We hope these recommendations, based on research and best practices, will respond to the immediate needs of working families and set the standards needed for a more just and robust economy that benefits workers.

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Introduction

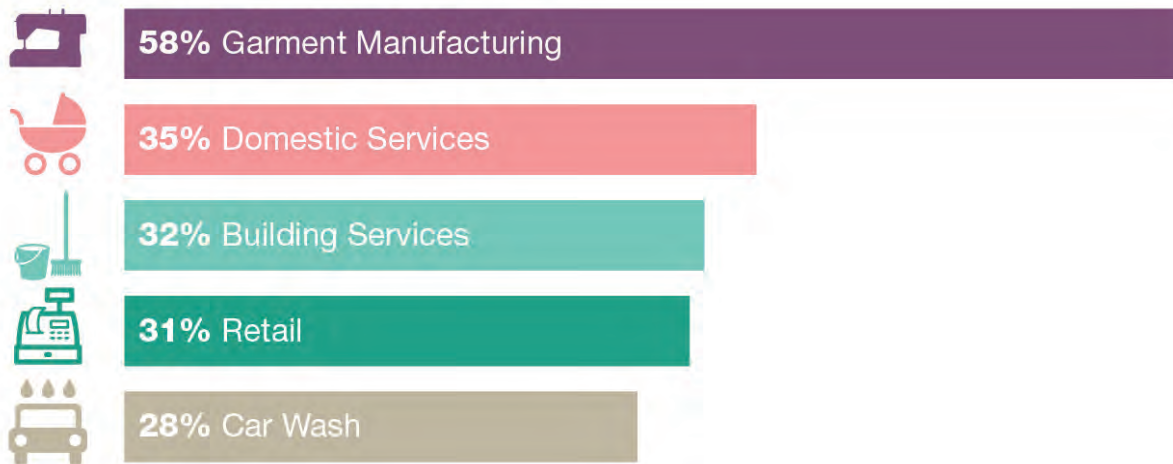
Garment workers earn poverty wages and experience some of the highest levels of wage theft including the illegal withholding of wages and the denial of basic workplace benefits.

The garment industry is the single largest manufacturing sector in Los Angeles⁹ and accounts for at least 45,000 of more than 500,000 manufacturing jobs in the Los Angeles region. It employs primarily Latino/a and Asian immigrants who cut, sew and finish garments locally.¹⁰

According to the California Department of Industrial Relations, Los Angeles County has 4,641 registered manufacturers and contractors engaged in apparel manufacturing. However, this number is certainly much higher given that unregistered apparel manufacturers operating in Los Angeles without a garment license are excluded from official numbers.

The garment industry workforce is largely made up of low-income immigrants who are routinely exploited, underpaid, and work under sweatshop conditions. National and regional studies on wage theft conducted in part by the UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment found that garment workers experience some of the highest levels of wage theft, which include the illegal withholding of wages and the denial of workplace benefits (see Figure 1).^{11,12}

Figure 1: Minimum Wage Violation Rates by Industry, Los Angeles County, 2009



Source: Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers Violations of Employment and Labor Laws in America's Cities. 2009.

9 Sweatshop Watch, Garment Worker Center. "Crisis or Opportunity? The Future of Los Angeles' Garment Workers, the Apparel Industry and the Local Economy." 1-14. Web. 8 May 2014.

10 Hsu, Tiffany. "Los Angeles is the largest manufacturing center in the US, government says." Los Angeles Times. 1 Sept. 2014. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 2011 County Business Patterns 1 Jan. 2011. Web. 8 May 2014. <http://censtats.census.gov/cgi-bin/msanaic/msadetl.pl>

11 Bernhardt, A. et al. "Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers: Violations in Employment and Labor Laws in America's Cities." 2009. <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/brokenlaws/BrokenLawsReport2009.pdf?nocdn=1>

12 Milkman, Ruth, Ana Luz González and Victor Narro. "Wage Theft and Workplace Violations in Los Angeles: The Failure of Employment and Labor Law and Enforcement for Low-wage Workers." UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment. 2010.

Widespread labor violations in the garment industry have partly gone unchecked due to the inadequate enforcement of labor laws. Apparel manufacturers that contract garment workers are notorious for shutting down operations, re-locating, and re-opening their businesses under different names to avoid paying workers their wages.¹³ These contractors do so without consequence leaving workers to navigate a cumbersome wage claims process.

A recent report examining the legal recovery of unpaid wages found that only 17 percent of workers who filed claims with the Labor Commissioner's office for unpaid wages received any payment.¹⁴ This means most workers never recover their owed wages and are pushed further into poverty.

Poverty in the U.S. is highly feminized due to historical gender pay inequities and occupational segregation. Overall, women working in the garment industry earn lower wages than men in comparable positions.¹⁵ Compounding these stark facts is the reality that working mothers in the U.S. face a "motherhood penalty" that keeps them locked in lower paying jobs compared to men or women without children. At the same time, 25.1 percent of U.S. children under the age of 5 live in poverty - and almost 1 in 10, or 9.7 percent live in extreme poverty.¹⁶ The costs and burdens associated with child care contribute to this increased poverty amongst women and children.

