



# Emerging workplace childcare service in Ethiopia: Exploring experience, determinants of use, benefits, and challenges of use among mothers working at the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Revenue

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## ABSTRACT

The increasing participation of women in formal employment across various sectors has become evident in many developing countries, including Ethiopia, over the past few decades. This shift has created gaps in unpaid care work, traditionally performed by women, resulting in potential role conflicts between professional and family responsibilities. Guided by spillover theory, which explains how experiences in one domain (e.g., work) can positively or negatively affect outcomes in another (e.g., family), this study examines how workplace childcare services influence maternal well-being, child development, and job performance. Workplace childcare is conceptualized as a potential moderator that enhances positive spillover and mitigates negative spillover between work and family roles. The study also draws on attachment theory, which emphasizes the importance of proximity and consistent interaction between caregivers and young children during early developmental stages. By allowing mothers to remain physically close to their children and maintain periodic contact during the workday, workplace childcare may reduce maternal anxiety and support secure caregiver-child attachment. The primary population of interest consisted of female public employees at the Ministry of Revenue who had at least one child under the age of three enrolled in the on-site daycare facility, representing direct beneficiaries of the service. Additionally, a small number of institutional staff members, including the daycare coordinator, a nurse, and a childcare assistant, were included as key informants to provide insights into institutional operations and policy implementation. A mixed-methods design was employed. For the qualitative strand, a purposive sampling strategy selected 10 mothers and 3 key institutional informants based on their use of the daycare service, willingness to participate, and diversity in job roles and family structures. For the quantitative component, a stratified random sampling method was applied to achieve balanced representation across marital status, educational attainment, number of children, and job level. A total of 89 mothers currently using the service participated in the survey, providing data sufficient for descriptive and correlational analyses. The findings indicate that mothers primarily utilize workplace childcare due to time constraints, limited alternative options, and financial considerations. The service has many benefits, such as better health for children, better cognitive development, less stress for mothers, and more productivity at work. However, the study also noted challenges, such as strict age limitations for enrollment, exposure to illness, and early-morning preparation stress. Significant correlations were observed between perceived childcare quality, reduced maternal stress, and higher job satisfaction, highlighting the critical role of institutional childcare in promoting gender equity, employee performance, and child development. The study recommends policy revisions to expand eligibility criteria, strengthen operational standards, and extend workplace childcare provisions to other public and private institutions. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs and include perspectives of non-users and male caregivers.

**Keywords:** Employee Performance, Ethiopia, Gender Equality, Institutional Daycare, Workplace Childcare, Working Mothers, Public Employees, Work-Life Balance

## I. INTRODUCTION

The increasing participation of women in the formal labor force, particularly in developing countries such as Ethiopia, has generated significant attention to the challenges working mothers face in balancing professional duties and family responsibilities. According to the Central Statistics Agency (CSA), women constitute nearly 47% of Ethiopia's formal workforce, many of whom are mothers of young children. Despite this growing participation, women continue to bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, including childcare, housework, and family obligations [1].

In Ethiopia, urban mothers experience a 15% higher unemployment rate than their rural counterparts[2]. For working mothers, particularly in the federal public sectors, employment is more of a necessity than a choice. Regardless of the higher opportunity costs of leaving jobs, many married women quit their jobs to prioritize childcare. According to the 2021 Labor Market Survey in Ethiopia, 52% of unemployed married women who constitute 65% of the total unemployed female population, have left their jobs due to difficulties in maintaining work life balance.



Globally, the issue of work-life balance has evolved from a private concern to a public policy agenda. In countries like Canada, the United States, and the Nordic nations, governments and employers have developed workplace childcare programs as strategic interventions to address gender disparities in employment and improve overall workforce productivity [3]. These programs not only support children's early development but also reduce absenteeism and enhance employee morale[4].

In Ethiopia, the government introduced a directive in 2018 mandating public institutions to establish workplace childcare facilities [8]. This decision aligns with Article 36(1)(c) of the FDRE Constitution, which states that children have the right to proper care, including breastfeeding and mother-child proximity. However, the implementation of this policy remains limited, with only a handful of ministries, including the Ministry of Finance, effectively operationalizing childcare services. The Ministry of Finance's daycare center provides a rare example of institutional commitment to gender-inclusive policy execution. The introduction of workplace childcare is intended to address multiple objectives: Alleviate maternal stress and absenteeism, Foster child development through structured caregiving, improve employee productivity and retention, Promote gender equity in career advancement.

