

MAKING THE BEST USE OF
THE *YOU BET I CARE!* DATA
SETS

FINAL REPORT ON A RESEARCH FORUM
FEBRUARY 22-23, 2002, TORONTO

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Thank you to Child Care Visions, Human Resources Development Canada for their financial support.

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April 2002

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INTRODUCTION

The *You Bet I Care!* (YBIC!) project was the largest and most comprehensive child care study carried out in Canada to date. Funded by the Child Care Visions program, Human Resource Development Canada, YBIC! included three studies. Study 1, completed in May 2000, was a Canada-wide study of wages, working conditions and practices in child care centres. Study 2, completed in September 2000, examined quality in child care centres in six provinces and the Yukon using on-site observations, and Study 3, also completed in September 2000, included collection of data on regulated family child care homes similar to that collected on centres in Studies 1 and 2.

The primary purpose of Study 1 of the *You Bet I Care!* project was to determine whether wages and working conditions had improved since the 1991 *Caring For A Living* survey of child care centres was completed. However, although Study 1 built on the 1991 survey, it collected additional information such as sources of child care centre revenue and the extent to which centres are providing care and education to specific populations (such as children with special needs and those who speak neither English nor French as a first language).

The three studies of the YBIC! project involved:

- 1,082 child care centres.
- 5,451 centre teaching staff.
- 231 regulated family child care providers.
- 24 family child care agencies.

The YBIC! project produced three extensive and rich data sets, which, collectively, contain extensive information about both centre-based and regulated family child care. These data include:

- levels and predictors of quality in each type of setting.
- information about the people who are employed in the child care field and their views on child care as an occupation.
- current remuneration levels.
- working conditions.
- identification of the issues of most concern to centre directors and to family child care agency directors.

The project's four reports¹ provide new information of direct relevance for policy development and operational planning, including identification of predictors of quality in each type of setting. It should be noted that the data is of practical use in the field; it appears that information contained in the project's four reports may have already influenced funding practices in Nova Scotia and discussions about regulatory changes in Saskatchewan. However, many analyses that could answer key policy and operational questions important for maintaining and strengthening child care services across Canada could not be undertaken due to resource constraints of both time and money.

In addition to YBIC's initial data analyses, the data sets or specific parts of them have subsequently been used in several subsequent analyses. These include examination of the influence of auspice² (non-profit or commercial) and of unionization³ on wages, working conditions, centre staff job satisfaction and centre quality. A Master's thesis used data from one questionnaire to explore factors associated with intent to leave their centre or the field among teaching staff in four provinces.⁴ While each of these studies has expanded our knowledge about Canadian child care, they were initiated on an ad hoc basis and may not necessarily reflect the issues of most concern to the field and to governments. Certainly, these studies do not represent the range of possibilities for use of the YBIC! data to answer questions relevant to policy and practice.

The issue of how to best capitalize on the potential of the already existing *You Bet I Care!* (YBIC!) data sets - developed using public funds - to answer key policy and operational questions of most concern to the child care field (including child care organizations, ECEC faculty in community colleges and universities, and federal/ provincial/territorial policy makers, child care researchers) motivated the formulation of the present project - *Making the best use of the You Bet I Care! data sets.*

¹ Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Goelman, H., LaGrange, A., and Tougas, J. (2000). *You Bet I Care! A Canada-Wide Study on Wages, Working Conditions and Practices in Child Care Centres*. Goelman, H., Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., LaGrange, A., and Tougas, J. (2000). *Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Child Care Centres Across Canada*. Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Goelman, H., Tougas, J., and LaGrange, A. (2000). *Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Regulated Family Child Care Across Canada*. Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Tougas, J., LaGrange, A., and Goelman, H. (2001). *Policies and Practices in Canadian Child Care Agencies*. All published by the Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph, Ontario.

² Doherty, G. and Friendly, M. (In preparation). Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

³ Doherty G. (In preparation). Ottawa: Canadian Union of Public Employers.

⁴ Marshall, S. (2000). *Deconstructing Child Care: Understanding the Factors Impacting Upon Staff Turnover in Child Care Centres*. Guelph, Ontario: Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, University of Guelph.

