

Research Paper

Practices and Challenges of Baby Daycare Services in Public Offices of Wolkite Town, Gurage Zone, Central Ethiopia

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Abstract

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Daycare is important for children's holistic development in cognitive, social and emotional development. It also creates a safe environment for children while their parents are working. However, in developing countries like Ethiopia, awareness and implementation of baby daycare services are limited. This study investigates the practices and challenges associated with baby daycare services in public institutions in Wolkite Town, Central Ethiopia. Within the framework of a mixed-methods approach, a descriptive research design was employed. Data were collected through survey questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions from a sample of 207 employees. The results revealed a lack of institutionalized baby daycare services, with only 43.1% of institutions offering limited facilities, such as basic rooms without caregivers or necessary equipment. This gap has led to significant challenges for employees, including reduced motivation, high absenteeism, and difficulty balancing work and childcare responsibilities. The findings further highlight that baby care services contribute significantly to employee performance by enhancing motivation, concentration, and effectiveness in customer service. Challenges in establishing these services include financial constraints, knowledge gaps, and insufficient stakeholder collaboration. Despite these obstacles, respondents emphasized that these challenges were surmountable through improved institutional commitment and coordinated efforts. Recommendations include fostering stakeholder partnerships, allocating government resources, and implementing robust policy frameworks to ensure accessible and effective baby care services. This study underscores the critical need for holistic approaches to childcare support in public institutions to improve employee well-being and organizational efficiency.

1. Introduction

Globally, gender norms often place a disproportionate childcare burden on women, limiting their participation in economic activities and career advancement opportunities (Withers, 2020; Bhojani et al., 2024). In many societies, women are primarily responsible for caregiving, which restricts their ability to engage fully in the labor market (Sinha et al., 2024). This challenge is even more pronounced in developing countries, where rapid urbanization and economic pressures necessitate women's participation in both formal and informal

employment (Mussida & Patimo, 2021; Bhojani et al., 2024). Despite this increasing workforce participation, childcare support systems remain underdeveloped, creating significant obstacles for working mothers (Ravindranath et al., 2021; Mbatta, 2023).

Daycare services have emerged as a critical solution to address these challenges, enabling women to balance their professional and personal responsibilities while also contributing to child development by providing safe and stimulating environments (Clark, 2019; Moussié, 2021).

Historically, formal daycare facilities first appeared in Europe in the 19th century, with France and the United States pioneering institutional childcare through government-recognized crèches in 1869 (Burger, 2012). Since then, many countries have integrated daycare services into workplace policies to promote gender equity and enhance productivity (Lee & Jung, 2024). However, in Africa, workplace daycare remains limited, with significant gaps in accessibility and affordability. Studies indicate that the absence of childcare services disproportionately impacts low-income families and restricts women's ability to participate in the labor force effectively (Clark, 2019).

Ethiopia faces similar challenges, where traditional childcare systems often rely on extended family support, leaving working mothers with limited formal alternatives (Berhane et al., 2018; Waterhouse & Bennett, 2023). Although the Ethiopian government mandates the establishment of daycare facilities in public institutions (Tessema et al., 2024), implementation remains sparse and inconsistent. Research indicates that workplace childcare services enhance employee productivity, reduce absenteeism, and improve job satisfaction (Bhojani et al., 2024; Sinha et al., 2024). However, many Ethiopian public servants, particularly women, continue to struggle with balancing demanding work schedules and caregiving responsibilities due to inadequate childcare support. This results in decreased productivity, higher stress levels, and constrained career growth opportunities (Berhane et al., 2018; Waterhouse & Bennett, 2023; Tessema et al., 2024).

In Wolkite Town, this issue is particularly evident, as public institutions have largely failed to establish functional daycare centers. Informal discussions with employees reveal challenges such as financial constraints, lack of institutional awareness, and poor coordination among

stakeholders—barriers that align with global findings on childcare service implementation (Bhojani et al., 2024). Research also highlights that the availability of affordable and quality daycare services is a critical factor in promoting women's labor force participation and economic empowerment (Lee & Jung, 2024). The lack of sustainable childcare solutions forces employees to seek costly or unreliable alternatives, further exacerbating gender inequalities in the workplace (Waterhouse & Bennett, 2023).