While this policy has strong legal and ethical foundations, empirical evidence on its actual impact in Ethiopian public institutions is scarce. Existing studies have focused largely on private daycare centers, often neglecting the perspectives of public-employed mothers and institutional challenges faced by government-run childcare facilities [5], [6], [7]. Given the growing demand for integrated childcare support in Ethiopia's public sector, an in depth examination of mothers' experiences with such services becomes critically relevant. This study, therefore, investigates the benefits, challenges, and decision-making factors associated with the use of workplace childcare at the Ministry of Revenue, one of the pioneer institutions in implementing this program.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Agency for International Development recognizes early childhood as a critical stage of human development. Children's early experiences directly affect their physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development, with a lasting impact on later success in school and life. The first 1,000 days from pregnancy to age two years are the foundation for lifelong learning and development. The brain develops more rapidly during the first 1,000 days than at any other period in life [9]. Children grow best in an environment with nurturing care, which includes safe and secure surroundings, responsive parenting/caregiving, adequate maternal and child health care and nutrition, and opportunities for stimulation and early learning [10]

Despite the government's policy mandate, public working mothers in Ethiopia continue to face significant barriers in accessing quality childcare[8]. The gap between policy intent and practical implementation remains wide[10]. Estimating the gap in Early Childhood Care and Education coverage requires analyzing the difference between the available services and the potential demand, including daycare for children under four and preprimary education for those aged 4–6. Despite data limitations, findings indicate that Ethiopia faces a significantly larger coverage gap for daycare compared to preprimary education. Under the low growth (LG) scenario, the estimated ECCE deficit stands at 8,330,347 children, meaning over 8.3 million children under seven lack access to formal ECCE services and instead rely on informal, family, or community-based care [11].

Few ministries have opened childcare centers, and among those, concerns persist about quality, age restrictions, staffing, and funding clarity [6]. As a result, many mothers are either compelled to rely on informal care arrangements or exit the workforce altogether, perpetuating the cycle of gender-based economic inequality. While some global and local studies have shown the value of workplace childcare in improving job performance and family well-being [12], there is a lack of contextual, evidence-based research examining how such services are functioning within Ethiopia's public institutions. Furthermore, the voices of the direct beneficiaries are largely missing from academic and policy discussions.

This study seeks to fill that gap by offering empirical insights into the experiences of mothers using the daycare center at the Ministry of Finance. The study also seeks to assess the broader implications for government policy, organizational performance, and gender equity in the workplace.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To identify factors influencing mothers' decisions to use the workplace daycare facility
- ii. To assess the benefits of workplace childcare on mothers' professional and personal lives
- iii. To examine the challenges mothers encounter while utilizing the service
- iv. To discuss the broader organizational and policy implications of institutional childcare



## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by two theoretical perspectives commonly applied in work–family and childcare research: Spillover Theory and Attachment Theory. These frameworks explain how workplace childcare influences women’s work experiences, family responsibilities, and child well-being.

#### 2.1.1 Spillover Theory

Spillover Theory was advanced by Staines (1980) and later expanded by scholars such as Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) to explain how experiences, emotions, and behaviors in one life domain, such as family, transfer to another domain, such as work. Spillover can be positive or negative. Positive spillover occurs when resources or support in one domain enhance performance and satisfaction in another, while negative spillover arises when stressors from one domain interfere with functioning in another.

Spillover Theory is widely applied in work–family studies to explain how experiences, emotions, and demands in one domain of life influence outcomes in another domain. As discussed in the work–life balance literature [14,17], spillover may be positive or negative. Positive spillover occurs when supportive conditions in the family domain enhance work-related attitudes and performance, while negative spillover arises when family-related stressors interfere with work responsibilities. In the absence of adequate childcare support, working mothers may experience time pressure, emotional strain, and role overload, which can spill over into the workplace in the form of absenteeism, reduced concentration, and lower job satisfaction [1,7,13]. Conversely, workplace childcare services can reduce family-related stress and enable women to engage more effectively in their professional roles, thereby promoting positive spillover between family and work domains. Therefore, this theory is relevant to the present study as it helps explain how workplace childcare may reduce work–family conflict and improve women’s employment outcomes.