This report aims to better understand the daily impact of child care needs on low-wage workers in the garment industry. To accomplish this, the UCLA Labor Center, the Garment Worker Center (GWC), and the worker-owned collective Research Action Design (RAD) – with the support of the Ms. Foundation for Women – collaborated to survey garment workers with children 13 years old and under.

Widespread labor violations in the garment industry have partly gone unchecked due to the inadequate enforcement of labor laws.

Only 17% of workers who filed claims with the Labor Commissioner's office for unpaid wages received any payment.

13 Asian American Legal Center of Southern California. "Reinforcing the Seams: Guaranteeing the Promise of California's Landmark Anti-Sweatshop Law an Evaluation of Assembly Bill 633 Six Years Later." September 2005.

14 Cho Hyunhye, Eunice, Tia Koonse and Anthony Mischel. "Hollow Victories: The Crisis in Collecting Unpaid Wages for California's Workers." 2013. Web. 16 September 2014. <http://ccauc-la-laborcenter.electricmembers.net/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2014/04/HollowVictories.pdf>

15 England, Paula. Gender inequality in labor markets: The role of motherhood and segregation. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 12(2), 264-288. 2005.

16 Strauss, Valerie. "New Census data: Children remain America's poorest citizens." *The Washington Post*. 17 September 2013. Web. 15 September 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/09/17/new-census-data-children-remain-americas-poorest-citizens/>



Photo by: Garment Worker Center

Nationally, the cost of child care has increased at almost eight times the rate of income, outpacing the cost of a year's tuition at a four-year public college.

The objectives of the study were to 1) document the resources and services garment workers access to meet their child care needs, 2) understand the barriers garment workers confront in accessing quality child care, and 3) outline recommendations to make child care accessible for low-wage workers. This study presents insights on the broader costs of low-wage work in the garment industry and the challenges women workers face to earn a living and provide care for their children.

Quality child care has become more difficult to acquire as the cost and demand for care in the U.S. has risen over the last decades. Nationally, the cost of child care has increased at almost eight times the rate of income, outpacing the cost of a year's tuition at a four-year public college.¹⁷ According to the Department of Health and Human Services 10 percent of a family's income spent on child care is the standard for affordable care. Yet, in every state the average cost of center-based child care is more than 25 percent of the median income for single parents (See figure 2).¹⁸

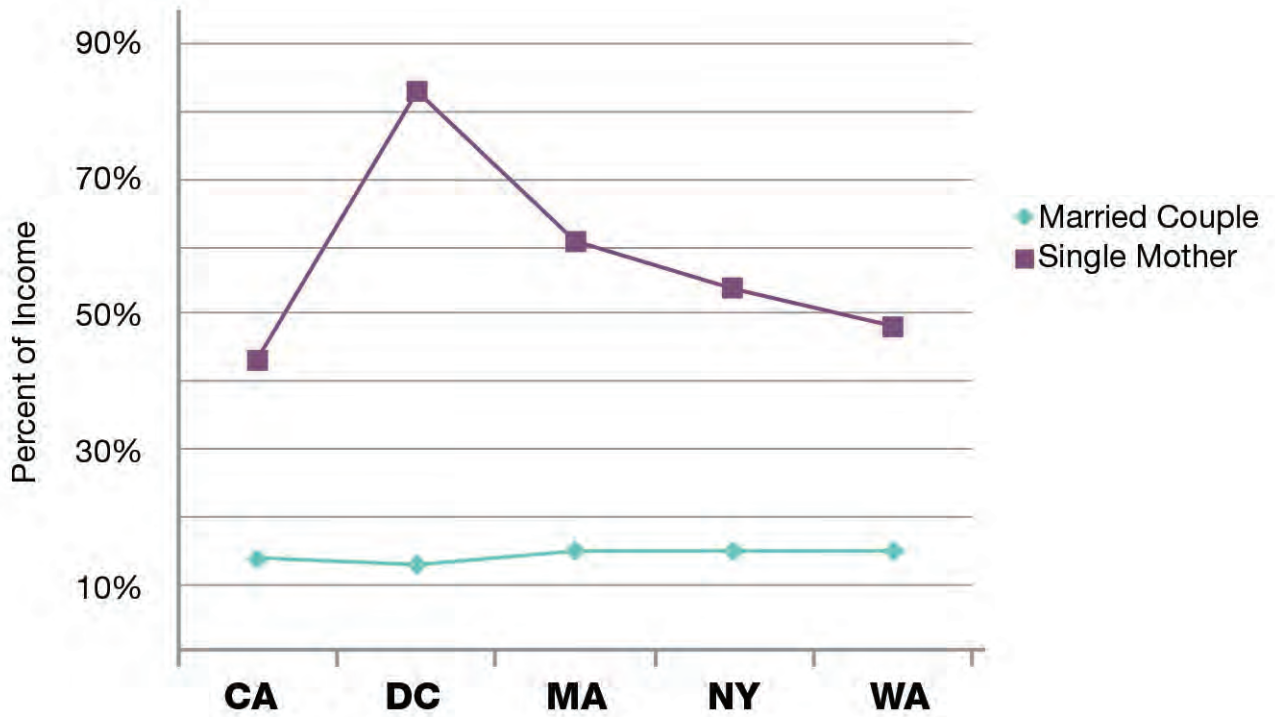
The rising cost of child care hits low-wage working mothers the hardest despite the creation of federal block grants administered by states to help subsidize child care for qualifying families.