To address these challenges, this study aims to examine the current practices, challenges, and effectiveness of daycare services in public institutions in Wolkite Town. Specifically, it seeks to assess the existing daycare service practices, evaluate their impact on female employees' job satisfaction and career progression, identify key challenges hindering their establishment and sustainability, and analyze the roles and contributions of stakeholders in managing these facilities. By doing so, the study provides insights and recommendations for improving daycare services in public institutions, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable work environment.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Study Area Description

Wolkite Town, the administrative and commercial center of Gurage Zone, is located 155 km southwest of Addis Ababa. Based on the Central Statistical Agency (2007) report, the town has a projected population of 87,984 (2022). The town serves as a key hub for governance, commerce, and social services. It is divided into three sub-cities: Adiss, Bekur, and Gubre; further organized into six urban kebeles for efficient administration.

Strategically positioned, Wolkite connects the Gurage Zone with surrounding regions, benefiting from major transport routes that enhance trade and mobility. Its economy thrives on agriculture, commerce, and growing investments in construction, retail, and services. The town also has essential infrastructure, including healthcare and education, supporting its expanding population. Given its role in linking urban and rural communities, Wolkite provides a relevant setting to examine the availability, challenges, and opportunities of baby daycare services in public institutions.

2.2. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design within a mixed-methods framework, with a primary emphasis on qualitative inquiry. A descriptive research design was chosen as it enables a comprehensive examination of the practices and challenges of baby daycare services in public institutions of Wolkite Town. This approach provides an in-depth analysis of existing conditions while identifying patterns and relationships among key variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study primarily adopted a qualitative research approach, which allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and challenges related to daycare services (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to gain rich, contextual insights. This approach was complemented by a quantitative component, which involved structured surveys to collect numerical data that support the qualitative findings and enhance the study's validity through data triangulation (Johnson et al., 2007).

The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods ensured a more holistic understanding of the research problem. The qualitative approach served as the primary means of data

collection, offering nuanced insights into the lived experiences of daycare service providers and users. The quantitative data provided measurable trends and patterns, reinforcing the findings and facilitating generalizability within the study context. This methodological combination strengthens the reliability and credibility of the study by incorporating diverse perspectives and verifying findings through multiple data sources (Patton, 2015).

By employing this descriptive mixed-methods approach with a qualitative priority, the study effectively captures the complexities and realities of daycare services in public institutions, ensuring a well-rounded analysis of the research problem.

2.3. Sampling and Sample Size

In Wolkite Town, there are twenty-two city administration offices. Among these, the researcher purposively selected five city administration offices due to their relatively higher number of employees, particularly women workers, compared to the other offices. This purposive selection was made to ensure the study captures diverse experiences and perspectives related to baby daycare services in institutions where female employees are more prevalent.

The total number of women employees in the selected five governmental institutions was 427. To determine an appropriate sample size for the study, the researcher employed simple random sampling to ensure every individual had an equal chance of selection, enhancing the representativeness of the findings. To calculate the required sample size, Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size determination was applied, allowing for a 95% confidence level with a margin of error of 0.05. The formula is expressed as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = required sample size

N = total population size (427 women employees in selected institutions)

e = margin of error (0.05 for a 95% confidence level)

Thus,

$$n = 427 / (1 + 427(0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 427 / (1 + 10.675)$$

$$n = 427 / 11.675$$

$$n = \{427\} / \{11.675\}$$

$$n = 36.67$$

$$n \approx 37$$

Rounding to the nearest whole number, the final sample size was 37 women employees.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

Given the mixed-methods research design, the study incorporated both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of daycare services in public institutions. A structured survey questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

A structured questionnaire was administered to 37 sample respondents, focusing on key aspects such as the availability, practices, and challenges related to daycare services. The standardized format of the questionnaire allowed for systematic data collection and facilitated statistical analysis.

To gain a deeper understanding of institutional efforts and constraints, interviews were conducted with 12 key informants, including department heads, decision-makers, and other relevant stakeholders. These interviews provided

valuable perspectives on policies, operational challenges, and the overall management of daycare services within the selected institutions.

Additionally, four focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with female employees to capture collective experiences and perspectives. One FGD was held in each of the four selected institutions, with each group consisting of six participants. This approach enabled participants to share their personal experiences, concerns, and suggestions in an interactive and supportive setting, enriching the qualitative findings.

Furthermore, secondary data were collected from institutional reports and policy documents to provide additional context and supplementary information. These sources helped triangulate findings from primary data collection methods, enhancing the depth and reliability of the study's analysis.

2.5. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process began with securing consent from the officials of the four public institutions involved in the study. This initial step ensured that all parties were informed about the research objectives and were agreeable to participating in the study.

Once consent was obtained, the survey questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 37 individuals across the four public institutions. Of these, 32 questionnaires were appropriately filled and returned. The questionnaire was designed to collect quantitative data that would provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic under investigation.