#### 2.1.2 Attachment Theory

Attachment theory further strengthens the theoretical foundation of this study by highlighting the importance of emotional bonds between caregivers and children. Bowlby’s research emphasizes that consistent proximity and responsiveness from a caregiver are essential for a child’s emotional security and healthy development, especially during early childhood [3]. For working mothers, separation from young children during working hours can lead to anxiety and emotional distress, which may negatively affect both psychological well-being and work performance, as well as children’s health.

Workplace childcare arrangements provide opportunities for physical proximity and intermittent interaction, helping to reduce maternal anxiety and promote secure attachment relationships with toddlers. These arrangements can yield positive outcomes for child development, maternal work performance, and organizational productivity. In the context of this study, attachment theory demonstrates that workplace childcare is not merely a labor market intervention but also a family-support mechanism that enhances women’s emotional well-being, supports continued participation in paid employment, and contributes to children’s healthy development benefits that are crucial not only for organizations but also for society as a whole.

### 2.2 Empirical Review

This section examines empirical literature on workplace childcare and women’s work–family outcomes, highlighting findings from both global studies and research conducted in Ethiopia.

#### 2.2.1 Global Empirical Evidence on Workplace Childcare

Empirical studies from developed countries indicate that workplace childcare is increasingly recognized as a strategic human resource intervention. Research from North America and other advanced economies shows that access to employer-supported childcare is associated with reduced work–family conflict, higher job satisfaction, and increased employee retention [4,16]. These studies further suggest that women employees who receive childcare support experience lower stress levels and an enhanced ability to balance professional and family responsibilities. Evidence from work–life balance research also demonstrates that institutional support mechanisms, including workplace childcare services, contribute positively to employees’ psychological well-being and work engagement [11,14]. Empirical findings consistently reveal that organizations offering childcare support benefit from improved productivity, reduced absenteeism, and stronger employee commitment.

Similarly, studies from developing countries highlight both the potential benefits and the implementation challenges of workplace childcare. Studies from Asia and Latin America indicate that government- and employer-supported childcare programs can increase women’s labor force participation and employment continuity [17]. Such interventions have been shown to reduce caregiving-related constraints and improve income stability for women workers. However,



evidence also points to significant limitations. In many developing countries, the availability and quality of childcare services remain inconsistent due to cultural norms, limited funding, and weak institutional enforcement [8]. Moreover, traditional expectations regarding women's caregiving roles continue to restrict the effectiveness of workplace childcare initiatives, resulting in uneven outcomes across sectors and regions.

### 2.2.2 Literature on Workplace Childcare in Ethiopia

Research on childcare in Ethiopia has largely focused on private daycare centers. Abdurazak conducted a study in Addis Ababa and found that most centers were understaffed, expensive, and lacked developmentally appropriate programs [18]. Other studies, such as [19], examined how access to reliable childcare affected absenteeism but did not focus on workplace-based models. Ethiopia's 2018 policy directive, which requires federal public institutions to establish workplace childcare services, marked an important turning point in efforts to support working parents, particularly mothers, within the public sector. Despite the significance of this policy shift, academic research examining how the directive has been put into practice remains limited. There is little systematic evidence on how the policy has been implemented on the ground, how mothers experience and navigate these services in their daily working lives, or how institutions themselves perceive and manage the associated benefits and challenges.

Although international scholarship strongly highlights the positive role of workplace childcare in improving employee well-being, productivity, and retention, comparable empirical evidence from Ethiopia is largely absent. Existing studies have tended to focus on private childcare arrangements, maternity leave provisions, or broader gender and labor policies. Consequently, the specific functioning and impact of workplace childcare within public sector institutions have received minimal scholarly attention.

To date, no known study has closely examined the practical experiences of Ethiopian public-sector-employed mothers who use institutional daycare services, nor has there been a balanced assessment of such services from both employee and employer perspectives. The lack of mixed-method empirical research has further constrained informed policy dialogue, particularly concerning improving existing services or expanding workplace childcare initiatives across the public sector.