THE FORUM

With funds provided by a contribution agreement from Human Resources Development Canada, the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto hosted a one-and-a-half day forum of key participants from the child care field in February, 2002, to discuss, identify and prioritize crucial questions/issues facing child care that could be addressed by the existing *You Bet I Care!* (YBIC!) data sets. The 19-person group, identified at the end of this paper, included representatives from provincial governments, child care organizations, other organizations concerned with the welfare of young children, ECCE college faculty, labour, and child care researchers. (In addition, two researchers who were unable to attend the meeting provided written comments).

METHOD

A fairly detailed overview of the YBIC! datasets was presented followed (as an illustration of the possibilities) by a description of the analyses of one of the data sets that were conducted for a Master's level thesis at the University of Guelph. Following this, participants were divided into two smaller groups whose task was to identify and elaborate on priority areas to consider for further analysis.

The two groups came back together and the two lists of topics were amalgamated. The final task was then – with the assistance of several of the YBIC! principal researchers and of data analysis experts – to determine which of the identified issues were possible for follow up given the content, form and extent of the YBIC! data sets.

THE ISSUES THAT WERE IDENTIFIED

Overview

1. Difficulties being experienced across the country that are pertinent to recruiting and retaining people to work in the child care field.
2. What are the policy and best practice-relevant characteristics of “the best” centres and family child care homes – and “the worst”?
3. What influences the level of quality in a child care centres? In a child care home?
4. What would be the cost of improving quality in centres and in family child care homes?

5. What impact has the increased reliance on fee subsidy for program revenue had on: a) overall program quality, b) staff stress and job satisfaction, c) staff intent to leave the setting in which they work or the child care field, and d) teaching staff turnover rates in centres?
6. What is the impact on working conditions, staff morale, program activities, and overall program quality of an unstable financial situation?
7. What are some of the jurisdictional and regional differences in program profiles and/or quality and what might explain some of the differences?

Elaboration of the research issues

1. Analyses relevant to recruitment and retention of people to work in child care

Canadian child care in all jurisdictions has, for some years, been facing a staffing crisis in both centres and family child care homes and recruitment difficulties in both types of settings. These twin issues were identified as matters of urgency in the HRDC funded Child Care Sector Study ⁵ and continue to be a major concern in the field. In 1998, *YBIC!* data showed that the Canada-wide annual turnover rate of centre teaching staff in centres was 21.7% with the rate considerably higher in some provinces such as Alberta, 44.8%, and Saskatchewan, 32.2%. ⁶ Comparable turnover data are not available for family child care providers although the data show that recruiting an adequate number of family child care providers is a major issue for all family child care agencies and turnover rates a concern for 42% of them. ⁷ High turnover is of concern not only because it interrupts the continuity of relationship between caregiver and child and is a predictor of lower program quality but also because it means that child care programs must always be recruiting new staff.

Important questions that could be addressed by the existing *YBIC!* data sets include:

- What contributes to job satisfaction in centres? What contributes to it in family child care homes?
- What contributes to job dissatisfaction in centres? What contributes to it in family child care homes?
- What appears to protect an individual from stress and job dissatisfaction in centres and in family child care homes?

⁵ Beach, J., Bertrand, J., and Cleveland, G. (1998). *Our Child Care Workforce: From Recognition to Remuneration: More Than a Labour of Love*. A Human Resource Study of Child Care in Canada. Ottawa: Child Care Human Resources Steering Committee, c/o the Canadian Child Care Federation.

⁶ Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Goelman, H., LaGrange, A., and Tougas, J. (2000). *You Bet I Care! A Canada-Wide Study on Wages, Working Conditions and Practices in Child Care Centres*. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph, Table 8.1.

⁷ Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Tougas, J., LaGrange, A., and Goelman, H. (2001). *Policies and Practices in Canadian Family Child Care Agencies*. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph, p. 37.

- What contributes to a decision to no longer provide child care in the setting in which the individual currently works whether it be a family child care home or a centre?
- What contributes to a decision to leave the child care field altogether?
- What can we learn from a better understanding of contributors to job dissatisfaction and to turnover that would assist in addressing some of the contributors and in developing effective recruitment strategies?