17 Child Care Now. Parents and the High Cost of Care, 2013 Report. 2013. Web 4 June 2014.
http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/cost_of_care_2013_103113_0.pdf

18 Ibid.

Although federal and state subsidized child care programs exist, they have recently been cut – with \$115 million cut in 2013 alone at the federal level. In many states eligible families also face frozen intake processes or long waiting lists to access these programs, preventing access altogether.¹⁹

Figure 2: Child Care Affordability* for Infant Full-Time Care in Child Care Center in Selected States, 2013



Source: Child Care Aware of America, Child Care in America: 2014 State Fact Sheets.

*The Department of Health and Human Services considers spending 10 percent of a family’s income on child care to be the benchmark of what is affordable.

19 Hamm, Katie. “Cuts to Child Care System Force Parents and Providers to Make Tough Choices.” Center for American Progress. 6 January 2014. Web 4 June 2014. <http://www.american-progress.org/issues/education/news/2014/01/06/81602/cuts-to-the-child-care-subsidy-system-force-parents-and-providers-to-make-difficult-choices/>

Survey Instrument and Methodology

Our survey questionnaire contained 28 questions that asked workers about the types of child care arrangements they use, the resources they access to pay for child care, and their barriers in acquiring child care.

The survey was first piloted with several garment workers who provided their feedback and input using participatory research methods. GWC members and nine UCLA undergraduate students from an applied research course in the UCLA Labor and Workplace Studies minor conducted the surveys over the course of three months.

Garment workers with children under the age of fourteen were recruited in and around the Los Angeles Fashion District to participate in the survey. The team surveyed a total of 82 garment workers. This report offers an analysis of the data collected from the surveys and highlights the financial struggles of garment workers to meet their child care needs.

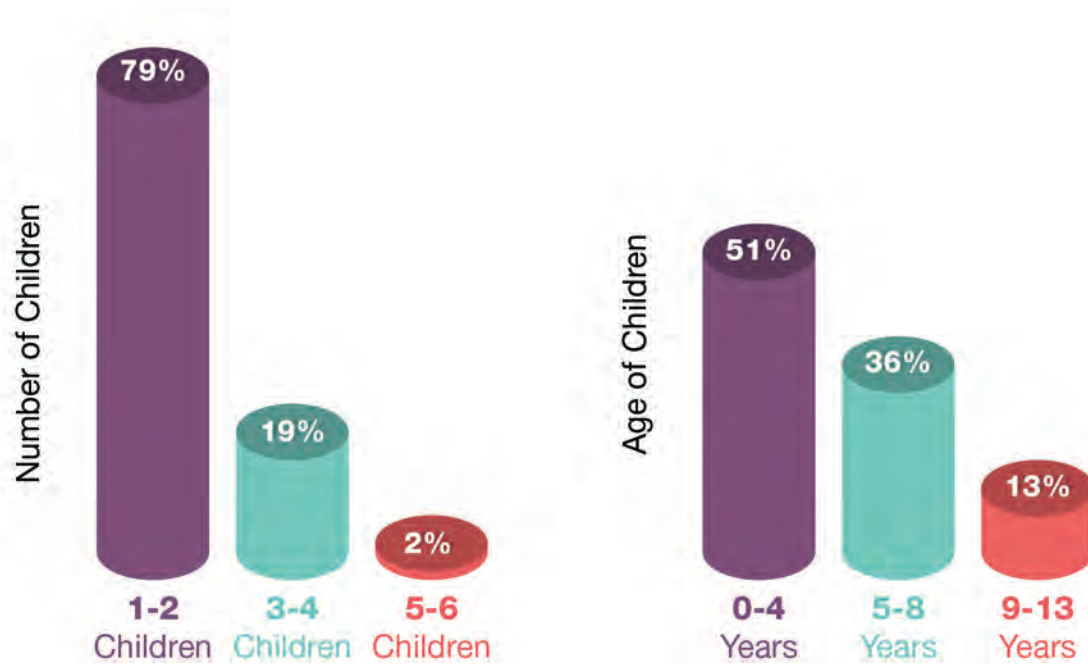
Figure 3: Los Angeles Fashion District Map



Figure 4: Ethnicity and Primary Language of Surveyed Workers



Figure 5: Number and Ages of Children of Surveyed Workers



Eighty-three percent of garment workers resort to informal child care arrangements to meet their child care needs.