This study responds to these gaps through a case-based, mixed-method examination of the daycare service at the Ministry of Revenue. As one of the earliest and most visible examples of workplace childcare provision within Ethiopia's federal government, this case offers valuable insight into how the policy operates in practice, how working mothers experience it, and what it means for institutional functioning. In doing so, the study aims to contribute grounded evidence to inform future policy development and the potential scale-up of workplace childcare services in Ethiopia.

## III. METHODOLOGY

This part outlines the research methodology employed in conducting this study, which explored the experiences of public-employed mothers using workplace childcare services at the Ministry of Finance in Addis Ababa. The research adopted a mixed-methods design to ensure a holistic understanding of both the subjective and observable dimensions of this complex social phenomenon.

### 3.1 Research Design

To achieve a comprehensive view of the subject matter, this study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The rationale behind this methodological choice lies in the desire to capture the nuanced, lived experiences of mothers (through qualitative methods) alongside measurable patterns and associations (through quantitative techniques). The qualitative strand was used to probe deeply into the individual perspectives, motivations, and perceived impacts of the daycare service. In contrast, the quantitative strand allowed the researcher to identify broader trends, frequencies, and statistical relationships among variables. By combining these two methodological lenses, the study sought to move beyond isolated anecdotes or raw data points, instead weaving together a layered and credible portrait of how institutional childcare shapes maternal well-being and professional performance in Ethiopia's public sector.

### 3.2 Research Approach

The study was executed through two distinct but complementary research approaches. The qualitative component followed a case study strategy. In this phase, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposively selected group of mothers currently using the daycare facility. This approach allowed the researcher to explore the contextual and personal factors influencing mothers' childcare decisions within a specific institutional setting.

Parallel to this, the quantitative component utilized a descriptive survey design. A structured questionnaire was administered to a broader sample of working mothers. This survey gathered numeric data on key indicators such as



satisfaction, stress reduction, child development, and job performance. Together, these two approaches created a well-rounded data corpus that supported both contextual interpretation and generalizable insights.

### 3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted at the Federal Ministry of Revenue, located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. As one of the few public institutions to have implemented an on-site childcare facility, the Ministry provided a unique and relevant setting for examining the real-world impact of Ethiopia's 2018 childcare directive. The institutional daycare center, situated within walking distance from most office spaces, has been operating since 2022 and caters primarily to the children of female employees.

### 3.4 Study Population

The primary population of interest consisted of 200 female public employees at the Ministry of Revenue who had at least one child under the age of three enrolled in the on-site daycare facility. These women were selected because they represented direct beneficiaries of the childcare service and could provide rich insights into its effectiveness and limitations. In addition to the mothers, 20 institutional staff members, specifically, the daycare coordinator, a nurse, and a childcare assistant, were included as key informants in the qualitative portion of the study. Their perspectives were valuable for understanding institutional operations and policy implementation dynamics.

### 3.5 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

The study applied two different sampling techniques aligned with the respective methodological strands. For the qualitative component, a purposive sampling strategy was employed. Ten mothers and three key institutional informants were selected based on their usage of the daycare center and their willingness to participate in extended interviews. Selection criteria also considered diversity in job roles and family structures to ensure representativeness within the small sample.

For the quantitative strand, a stratified random sampling method was used to achieve a balanced representation of participants across different strata, including marital status, educational attainment, number of children, and job level. Accordingly, a total of 89 mothers who currently using the service were selected and surveyed. This sample size was deemed sufficient for descriptive and correlational analysis within the scope of this case study[20].

### 3.6 Data Collection Tools and Procedures

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, each lasting between 40 and 60 minutes. Interviews were conducted over the phone due to logistical considerations and were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent. The interviews were later transcribed verbatim and translated from Amharic into English. An interview guide was used to explore themes such as reasons for the daycare service, perceived benefits, experienced challenges, and emotional or professional outcomes.

Quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire that was developed based on themes emerging from the qualitative phase as well as relevant existing literature. The questionnaire included items capturing respondents' demographic and employment characteristics, Likert-scale measures assessing perceived benefits and influencing factors, and binary (yes/no) questions designed to identify challenges and patterns of service utilization. Data collection was conducted electronically, which ensured respondent anonymity and facilitated standardized data entry and secure data storage.

### 3.7 Data Analysis Methods

Qualitative data analysis followed a structured thematic analysis procedure, drawing on Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework. These phases included familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing and refining those themes, assigning them conceptual labels, and finally synthesizing findings in narrative form. Coding was conducted manually and, where necessary, supported by qualitative data analysis software (NVivo) to improve data organization.

Quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as means, percentages, and frequencies were computed to describe demographic attributes and response patterns. Furthermore, Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine potential relationships among key variables, such as the link between maternal stress reduction and job satisfaction, or between household income and reliance on institutional childcare. Visual charts and graphs were developed to facilitate interpretation and enhance clarity.

The choice of a mixed-methods approach was grounded in the desire to enrich both the depth and breadth of the analysis. The qualitative data illuminated the underlying motivations and emotional landscapes of working mothers, providing insight into not only what they experienced but why. Meanwhile, the quantitative data validated these insights at scale, offering statistical evidence of common patterns and shared outcomes.



This combination of methods enhanced the validity of the findings and allowed the study to transcend the limitations inherent in single-method research. It enabled a layered understanding of the structural, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of workplace childcare, capturing both the micro-level lived experiences and the macro-level institutional implications.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Findings

#### 4.1.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The quantitative survey captured responses from 89 mothers utilizing the Federal Ministry of Finance's childcare facility. Demographic analysis revealed notable diversity in household structures and educational backgrounds (Table 1). Marital status distribution showed 60% married, 20% single, and 20% divorced participants. Educational attainment varied significantly: 30.3% held MA degrees, 30.3% possessed BA degrees, 20.2% had diplomas, and 19.1% completed high school. Family composition data indicated 49.4% had one child, 20.2% had two children, and 30.3% had three children. Crucially, all participants had at least one child actively enrolled in the center, confirming the facility's relevance across socioeconomic strata. This heterogeneity strengthens the study's representativeness while highlighting childcare's universal importance for public sector employees.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents*

| Variable               | Category       | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Marital Status         | Married        | 60.0%          |
|                        | Single         | 20.0%          |
|                        | Divorced       | 20.0%          |
| Educational Attainment | MA Degree      | 30.3%          |
|                        | BA Degree      | 30.3%          |
|                        | Diploma        | 20.2%          |
|                        | High School    | 19.1%          |
| Number of Children     | One Child      | 49.4%          |
|                        | Two Children   | 20.2%          |
|                        | Three Children | 30.3%          |

#### 4.1.2 Factors Influencing Mothers' Use of Workplace Childcare

Quantitative Analysis demonstrated overwhelming consensus regarding utilization drivers. As presented in Table 2, *time scarcity* emerged as the predominant factor (mean=4.7, 94.4% agreement), followed closely by *perceived superiority of center services* (mean=4.6, 90.0%) and *dissatisfaction with home-based alternatives* (mean=4.5, 87.6%). Financial constraints (mean=4.3, 83.1%) and larger family demands (mean=4.1, 76.4%) further reinforced utilization decisions.

Qualitative Insights contextualized these metrics through compelling narratives. Participants consistently described grappling with "triple role exhaustion" – simultaneously navigating professional responsibilities, maternal duties, and household management. One mother's account epitomized this struggle: "*After maternity leave, I faced impossible choices between career continuity and my son's wellbeing. This center became my lifeline*" (Participant G). Multiple interviewees criticized private facilities, citing inadequate supervision and untrained caregivers as key push factors.

Theoretical Integration aligns with Spillover Theory's postulation that unresolved domestic burdens impair workplace functioning [1]. These findings further corroborate Morrissey and Warner's established linkage between childcare access and female labor participation [2], suggesting Ethiopia's policy initiative effectively addresses a critical barrier to gender equity in public service.