Forum participants identified the following types of information in the *YBIC!* data sets that could be used to address the six broad questions identified above: (1) characteristics of the individual such as educational and experiential background, age, position (e.g. centre assistant teacher, teacher, supervisor or director or family child care provider), (2) remuneration levels and working conditions such as the number of hours regularly scheduled to work and the availability of benefits such as paid sick days or a pension, (3) the individual's perception of the availability of support such as networking with other family child care providers or other centre directors and consultation from other disciplines such as speech pathology, (4) the workplace climate such as perceived autonomy to make decisions, the extent to which the supervisor or home visitor is perceived to be supportive, and the reported satisfaction with co-worker relationships, (5) management structures such as the degree of formalization and the degree of centralization, (6) teacher/family child care provider identification of the positives and negatives of child care as a career, (7) the characteristics of the children served by the setting such as age range, proportion of part-time children, proportion of children who are subsidized, proportion of children who have special needs, (8) the characteristics of the program such as the mix of services it provides and whether it provides extended hours of service, and (9) the teacher's perception of the quality of the centre.

The above types of data could also be considered within the context of non-child care work-related factors that might influence retention such as the proportion of the individual's family expenditures that are covered by the individual's child care income and the availability of other job opportunities in the jurisdiction in which the individual resides.

2. What policy and practice-relevant characteristics distinguish “the best” child care settings from “the worst?”

Both YBIC! Study 2 (*Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Child Care Centres Across Canada*) and Study 3 (*Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Regulated Family Child Care Across Canada*) undertook some preliminary exploration of differences between settings in the top and in the bottom quality quartiles. These explorations focused on variables such as the family child care provider’s level of overall education and of specialized training⁸ and characteristics of the child care centre such as ratio and whether the centre is used as a student practicum setting.⁹ However, settings in the top and in the bottom quality quartile (or even more narrowly defined quality sectors where data allow) may differ in other important respects that could increase our understanding of the conditions that support or fail to support the provision of quality programming. For example, centres in the top quartile may differ from those in the bottom quartile in characteristics such as the director’s administrative style which in turn influences workplace climate and the way in which teaching staff interact with children.

Forum participants identified the following types of information in the YBIC! data sets that could be used to expand our understanding of the characteristics associated with high or with low quality: (1) the profile of the children served, e.g. a broad or narrow age range, the proportion of subsidized children, the proportion of part-time children, and the proportion of children who do not speak the language of the centre and/or who have a special need, (2) characteristics of the program such as the mix of services it provides and whether it provides extended hours of operation, (3) the program’s resources such as the availability of annual government operating and/or grants to support the inclusion of children who have special needs and the availability of free/subsidized space and utilities, (4) the availability of supports such as opportunities to network with other family child care providers or other centre directors and the availability of consultation from other disciplines, (5) the program’s attitude towards parents and the extent to which there are provisions for meaningful parent involvement in policy and program decision-making, (6) the program’s attitude towards diversity (whether cultural or children’s ability level) and its provisions to accommodate and support diversity, and (7) the administrative style of the family child care agency or centre,

⁸ Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Goelman, H., Tougas, J., and LaGrange, A. (2000). *Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Regulated Family Child Care Across Canada*. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph, Table 8.2.

⁹ Goelman, H., Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., LaGrange, A., and Tougas, J. (2000). *Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Child Care Centres across Canada*. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph, Table 5.9.

for example, the extent to which teachers and family child care providers feel supported by management and given reasonable autonomy to make decisions.

The above seven types of information in combination with information on caregiver experiential and educational backgrounds and setting characteristics such as whether a centre is used as a student practicum could be used to develop profiles of "the best" and "the worst" settings.

3. What additional factors influence quality level in child care centres and in regulated family child care homes?

The initial *YBIC!* analyses identified a number of predictors of quality level in centres and in family child care homes – wages, child-specific education, additional resources -for example. However, these analyses used only some of the available data. Would other predictors be identified if further analyses were done using additional information already in the data sets? Information that might be used could be all or some of the information identified as appropriate for developing profiles of high and low quality centres and family child care homes. Identification of predictors would require a different approach to data analyses than that sufficient for the development of profiles of high and low quality settings.

Forum participants identified the following elements of the *YBIC!* data sets in connection with this question: (1) the profile of the children served; (2) the characteristics of the program such as the mix of services it provides and whether it provides extended hours of operation, (3) the program's resources such as the availability of annual government operating and/or grants to support the inclusion of children who have special needs; (4) the availability of supports such as opportunities to network with other family child care providers or other centre directors and the availability of consultation from other disciplines, (5) the extent to which there are provisions for meaningful parent involvement in policy and program decision-making, (6) the program's approach to diversity (whether cultural or children's ability level) and (7) the program's administrative style for example, the extent to which teachers and family child care providers feel supported by management and have a role in making decisions.