In addition to the surveys, interviews were conducted with 12 key informants, including department heads and decision-makers from five public institutions. Three respondents were selected from each of the four institutions to

gather diverse perspectives from senior staff and individuals in leadership positions.

To gain deeper insights into the experiences of female employees, focus group discussions were held with four groups, one in each institution. Each focus group consisted of six female employees, providing a platform for open discussion on their perspectives and experiences within the institutions.

Finally, secondary data was collected from institutional reports and policy documents. This supplementary data helped provide context and further enrich the findings obtained through the primary data sources, ensuring a well-rounded analysis of the research topic.

2.6. Data Analysis Method

The quantitative data collected from the survey questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Specifically, frequency counts and frequency distributions were used to summarize the responses and identify trends within the data. Additionally, standard deviation was calculated to assess the variability and spread of the data, providing a clearer understanding of the consistency of responses across the sample.

For the qualitative data obtained from the interviews and focus group discussions, a thematic analysis approach was employed. The data from these sources were transcribed and examined for recurring patterns, themes, and key ideas. These themes were then categorized and analyzed to draw meaningful insights, allowing for a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the participants. This approach ensured that the qualitative data was thoroughly explored and its nuances were accurately captured.

3. Results

3.1. Practices of Baby Care Services

The findings from Tables 1 and 2 reveal significant gaps in baby care services within public institutions. Of the 202 institutions surveyed, only 87 (43.1%) reported having baby care services, while the majority, 115 institutions (56.9%), did not offer any support for employees with childcare needs. Furthermore, among the 87 centers that do provide baby care services, 43.1% were equipped solely with basic rooms, and none offered necessary facilities, caregiver support, or additional amenities.

Table 1: Availability of Baby Care Services in Public Institutions

Availability of Services	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Institutions with baby care services	87	43.1
Institutions without baby care services	115	56.9
Total	202	100

Table 2: Facilities Available in Baby Care Centers

Type of Facility	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Basic room only	87	43.1
Room with necessary facilities	0	0
Room with caregiver support	0	0
Others	0	0
Total	87	100

3.2. Focus Group Discussion

Focus group discussions and interviews confirmed that even institutions providing baby care services experience significant gaps in infrastructure and management. Many facilities lack essential amenities, such as appropriate furniture, toys, and sanitary provisions, rendering them unsuitable for effective childcare. Respondents also pointed out the absence of standardized guidelines or regulations governing the operation of these centers, which has contributed to their underperformance.

A recurring issue highlighted in the discussions was the lack of dedicated caregivers. Employees who bring their children to work often find themselves attending to them during office hours, negatively impacting their productivity. This

situation aligns with previous studies demonstrating that inadequate childcare support can lead to reduced job satisfaction and work-life imbalance.

3.3. Contributions to Employee Motivation

The results presented in Table 3 illustrate the impact of baby care services on employee motivation. Out of 202 respondents, 45.0% indicated that baby care services significantly enhance performance and productivity, while 18.8% reported improved concentration at work and an increased willingness to attend work, both of which also received equal support from the same percentage of respondents. Additionally, 9.4% noted that baby care services contribute to improved customer service delivery, and 7.9% identified other motivational contributions.

Table 3: Impact of Baby Care Services on Employee Motivation

Contribution to Motivation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Enhanced performance and productivity	91	45.0
Improved concentration at work	38	18.8
Increased willingness to attend work	38	18.8
Improved customer service delivery	19	9.4
Other contributions	16	7.9
Total	202	100

The findings presented in Table 4 highlight the challenges faced by employees due to the absence of baby care services. Among the 202 respondents, 44.1% reported experiencing absenteeism as a significant challenge, while 40.6% indicated that they faced penalties or

reprimands for their absences. Additionally, 10.4% of respondents noted difficulties in achieving performance goals, and 5.0% mentioned that they had to drop out of work entirely.

Table 4: Challenges Due to Absence of Baby Care Services

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Absenteeism	89	44.1
Penalties or reprimands for absences	82	40.6
Difficulty achieving performance goals	21	10.4
Dropping out of work entirely	10	5.0
Total	202	100

3.4. Stakeholder Roles

The results presented in Table 5 highlight significant issues regarding stakeholder engagement in establishing daycare services. A striking 93.6% of respondents indicated a lack of stakeholder commitment, reporting minimal

engagement and support for these initiatives. Additionally, focus group discussions underscored the necessity for collaborative efforts among stakeholders, emphasizing that effective teamwork is crucial for the successful establishment of daycare services.