**Table 2**

*The Average Ratings for Key Influencing Factors on a 5-Point Likert Scale*

| Factor                              | Mean Score | % Agree (4 or 5) |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------------------|
| Limited time for childcare          | 4.7        | 94.4%            |
| Low quality of home-based care      | 4.5        | 87.6%            |
| Superior quality of center services | 4.6        | 90.0%            |
| Limited household income            | 4.3        | 83.1%            |
| Larger family size                  | 4.1        | 76.4%            |



### 4.1.3 Benefits of Workplace Childcare

Quantitative Outcomes (Table 3) revealed substantial benefits across personal and professional domains. Reduced maternal stress registered the highest agreement (93.3%, mean=4.7), followed by improved child health (91.0%, mean=4.6) and enhanced communication skills (88.8%, mean=4.5). Notably, 86.5% reported measurable job performance improvements, while financial relief through cost savings garnered 83.1% consensus.

**Table 3**

*Benefits of Daycare Services*

| Benefit                              | Mean Score | % Agree (4 or 5) |
|--------------------------------------|------------|------------------|
| Improved child health                | 4.6        | 91.0%            |
| Improved communication skills        | 4.5        | 88.8%            |
| Reduced maternal stress              | 4.7        | 93.3%            |
| Enhanced job performance             | 4.4        | 86.5%            |
| Cost savings                         | 4.3        | 83.1%            |
| Improved family/social relationships | 4.2        | 79.8%            |

Qualitative Elaboration provided rich illustrations of these metrics. Participants described observable developmental leaps in children, exemplified by one mother's observation: *"My son's transformation astonished us – within months, he gained language clarity and social confidence we hadn't witnessed before"* (Participant A). Professional impacts featured equally prominently, with another respondent noting: *"Constant anxiety about my toddler evaporated. For the first time, I deliver focused, quality work without distraction"* (Participant I).

Theoretical Reconciliation confirms Bowlby's Attachment Theory regarding proximity's developmental significance [3]. The correlation between reduced stress and enhanced productivity further validates findings on institutional childcare as a performance catalyst [4], while cost-benefit alignment with calculations underscores economic rationality [5].

### 4.1.4 Organizational Benefits

The key informants identified three main strategic advantages for the hiring organization associated with the provision of workplace childcare services. First, performance enhancement was evident, with documented productivity increases exceeding 40 percent among employees who utilized the facility. Second, the availability of childcare support contributed to improved talent retention, as resignation intentions declined by 76 percent among eligible mothers. Third, the organization experienced gains in reputational capital, reflected in a positive external perception as a family-friendly employer.

As noted by the daycare coordinator, *"We retained seven high-performing mothers who had submitted resignations prior to the implementation of the childcare service. Their continued excellence now benefits the entire institution"* (Key Informant X). These observations support the psychological outcomes associated with childcare support [6] and position workplace childcare facilities as investments in human capital rather than as welfare-oriented amenities.

### 4.1.5 Implementation Challenges

Quantitative Constraints surfaced through operational data (Table 4). *Age limitations* affected 80.9% of users, while *logistical burdens* from early preparation impacted 76.4%. Health concerns regarding *illness exposure* registered a 61.8% the challenges experienced while using the service.

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*Challenges Faced in Using the Facility*

| Challenge                       | Frequency | % of Respondents |
|---------------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Early morning disruptions       | 68        | 76.4%            |
| Exposure to illness (flu, etc.) | 55        | 61.8%            |
| Age limit constraints (under 3) | 72        | 80.9%            |

Qualitative Nuances exposed policy-practice disconnects. Mothers expressed frustration about children aged 3-4 being *"too old for the center but too young for school,"* forcing suboptimal care arrangements. Logistical strains emerged through accounts of pre-dawn routines: *"Waking sleeping infants at 5 AM for commutes feels contrary to the policy's intent"* (Participant D).



Comparative Analysis echoes Addis's findings on systemic limitations in Ethiopian childcare [7]. These operational hurdles reflect broader Global South challenges where regulatory frameworks outpace implementation capacity, particularly regarding age eligibility harmonization and resource allocation.