Forty-three percent of workers have a relative care for their children and 40% leave their children under the care of a friend or neighbor.

Key Findings

The prevalence of informal care

Two major challenges garment workers surveyed experienced were the high cost and unavailability of child care during all work hours. Our survey found that 83 percent of workers resort to informal child care arrangements to meet their child care needs. Forty-three percent of workers turn to relatives to care for their children and 40 percent leave their children under the care of a friend or neighbor (see Figure 6). A majority of garment workers rely on informal child care providers because this is the only form of child care they can afford.

Since most garment workers work beyond 8 hours a day, informal child care providers are often the only providers who can offer care during nonstandard work hours. Garment workers also seek informal child care providers because they are located within the communities where workers live and are more readily accessible, especially for workers who lack transportation. As such, 46 percent of surveyed workers reported that the location of their provider is a key factor they consider when selecting a child care provider.

Forty percent of respondents reported that trust and familiarity with their provider was critical and workers expressed a sense of trust

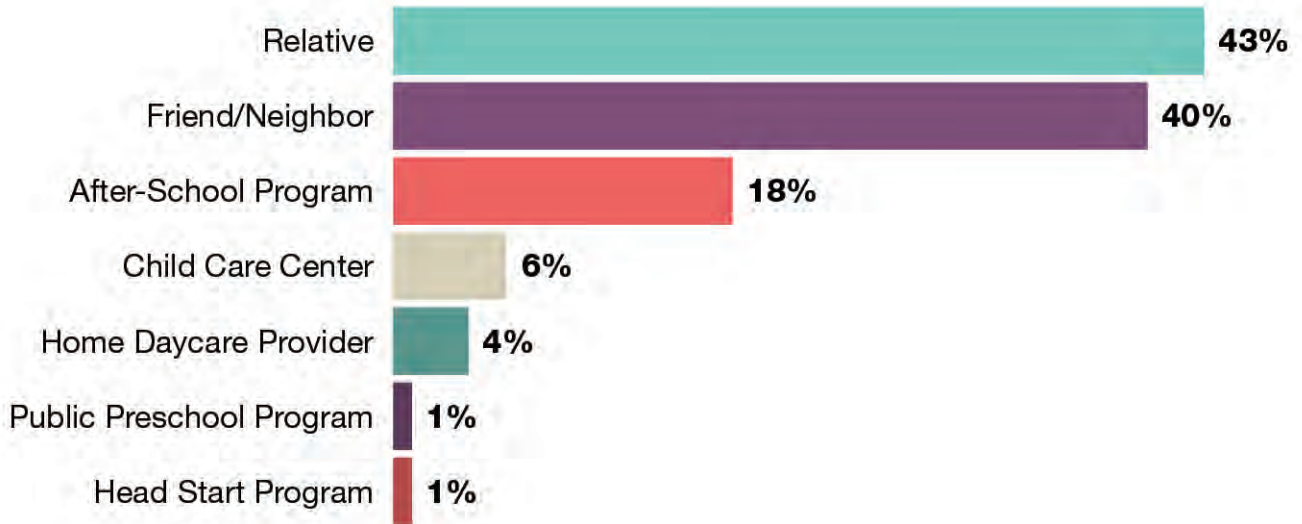
and familiarity with informal care providers due to their established personal relationships. Thus, the use of informal care by garment workers parallels a national trend where working parents struggling to make ends meet utilize informal child care arrangements.

A national survey on child care estimates that about half of the children receiving child care are cared for by informal providers.²⁰ As will be discussed further, many parents do not consider informal child care ideal, but lack information on how to access formal early child care educational programs.



20 Sonenstain, Freya. "Primary Child Care Arrangements of Employed Parents. Findings from the 1999 National Survey of America's Families." Urban Institute. 1 May 2002.

Figure 6: Type of Child Care Utilized by Workers



The Challenges of Informal Child Care

“Sometimes it’s hard leaving my kids with my aunt because she’s not available all the time. Sometimes she gets sick or has to go to the doctor and I have no one to leave my kids with.”

– Survey participant

Garment workers identified many limitations to their informal care arrangements and cited long term economic losses associated with the unreliability of their child care. Half of the garment workers surveyed had infants and toddlers ages 0-4 (Figure 5) and parents with infants and toddlers ages 0-3 stated they had more difficulty securing child care. For example, one mother in the study shared that she was unable to work for a few months after having her baby because there were not many providers willing to care for young infants.

The sporadic and unpredictable work schedules of garment workers also pose a challenge when seeking child care. Most parents surveyed shared that



Photo by: Garment Worker Center

Forty-two percent of garment workers missed a day of work due to the unavailability of child care and 26% left work early to care for their children.