Table 5: Stakeholder Engagement in Establishing Daycare Services

Stakeholder Engagement Aspect	Percentage (%)	Key Findings
Lack of Stakeholder Commitment	93.6%	Most respondents reported minimal engagement and a lack of support.
Need for Collaborative Efforts	-	Focus groups emphasized the importance of working together.

4. Discussion

4.1. Practices of Baby Care Services

The provision of baby care services in public institutions is crucial for the health and well-being of infants and their families (Callaghan-Koru et al., 2013; Horwood et al., 2019; Yosef et al., 2021). In the present study, it was found that only 43.1% of public institutions offer baby care services. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Rahman et al. (2022), which demonstrated that access to baby care services significantly impacts maternal and infant health outcomes. The authors emphasize that

inadequate facilities can lead to increased morbidity and mortality rates among infants, underscoring the urgent need for improved services.

The present study reveals a concerning absence of comprehensive baby care facilities in the surveyed institutions, with none offering rooms equipped with necessary amenities or staffed by trained caregivers. This gap highlights a significant lack of institutional attention to employee welfare (Yosef et al., 2021) and reflects broader systemic challenges within

Ethiopia's public institutions. Despite government mandates for daycare facilities, implementation has been inconsistent, primarily due to insufficient resources and minimal institutional awareness (Behbehani et al., 2024). The lack of adequate childcare services has profound implications for employees, particularly women, who struggle to balance work responsibilities with caregiving. This dual burden diminishes productivity and job satisfaction, as supported by qualitative insights from focus group discussions, where respondents noted that the absence of facilities often forces them to take leave or seek alternative childcare arrangements, leading to economic and professional repercussions (Horwood et al., 2019; Rahman et al., 2022).

Drange and Rønning (2020) discuss the importance of quality care in public institutions, noting that many facilities lack essential resources and trained caregivers, a situation that resonates with the findings from Wolkite Town. According to Rahman et al. (2022), barriers such as insufficient funding, a lack of trained personnel, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to the limited availability of baby care services in public institutions. These challenges highlight the systemic issues that need to be addressed to enhance service delivery.

In contrast to the findings from Wolkite Town, a study by Tessema et al. (2024) revealed that public institutions in urban areas of Ethiopia offer comprehensive baby care services. This underscores significant regional disparities in the availability of such services, suggesting that while urban centers may have better access to childcare resources, rural areas continue to face substantial gaps. This discrepancy suggests that urban institutions may benefit from better resource allocation and policy support compared to their rural counterparts. Lucas et al. (2018) found that targeted policy interventions significantly improved the availability and

quality of baby care services in several regions. Their research suggests that effective governance and strategic investments can lead to better outcomes for both infants and their families. This indicates that with the right policies in place, it is possible to bridge the gaps in service provision observed in areas like Wolkite Town.

In contrast, global best practices demonstrate that developed countries often integrate workplace daycare services into organizational policies to enhance employee retention and productivity (Travis et al., 2014; Yerkes & Javornik, 2019). These centers typically feature trained staff and age-appropriate learning materials, creating safe and stimulating environments for children. Adopting similar standards in Wolkite's institutions would necessitate significant investment and policy enforcement but could yield substantial benefits for employee well-being and organizational efficiency (Yosef et al., 2021). Overall, the findings underscore the urgent need for action from institutional leaders and policymakers to address the gaps in baby care services. Collaborative efforts among government agencies, private sector partners, and community organizations are essential to mobilize the necessary resources and expertise to establish functional daycare centers across public institutions (Behbehani et al., 2024).

4.2. Contributions to Employee Motivation

The current study revealed that respondents strongly agreed that the availability of baby care services positively impacts their motivation and job performance. This finding is supported by several studies that highlight the positive effects of childcare services on employee motivation and productivity (Yosef et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2022). Specifically, Yosef et al. (2021) found that access to childcare facilities significantly improved employee performance and reduced absenteeism across various sectors. Additionally, research has provided deeper insights into the emotional and psychological benefits of baby

care services, aligning with the current findings on employee well-being. According to Yerkes and Javornik (2019), employees with access to childcare services reported lower stress levels and higher job satisfaction, which are critical factors in enhancing overall workplace morale.

Also, a study by Damoah and Ntsiful (2016) found that workplace childcare services are associated with improved employee morale and reduced absenteeism across various industries. Furthermore, case studies of organizations that have successfully implemented childcare services provide practical examples that support the present study. For instance, Uwababyeyi and Gitahi (2023) documented a company that introduced onsite childcare and observed significant improvements in employee attendance and productivity, illustrating the tangible benefits of such initiatives.