## 4.2 Correlation Dynamics

As shown in Table 5, Pearson correlation analysis revealed statistically significant relationships among key variables. Perceptions of childcare quality were positively associated with work satisfaction, showing a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.60$  ( $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, reductions in stress were significantly related to improved job performance ( $r = 0.55$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Income level was negatively correlated with stress reduction ( $r = -0.35$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that employees with lower incomes experienced greater stress relief from childcare services. These findings underscore the dual function of workplace childcare as both an intervention for employee well-being and a mechanism for organizational efficiency. The inverse relationship between income and stress reduction also highlights the service's redistributive potential for lower-income civil servants.

**Table 5**

*Pearson Correlation between Key Variables*

| Variables                                        | Correlation Coefficient (r) | Significance (p) |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Childcare quality perception – Work satisfaction | 0.60                        | < 0.01           |
| Stress reduction – Job performance               | 0.55                        | < 0.01           |
| Income level – Stress reduction                  | -0.35                       | < 0.05           |

The integrated analysis reveals quantitative patterns gain depth through qualitative narratives. High stress-reduction metrics (93.3%) transformed from abstract percentages into visceral accounts of psychological liberation. Conversely, logistical challenge statistics acquired texture through descriptions of sleep-deprived infants on public transit. This synergy validates the mixed-methods approach while exposing policy-action gaps: despite high satisfaction (mean=4.6), systemic constraints inhibit universal benefit realization.

The findings collectively endorse institutional childcare as a triple-win intervention – advancing maternal well-being, child development, and organizational performance. However, optimal impact requires addressing identified operational limitations through age-eligibility expansion, logistical support mechanisms, and cross-ministerial resource sharing.

## 4.3 Discussion

This section presents a comprehensive discussion and interpretation of the key findings based on the research questions and objectives of the study. The results from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses are critically examined, considering existing literature and relevant theoretical frameworks, particularly spillover theory and attachment theory.

The demographic profile revealed a diverse group of participants, both in marital status and educational background, all of whom were actively engaged in public employment and utilized workplace childcare. The high percentage of mothers with one or two children and the wide educational representation suggests that workplace childcare serves not only low-income or undereducated mothers but a cross-section of professional women. This reinforces the need for inclusive childcare policies that cater to varied workforce demographics.

The high mean scores in quantitative findings and strong agreement percentages highlight time scarcity, household economic limitations, and dissatisfaction with domestic childcare as primary motivators for using institutional daycare. The qualitative narratives vividly confirmed these constraints. According to Spillover Theory [1], unresolved family challenges such as unreliable childcare negatively affect work performance. This was clearly reflected in participants' testimonies, where childcare availability was framed as essential to maintaining employment and professional performance.

The study also aligns with findings in the U.S. that institutional childcare boosts maternal labor force participation [2]. In the Ethiopian context, where extended family or community-based childcare is traditionally assumed to substitute institutional care, these findings challenge cultural assumptions and reflect a shift in urban mothers' needs and preferences. The results affirm the significant individual and organizational benefits of workplace childcare services. Statistically, reduced maternal stress and improved child health emerged as dominant benefits. Qualitative accounts further highlighted the emotional relief experienced by mothers, citing reduced anxiety, improved punctuality, and enhanced focus at work.

These benefits repeat Bowlby's Attachment Theory [3], which emphasizes that physical and emotional proximity to caregivers in the early stages of child development fosters secure attachment and emotional regulation.



Workplace childcare allows mothers to remain emotionally available and physically accessible, thereby enhancing the child's sense of security while promoting professional continuity.

Additionally, organizational benefits such as improved retention and enhanced morale resonate with studies by [4], who found that employee productivity is positively influenced when companies offer on-site childcare. In the Ethiopian public sector, where employee turnover and productivity challenges are common, such findings have clear managerial relevance.

Despite the high satisfaction rates, the study found several operational challenges. Age eligibility was cited as the most limiting factor, as children over three were not allowed to continue using the daycare. This created a disruptive care gap for mothers until their children were eligible for school. The early-morning burden and the child's exposure to illness were also noted. These constraints reflect systemic weaknesses in Ethiopia's institutional childcare model. While the 2018 directive legally mandates childcare, it lacks robust implementation guidelines, quality control frameworks, or expansion plans. This parallels findings in other developing nations where policy intentions are not matched by infrastructure or administrative support [7]. Thus, while the service at the Ministry of Finance is an encouraging model, its limitations signal the need for broader reform and cross-sectoral collaboration.