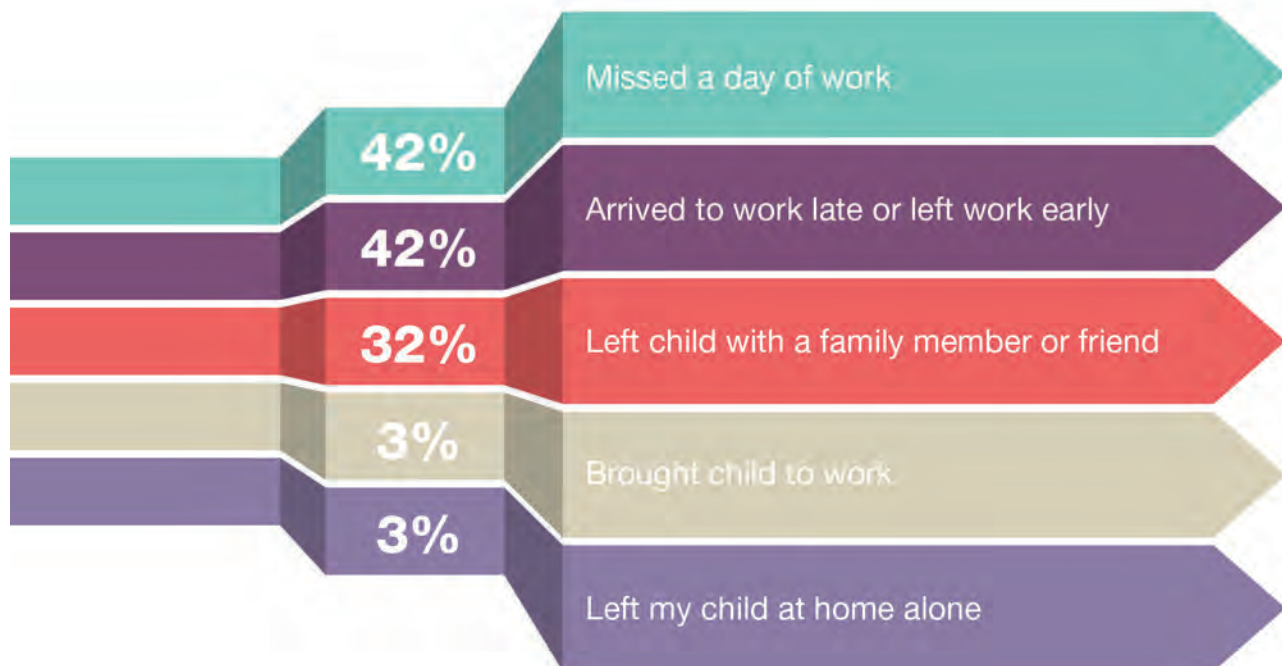
accessing child care was especially difficult after regular work hours, during weekends, holidays and on non-school days.

Forty-two percent of garment workers missed a day of work due to the unavailability of child care, while 26 percent left work early to care for their children (see Figure 7). In other words, limited access to quality child care resulted in a substantial loss in wages, which is exacerbated by workplace practices that punish parents for tending to their children. Workers we surveyed feared retaliation by their employer for requesting changes to their work schedule to accommodate the need to care for their children. As a result, rather than missing work, some workers reported taking their children to work or leaving them at home with other siblings in order to pay for food and rent. This situation places parents in the difficult predicament of exposing their children to an unsafe environment or missing work and losing income or employment opportunities.

The workers we surveyed recognize the shortfalls of informal child care in terms of the quality and limited educational opportunities informal care providers offer. Moreover, workers surveyed expressed the need for informal providers to be certified, while others wished these providers offered educational activities for their children.

Studies have shown that children who participate in early childhood educational programs experience improved personal and professional outcomes later in life in comparison to those

Figure 7: Consequences of Being Unable to Obtain Child Care



who do not.²¹ However, despite a desire by workers for their child care to offer structured learning activities, they also reported they could not afford any other form of child care given their income constraints.

The Cost of Child Care

“Child care is too expensive and I cannot afford it.”

- Survey participant

Child care remains unaffordable for many families especially for low-wage workers earning below minimum wage. Garment workers who participated in our survey pay an average of \$88.48 per week on child care. Many struggle to pay this amount when they reported working an average of 42 hours a week and earning an average of \$305.36 (see Figure 8). In other words, on average, child care costs amount to nearly one-third of a worker’s weekly salary. Such costs are all the more difficult to bear given that garment workers in Los Angeles experience the highest number of minimum wage violations and some of the highest overtime wage violations.²²

The high cost of living in Los Angeles also erodes earnings. A 2014 UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs study confirms that Los Angeles is now the least affordable rental market in the country, based on the portion of a worker’s income that goes towards paying rent. According to the report the average renter in Los Angeles pays 47 percent of their paycheck to cover the cost of rent.²³

Garment workers pay an average of \$88.48 per week on child care.