4. What would be the cost of increasing quality in centres and in family child care?

The *YBIC!* reports on quality in centres¹⁰ and in family child care homes¹¹ used sophisticated statistical models to identify a number of variables that are not simply associated with higher levels of quality but actually predict quality level. Two of these variables can be regulated (required ECCE training and permitted number of children for whom one person is responsible or child/staff ratio). Another variable - teacher satisfaction with the work environment and her relationship with her colleagues - is influenced by the director's management style. American research suggests that directors who have had specific training in administration are associated with working environments that are rated more highly by teaching staff.¹²

With these kinds of factors in mind, the forum participants asked "How much would it cost to raise the level of quality as measured in the *YBIC!* Studies?" Some of specific questions that previous research suggests would be of interest are: Is the rated overall quality of a room substantially higher when the observed teacher has two years of ECCE education rather than one year or less? If yes, how much would it cost to require that at least one staff person in every centre classroom have a two-year ECCE credential? How much would it cost to require specific training in child care administration for centre directors? Is the quality of the interaction between adult and child notably higher when the adult is responsible for three infants than when she is responsible for four infants? If yes, what would it cost to reduce the permitted ratio to three infants to one teacher in jurisdictions that currently have a less favourable ratio?

5. The impact of growing reliance on fee subsidy

Eligibility for fee subsidies in Canadian child care is restricted to families whose income falls below a specific threshold set by the jurisdiction, to parents who are participating in government-mandated employment training programs, or, in some provinces, for children deemed to be at risk due to family circumstances. Comparison of *Caring for a Living* and *YBIC!* data show that changes in government funding between 1991 and 1998 resulted in the average centre's reliance on fee subsidy for its revenue increasing in six of the ten provinces.

¹⁰ Goelman, H., Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., LaGrange, A., and Tougas, J. (2000). *Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Child Care Centres across Canada*. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph.

¹¹ Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Goelman, H., Tougas, J., and LaGrange, A. (2000). *Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Regulated Family Child Care Across Canada*. Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph.

¹² Jorde Bloom, P., and Sheerer, M. (1992). "Changing Organizations by Changing Individuals: A Model of Leadership Training." *The Urban Review*, 24: 263-286.

Such reliance increased by 14% in Alberta and by 12% in New Brunswick - two provinces that substantially reduced or eliminated government operating grants during the time period in question.¹³ Changing the proportion of subsidized children in a program changes the profile of the user population and this in turn may change the expectations and demands on the program and has implications for the caregivers.

In 1998, on a Canada-wide basis, 64% of centres in the *YBIC!* sample reported that more than 25% of the children enrolled were receiving fee subsidies.¹⁴ In 1999, 71.6% of family child care providers reported that they were providing care for at least one subsidized child and Canadian the average was 2.3 subsidized children in each home.¹⁵

The forum participants identified the relationship between the proportion of subsidized children in a program and a number of variables to be of key interest from both policy and best practice-relevant perspectives. Such variables include:

- The overall quality of the program.
- The degree of stress reported by the care provider.
- Care provider level of job satisfaction.
- Care provider stated intention to leave (a) the setting, and (b) the field within three years time.
- Staff turnover rates in centre-based child care.

Answers to each of these questions for both centres and family child care settings could be provided through further analyses of the existing *You Bet I Care!* data sets.

6. The impact of concern about financial stability on quality and practices in child care centres

In 1998, *YBIC!* data showed that 38.0% of centres in the Canada-wide sample reported that the continued financial stability of their centre had been one of the three most pressing issues faced by the centre in the previous 12 months.¹⁶ No other issue was reported as a pressing concern by as large a proportion of centres.

¹³ Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Goelman, H., LaGrange, H., and Tougas, J. (2000). *You Bet I Care! A Canada-Wide Study on Wages, Working Conditions, and Practices in Child Care Centres*. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph, Figure 10.3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Table 9.5.

¹⁵ Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Goelman, H., Tougas, J., and LaGrange, A. (2000). *Caring and Learning Environments: Quality in Regulated Family Child Care Across Canada*. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph, p. 54.

¹⁶ Doherty, G., Lero, D.S., Goelman, H., LaGrange, A., and Tougas, J. (2000). *You Bet I Care! A Canada-Wide Study on Wages, Working Conditions, and Practices in Child Care Centres*. Guelph, Ontario: Centre for Families, Work and Well-Being, University of Guelph, Table 12.1.