The Pearson correlation results offer deeper insight into the psychological and behavioral mechanisms underlying daycare utilization. A positive correlation between daycare quality and job satisfaction ( $r = 0.60$ ) suggests that workplace childcare serves as a mediating factor between personal well-being and professional performance. Similarly, the correlation between stress reduction and job output ( $r = 0.55$ ) confirms that emotional security fosters efficiency. Interestingly, income was inversely related to stress ( $r = -0.35$ ), suggesting that mothers with lower income levels may experience heightened anxiety when childcare is unavailable or unreliable, making them more reliant on institutional support. This finding highlights the equity dimension of childcare and suggests its role in supporting vulnerable economic groups.

This study's findings resonate with gender role theory [5], which contends that societal expectations disproportionately assign caregiving responsibilities to women, often at the expense of career progression. Institutional childcare, as demonstrated in this study, disrupts this dynamic by structurally supporting mothers in maintaining professional identities alongside caregiving roles. Moreover, the study affirms international research emphasizing the macro-level impacts of workplace childcare on economic productivity and gender equity [6]. By retaining women in the workforce and reducing time lost to caregiving responsibilities, such services contribute directly to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

#### 4.3.1 Organizational Human Resource Strategy

The findings demonstrate that accessible, high-quality childcare services within the workplace significantly reduce maternal stress, increase productivity, and enhance employee retention. These benefits align with global findings, which show that onsite childcare leads to lower absenteeism and improved morale [1]. Thus, institutions should consider integrating childcare facilities into their human resource policies, treating them not merely as welfare initiatives but as strategic tools for workforce efficiency and retention. Government ministries and large employers should establish dedicated budget lines and administrative capacity for sustainable onsite childcare centers.

#### 4.3.2 Employee Well-being and Performance

The strong correlation between reduced stress and improved job performance confirms that workplace childcare directly contributes to employee well-being. This aligns with the Spillover Theory [2], which suggests that support in one life domain (family) positively impacts another (work). Investment in family-friendly services like on-site childcare should be positioned as core to gender-inclusive workforce development.

#### 4.3.3 Implications for Future Research

This study provides a foundation for larger, multi-institutional research examining the effects of workplace childcare services on long-term job retention, women's empowerment, child development outcomes, and gender equity in career advancement. Future investigations should also incorporate the perspectives of male employees, non-user mothers, and institutional administrators, groups that were not fully represented in the current study. Such research would deepen understanding of the broader impact and potential of workplace childcare in diverse institutional and social contexts.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

Workplace childcare services are shown to be instrumental in supporting maternal well-being, child development, and employee performance. Mothers utilize the service mainly due to time constraints, limited



alternatives, and financial considerations. The facility contributes to improved child health, enhanced cognitive development, reduced maternal stress, and increased workplace productivity. Significant correlations between perceived childcare quality, stress reduction, and job satisfaction highlight its effectiveness in promoting both employee well-being and organizational efficiency. While challenges such as age restrictions and early-morning preparation stress exist, the findings underscore the essential value of institutional childcare as a support mechanism for working mothers.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Although Ethiopia's 2018 directive on workplace childcare represents a progressive step, its implementation remains limited in both coverage and effectiveness. Many ministries have yet to operationalize the service, and gaps persist regarding age eligibility, resource allocation, and institutional accountability. To address these issues, the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs should consider revising the policy to expand eligibility beyond children aged three, include fathers as co-beneficiaries, and provide legal mechanisms to ensure adequate resource allocation across public institutions. Such revisions would advance gender-responsive public administration, in line with the principles outlined by the United Nations.

Currently, the policy is primarily applicable to federal public institutions in urban centers, leaving working women in the private sector and rural cooperatives without institutional childcare support. Extending the policy to include private organizations above a certain employee threshold, as well as rural microenterprises and agricultural cooperatives where women are active contributors, would promote broader inclusion. Evidence from South Asia and Latin America demonstrates that small-scale, employer-supported care models in such contexts can enhance women's economic participation.

## Declaration of conflict of interest

The authors declare no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

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