Garment workers struggle to pay child care costs when on average they work 42 hours a week and earn an average of \$305.36.

Figure 8: Comparison of Cost of Child Care and Weekly Salary Workers Receive

Total Cost of Child Care	Amount
Average weekly cost of child care	\$88.48
Weekly Salary	Amount
Average weekly Salary	\$305.36

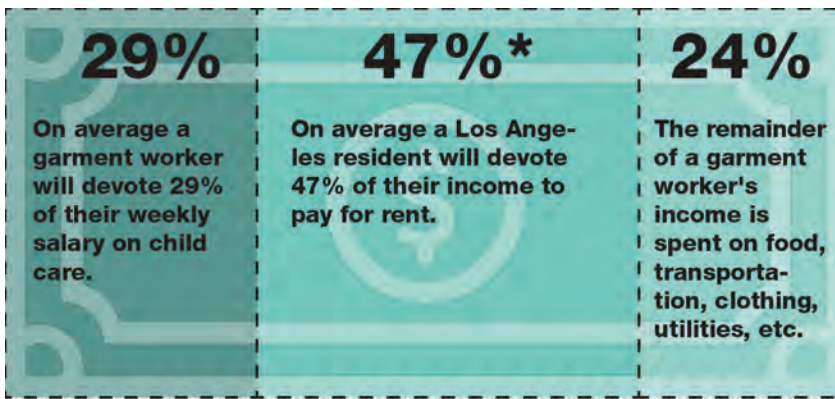
21 Slaby, Robert, Sharon Loucks, and Patricia Stelwagon. “Why Is Preschool Essential in Closing the Achievement Gap?.” *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development* 17 (2005): 47-57.

22 Bernhardt, A. et al. “Broken Laws, Unprotected Workers: Violations in Employment and Labor Laws in America’s Cities.” 2009. <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/brokenlaws/BrokenLawsReport2009.pdf?nocdn=1>

23 Rosalie Ray, Paul Ong and Silvia Jimenez. *Impacts of the Widening Divide: Los Angeles at the Forefront of the Rent Burden Crisis.* Center for Study of Inequality, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. 2014. 9 Sept 2014. <http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/Documents/areas/ctr/ziman/2014-08WPrev.pdf>

These high rental costs and the depressed earnings of garment workers leave workers with little to no income to financially compensate child care providers. As a result, many surveyed

workers reported compensating their child care providers with food, by paying for utility bills or through other contributions because they were unable to pay them a monetary fee. In the face of unequal wages, rampant labor violations and the ever-increasing costs of living, child care becomes increasingly unaffordable for low-wage workers.



**This percentage is provided by the Center for Study of Inequality, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs. The other percentages are provided by this report's survey data.*

Government Assistance Programs

"Even if I know where to go to apply for assistance I need help to complete all the paperwork."

- Survey participant

Ninety-five percent of garment workers do not access child care assistance programs and only 4% reported accessing a free or low cost child care program.

While federal assistance programs may help some families cover a portion of the cost of child care, almost all the workers we surveyed were unaware of these programs. When respondents were asked if they receive any government subsidies or resources to pay for their child care, 95 percent responded they did not receive any assistance, while 4 percent reported they access a free or low cost child care program. Forty-two percent of garment workers did not think they were eligible for government assistance, 19 percent were unaware of such assistance, and 18 percent reported their immigration status prevented them from applying for assistance (see Figure 9).

Most workers surveyed reported living in mixed immigration-status households with their native-born, U.S. citizen children. Eighty seven percent reported that either all or some of their children were U.S. citizens. Yet, these children who may qualify for publicly funded early childhood education programs and services are not accessing them. What accounts for this gap?

In general, workers expressed a need to be informed about child care assistance programs and their requirements. Several parents we surveyed believed their immigration status barred their families from accessing government programs and were unaware their U.S.

born children were eligible for such assistance. Others expressed concerns with the implications of accessing public assistance. One participant shared that she did not seek government assistance because she was told it would only create problems for her family.

This sentiment is common in view of recent immigration enforcement policies that have increased the number of deportations, creating widespread fear amongst immigrant communities. Thus, the failure to enact immigration reform and the fear of deportation has deterred immigrant families from accessing public assistance programs.²⁴ This reality is only compounded by misinformation about eligibility requirements for public assistance and the difficulties of living with tenuous legal status in the U.S.

Additionally, public assistance organizations are short-staffed and operating on limited resources that prevent them from providing clear, accessible, and multi-lingual resources.²⁵ Therefore, numerous factors including legal, political, and social barriers obstruct low-wage immigrant workers who may qualify for benefits from accessing child care assistance programs.

Garment workers believe their immigration status bars them from accessing government programs and are unaware their U.S. born children are eligible for such assistance.