- What is the profile of a centre that perceives itself as being on the financial brink?
- What effect does this perception have on working conditions and on staff morale?
- What effect does this perception have programming, the quality of the interaction between teachers and children, and the overall quality of program?

Forum participants identified the following types of information in the *YBIC!* data sets that could be used to explore the above questions: (1) ages and types of children served. For example, infants and children who have special needs require more staff time, (2) proportion of revenue from different sources, (3) level of fees charged relative to those charged by other centres in the same community, (4) reduction in resources over the previous three years, for example, loss of free or subsidized space or reduction in government funds, (5) centre size as indicated by its licensed capacity, (6) proportion of vacant spaces, (7) greater use of part-time or time-limited contract staff than three years ago, (8) decrease in benefits over the past three years, (9) level of director and teaching staff job satisfaction, (10) director and teaching staff intention to remain or to leave the centre, (11) teaching staff turnover rate in the previous 12 months, (12) changes in program activities such as decreased field trips, and (13) ratings of the quality of the interaction between teachers and children and of the overall quality of the program.

7. What jurisdictional and regional differences can be identified that have an impact on quality and access for parents?

The context and the practice of child care in Canada vary enormously across the jurisdictions and even within individual provinces and territories, particularly with respect to urban/rural/remote communities. Forum participants identified the following jurisdictional or regional differences that warrant further exploration.

- Why is there a higher proportion of family child care homes than centres in the top quality quartile in some jurisdictions and a higher proportion of centres than homes in the top quality quartile in other jurisdictions?
- Is there a difference in the profile of a high quality program in a jurisdiction that has relatively high training requirements and a relatively small permitted number of children per caregiver and/or government operating grants and one in a jurisdiction with less stringent requirements and/or no grants? Is there a difference in the profile of low quality programs in these two types of situations?
- What, if any, are the differences between urban and rural centres in variables such as the proportion of teaching staff with ECCE training, staff job satisfaction etc.

- Forum participants identified that the first two issues could be addressed by combining information from the *YBIC!* data sets with contextual information derived from other sources, for example, demographic, economic and social information, government regulations, monitoring and funding practices at the time the quality ratings were obtained. Information about differences, if any, between urban and rural centres could be obtained by linking *YBIC!* data with centre postal codes.

Other priorities discussed

Other related, important priorities for research identified by the forum participants were:

1. Replication of the *YBIC!* data collection related to demographic, experiential and other characteristics of the workforce, child care remuneration levels and working conditions, and practices in centres and in family child care homes on a periodic, predictable basis. Such human resource information is vital for planning recruitment and retention strategies but it ages quickly.
2. Replication of the assessment of quality levels in centres in the four provinces and two territories where this was not done by *YBIC!*.
3. Replication of the assessment of quality levels in the jurisdictions already assessed in Study 2 of *YBIC!* to identify the effects of changes in policy and practice, for example, the effect of the recent reforms in Québec.
4. Replication in the unregulated sector of the study done by *YBIC!* in regulated family child care.
5. Exploration of individuals' decisions to choose child care as an occupation.
6. Combination of information from *YBIC!* with information obtained by recent studies on school-age programs.
7. Replication of the *YBIC!* studies in school-age programs.

CONCLUSIONS

The Forum participants were unanimous in concluding that:

1. The issues identified at this forum in no way reflect all the pertinent questions that could be addressed using the *YBIC!* data sets.
2. Analysis of the *YBIC!* data sets do not represent the sole approach to child care research that should be encompassed in a comprehensive research agenda.
3. It is vital that funding be found as soon as possible to capitalize on the potential of the existing *YBIC!* data sets for answering key policy and service delivery questions and to inform discussions and debates that are already underway.

4. The implementation of a coordinated research agenda for child care requires a stable, predictable source of on-going funding.
5. Collaboration, information sharing and networking in current and future efforts in Canadian child care research should be enhanced.
6. Child care is an essential education and family support service. As noted in the Social Union Framework Agreement, Canada must “Ensure access for all Canadians, wherever they live or move in Canada, to essential social programs and service of reasonably comparable quality.”¹⁷ This means that there must be a federal presence in child care.
7. There is an urgent need to develop a coordinated research agenda that will address key policy, service delivery, and best-practices questions and the development of this agenda must be done with input from all key stakeholders.

¹⁷ Text of *A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians: An Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Governments of the Provinces and Territories*. Published in the *Globe and Mail*, February 5, 1999, p. A 13.

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