Moreover, studies have highlighted the implications of childcare services on employee motivation in both developed and developing countries. For instance, Miller et al. (2020) conducted a comparative analysis demonstrating that organizations in developed countries that provide childcare services experience higher employee retention and satisfaction rates. However, policy analysis literature often critiques the current state of childcare services in public institutions, pointing out gaps in implementation and funding. Davidson et al. (2020) discuss the challenges faced by public institutions in establishing effective childcare services, emphasizing the urgent need for strategic investment and comprehensive policy reform.

4.3. Challenges in Establishing Baby Care Services

In the present study, the establishment of baby care services in Wolkite Town faces several significant challenges, with the most prominent being financial constraints, knowledge gaps, and

poor stakeholder coordination. A study by Davidson et al. (2020) found that inadequate funding is a significant barrier to the implementation of baby care services in low-income areas. This finding is further supported by various research insights into the experiences of healthcare providers and caregivers, which highlight the critical issues of knowledge gaps and poor stakeholder coordination. For instance, Lucas et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of training programs for healthcare providers to enhance infant care practices, suggesting that targeted education can lead to better health outcomes for infants and baby caregivers.

Moreover, the social determinants of the health framework indicate that broader social factors, beyond specified financial and knowledge constraints, significantly influence baby care service delivery (Qi et al., 2024). This perspective underscores the need for a holistic approach to addressing the challenges in baby care services. In addition, Yerkes and Javornik (2019) critique existing baby care service policies for their inadequacy in addressing the financial and coordination challenges faced in maternal and child health services, indicating a gap between policy intentions and practical implementation.

Conversely, a systematic review by Behbehani et al. (2024) found that coordinated care models can significantly improve outcomes in baby care services, demonstrating the potential benefits of effective collaboration among stakeholders. Furthermore, a case study by Elsey et al. (2020) documented a successful initiative in a rural area that enhanced stakeholder coordination and secured funding through community engagement. This case illustrates how grassroots efforts can lead to sustainable improvements in baby care services, emphasizing the importance of local involvement and resource mobilization.

4.4. Stakeholder Roles

Stakeholder engagement is important for the successful establishment and sustainability of daycare services. However, it was found that stakeholder involvement in the development of baby care services in Wolkite Town has been minimal. 93.6% of respondents indicated that there is a lack of commitment from stakeholders. According to Shoesmith et al. (2021), the commitment of stakeholders plays a vital role in early childhood education, as minimal engagement can significantly hinder progress in developing effective daycare facilities. This highlights the need for active participation from all relevant parties, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local communities. Without sufficient stakeholder involvement, the potential for creating comprehensive and effective childcare services diminishes, leading to challenges in meeting the needs of working parents and their children.

Focus group discussions emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector, and local communities for enhancing the planning and implementation of daycare services. Drange and Rønning (2020) emphasize that collaborative approaches can lead to more effective childcare service development, as they allow for the pooling of resources, expertise, and perspectives. Socia et al. (2018) further assert that effective collaboration is necessary to overcome the various challenges faced in establishing sustainable daycare services. To facilitate this collaboration, Warner et al. (2004) and Karn et al. (2017) propose strategies for strengthening partnerships and improving communication among stakeholders. By fostering a cooperative environment, stakeholders can work together to ensure the successful delivery of childcare services, ultimately benefiting families and communities.

5. Conclusion

The study highlights critical deficiencies in baby care services within public institutions in Wolkite Town, revealing those inadequate facilities and a lack of trained caregivers significantly hinder employee productivity and job satisfaction. The findings align with global research indicating that effective childcare support is essential for enhancing women's participation in the workforce and achieving gender equity. The absence of standardized guidelines and the financial constraints faced by institutions further complicate the establishment of functional daycare services. Addressing these challenges is vital for fostering a supportive work environment that enables employees, particularly women, to balance their professional and caregiving responsibilities effectively.

6. Recommendations

To improve baby care services in public institutions, it is crucial to strengthen the enforcement of existing government mandates for establishing daycare facilities, ensuring compliance and accountability. Additionally, increasing funding and resources for comprehensive baby care services, including caregiver training and essential amenities, is vital. Fostering collaboration among government agencies, private sector partners, and community organizations will mobilize the necessary resources and expertise to establish functional daycare centers. Furthermore, developing and implementing standardized guidelines and regulations for daycare operations will ensure quality and consistency across institutions. Finally, conducting awareness campaigns to educate institutional leaders and employees about the benefits of daycare services will help promote a supportive culture for working parents.

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