Figure 9: Barriers That Prevent Workers from Obtaining Government Child Care Assistance

Barrier	Percent
My family is ineligible	42%
I do not know about assistance	19%
I am unsure where to apply	19%
My immigration status prevents me	18%
Too much paperwork involved	13%
I do not have time to apply	12%
The waiting list is too long	10%
There is a language barrier	8%
We do not require assistance	9%

**Workers were able to select multiple responses*

24 Nichols, Alex. Barriers to Public Assistance for Hispanic Immigrants in the United States. Organizational Studies Senior Honor Thesis. Web. 11 June 2014. <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/UMICH/orgstudies/Home/Current%20Students/OS%20Honors/Past%20OS%20Honors%20Theses/Alexander%20Nichols%20Final%20Thesis%20Draft.pdf>

25 Ibid.

Although child care subsidy programs exist to help low-income families pay for care, these programs are inaccessible to many garment workers.

Language barriers, cumbersome paperwork, and concerns about immigration status are some of the factors that prevent undocumented workers from accessing public assistance programs that include child care subsidies.

Conclusion

The garment industry workforce is primarily comprised of immigrant women earning poverty wages and experiencing high levels of wage theft. The severe economic hardships imposed by these employment conditions leave garment workers with limited resources to pay for child care. As a result, garment workers are unable to meet the increasing costs of center-based child care and must rely on relatives or friends to care for their children. These informal child care networks provide families with low cost care, often during non-standard work hours, aiding parents to make ends meet. At the same time, such arrangements are unstable, requiring workers to miss work and lose a day's pay. Additionally, informal care often lacks the educational activities that contribute to academic readiness and success throughout a child's development.

Although there are child care subsidy programs that help low-income families, these programs are inaccessible to many garment workers. The majority of parents we surveyed were unaware of these federal programs and none were recipients of such programs.

Most parents did not think they were eligible to receive assistance, while others believed their immigration status disqualified them.

Many factors, including language barriers and concerns about immigration status, prevent undocumented workers from accessing public assistance programs that include child care subsidies. Therefore, garment workers have limited resources and struggle financially to access quality child care.

Child care is essential to a working family's well-being and ability to participate in the workforce. Without stable child care arrangements, workers experience loss of wages, reduced work hours, and unemployment, all factors that lead to chronic poverty.

We hope our survey raises awareness about the numerous obstacles low-wage workers experience in accessing child care. Our survey was part of a larger study focused on various low-wage employment sectors funded by the Ms. Foundation for Women to better understand how low-wage workers nationwide access child care. This study intends to shed light on the child care needs of garment workers in order to shape and influence policies to make child care more accessible for parents working in low-wage industries.

Based on our survey and other research on child care needs in



Photo by: Liberty Hill Foundation

the U.S., we offer the following recommendations to address the challenges low-wage parents face when making child care choices.

Quality child care is the foundation of a child's development, it is critical to a family's well-being and ultimately, it is vital for the country's economic future and the renewal of a middle class in the U.S. We hope these recommendations provide a way forward in establishing greater access to quality child care for all workers.

Child care is essential to a working family's well-being and ability to participate in the workforce.

Recommendations

Promote public education and outreach for child care assistance programs

The majority of the parents we surveyed were unaware of the existence of child care assistance programs. Public education and outreach is needed to inform families about child care assistance programs. These efforts should target immigrant communities in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways. In order, to effectively disseminate information, the language and literacy levels of the targeted communities must be taken into account. Parents should be informed in their primary language about eligibility requirements and receive assistance with the application process. These steps are essential for families to properly receive child care assistance.

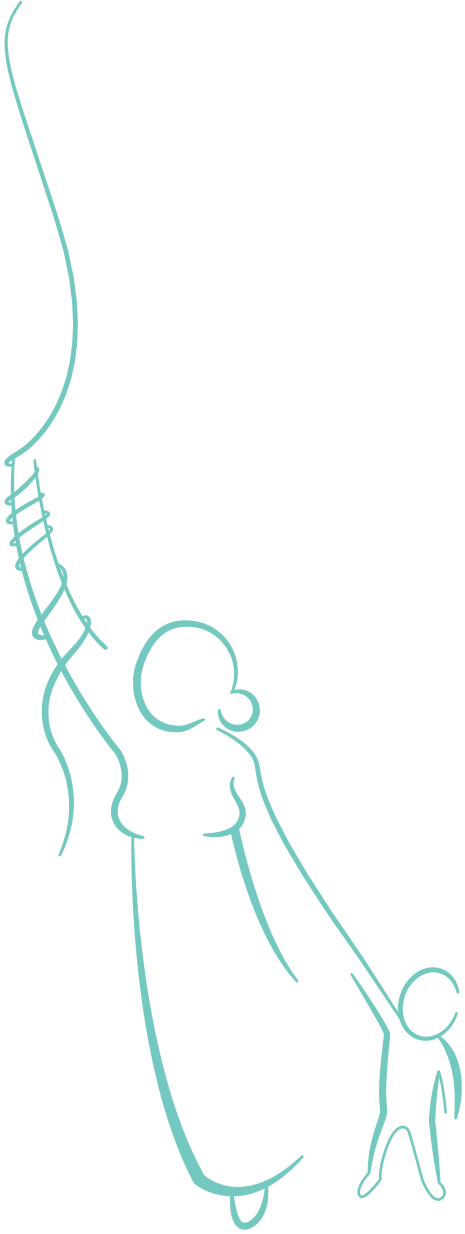
The recent addition of early education funds to the US Department of Education's Race to the Top, targeting low-income communities and English language learners, is a good start in this direction. However, these funds will be stretched thin nationally across numerous communities and given the magnitude of need, greater funds and more robust programs are needed.

Increase funding for child care subsidies to ensure low income families receive assistance

Informing parents about child care assistance programs would be futile without adequate resources to expand the availability of child care assistance programs. Currently, the increasing need of families to cover the costs of child care exceeds the availability of assistance programs. Insufficient funding for these programs and restrictive eligibility requirements prevent families from accessing assistance and places eligible families on long waiting lists.²⁶

Policymakers must rethink how funding for child care is allocated to effectively meet the needs of families. At the same time, legislators must reverse prior trends and allow undocumented immigrants to access publicly-funded child care programs. Research has shown time and time again that the return on investment in quality, affordable child care in low-income, working-class, immigrant communities is very high. Children who receive quality child care with structured activities in the first five years of their lives are much more successful learners later in life.

26 Blank, Helen and Schulman, Karen. "Downward Slide State Child Care Assistance Policies 2012." National Women's Law Center, 1 Jan. 2012. Web. 27 May 2014. http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/NWLC2012_StateChildCareAssistanceReport.pdf



Raising the minimum wage would help workers pay for quality child care

Policymakers must examine why more and more families are unable to cover the costs of child care and are forced to rely on child care assistance programs in the first place. The real problem is the stagnation and decline of wages coupled with decreased job quality for U.S. workers.²⁷

This trend disproportionately affects low-wage workers, and demands a raise in the minimum wage. Recent initiatives by municipalities across the country point to the fact that a 15-dollar minimum wage for a single worker is necessary for survival in the current economy and that such a move must be complemented with continued funding for child care subsidies.

Greater enforcement of labor laws to reduce wage theft in the garment industry

Raising the minimum wage alone will not result in higher wages for garment workers who are underpaid or not paid at all for their work. Without proper enforcement of labor and employment laws, employers will continue to deprive workers of their legally earned wages. Therefore, proactive measures must be taken to combat wage theft, and enforcement initiatives must be adopted to put an end to the rampant wage and hour violations in this sector.

Grant mandatory paid sick leave to all workers

Ensuring all workers receive paid sick leave would allow parents to care for their sick children and still be paid for the day. Most low-wage workers do not receive paid sick days and cannot care for a sick child because they risk losing pay or being fired. When parents have access to paid sick days they are able to provide their children with essential care.

Facilitate certification and subsidies for informal care providers

Informal care providers are crucial to communities and allow families to participate in the workforce. Facilitating the process of certifying and subsidizing home-based care providers will support this type of care. Such providers are quickly becoming an invisible backbone of the U.S. labor force and economy; helping working

²⁷ Mishel, Lawrence and Shierholz, Heidi. "A Decade of Flat Wages: The Key Barrier to Shared Prosperity and a Rising Middle Class." The Economic Policy Institute. Briefing Paper#365, 21 Aug. 2013 Web. 12 June 2014. <http://www.epi.org/publication/a-decade-of-flat-wages-the-key-barrier-to-shared-prosperity-and-a-rising-middle-class/>

families manage the challenges of low-wage work. Additionally, state and local agencies should increase training resources so that informal care providers are able to provide learning opportunities to the children under their care. Such certificate and training programs should, like the programs geared towards parents, account for the language and literacy levels of diverse communities.

At the same time, policymakers should consider increasing subsidy rates to provide a living wage and labor protections to these child care providers.

Increase child care centers in local communities by integrating child care into planning policies

Surveyed workers identified the lack of child care centers in their surrounding communities. Accessing child care that is convenient to home or work is a tremendous challenge, especially for parents without transportation. Child care is often overlooked in community planning and economic development, which results in supply gaps, increased development costs, and poor linkages to a family's housing and transportation.²⁸

To address this problem, child care programs should be integrated in new and existing residential, commercial, and mixed use developments.²⁹ As municipalities view transit-oriented development as a key facet of sustainable planning, city planners and developers need to think of creative and innovative ways to include child care centers near transit, housing, and workplaces in urban areas and in mixed-use developments.

Several communities are already doing so by including child care and Head Start centers within walking distance of housing developments.³⁰

28 The Importance of Ensuring Adequate Child Care in Planning Practice. American Planning Association. 1 Jan. 2013. Web. 27 May 2014. <http://www.planning.org/research/family/briefingpapers/childcare.htm>

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

