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# **Who Minds About The Minders ?**

**Angela Coulter**



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**Angela Coulter**

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Cover by Emma MacLennan from a photograph by Kate Bruner



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# Contents

	Page
INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDMINDING	1
<i>Day-care for the children of working parents - childminders and homeworking</i>	
1. CHILDMINDING IN PERSPECTIVE	5
<i>Early history - Legislation - The need for support - Day-care on the cheap - What about the minders? - Other People's Children - The debate about quality of care - Professional childminders?</i>	
2. THE CHILDMINDERS	13
<i>The Low Pay Unit survey - Where they came from - The children they cared for - The childminders' backgrounds - Their earnings - The working day - Payment for absence - Why work as a child-minder? - Previous occupations - Summary</i>	
3. WHY ARE CHILDMINDERS LOW PAID?	25
<i>No standard rates - Subsidising low paid mothers - The labour market - Stigma - A responsible and demanding job</i>	
4. WHAT IS BEING DONE?	31
<i>Salaried minding - Sponsored or fee-paid minding - Training - Free milk - Insurance - Equipment loan - Other support - The National Picture - The Government's View</i>	
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	39
<i>A comprehensive state-funded day-care system - Direct employment of childminders - Training and support for childminders - The National Childminding Association</i>	

# Introduction: The Importance of Childminding

The postwar years have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of women entering employment and the rate of increase has been fastest among married women, especially those with young children.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that more than half of all women with dependent children are now engaged in paid employment.

A number of reasons for this increased female participation in the labour force can be identified, including industry's demand for labour during the years of postwar expansion and women's concern to participate more fully in the economy and society. There is also evidence that, for many families with children, the contribution of two wage-earners has become a financial necessity. Official estimates suggest that the number of families in poverty would treble if it were not for the additional earnings of married women.<sup>2</sup>

The ability of families to maintain two sources of earnings depends on their ability to make provision for the care of children. Yet the increase in female employment has not been accompanied by an equivalent increase in the provision of day-care facilities by local authorities or employers.

This report is not primarily concerned to demonstrate the need for more and better child care facilities: the case has been ably put by the Equal Opportunities Commission<sup>3</sup> and Hughes et al<sup>4</sup> among others. However it is important to see childminding within the overall context of day-care provision.

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## DAY CARE FOR THE CHILDREN OF WORKING PARENTS

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The existing facilities can be divided roughly into four sectors: local authority provision, workplace provision, voluntary provision and private provision.

Local authorities run day nurseries and nursery schools and classes

for the under fives. Day nurseries provide all-day care (usually 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m.), but normally only for 'priority' children on the basis of special need:

*"These may include children of working lone parents, children with a mental or physical handicap, those whose home environment is so socially impoverished or so strained that day care is considered necessary for their welfare, and those whose parents are through illness or handicap unable to look after them during the day."*<sup>5</sup>

The latest official figures on state day nursery provision in England (31st March 1977)<sup>6</sup> showed 27,400 under fives being cared for in 582 nurseries. At the same time there were nearly 10,000 'priority' children on the waiting lists for day nursery care. So state provision was inadequate to meet even the government's limited definition of those in need of day care.

The bulk of local authority provision for the under fives is in schools run by local education authorities. In January 1980, 215,451 children were attending nursery schools or classes in England.<sup>7</sup> These places are normally open to those three and four year olds who happen to live within a nursery school's catchment area. They are only open in term-time and the majority of places are part-time so they cannot cater for the day-care needs of working parents.

Local authority day-care provision for the over-fives in the form of before and after-school and holiday provision in playcentres is similarly scarce and in many parts of the country there is virtually none.<sup>8</sup>

Most working parents are therefore forced to look elsewhere for the care of their children. The majority probably make informal arrangements with relatives or friends. Fonda and Moss<sup>9</sup> quote several local studies undertaken in the late '60s and early '70s which show that relatives, neighbours and fathers remained the major alternative to care by the child's mother. Many children are cared for in a number of different ways during the course of a week. It is partly for this reason that it has been so difficult to estimate the true extent of unregistered childminding - recent estimates range widely between 50,000 and 300,000 children being cared for by 'illegal' minders. In the absence of a national survey though, these figures remain at the level of guesswork.

Workplace nurseries provide for only a tiny minority of the children of working parents - not more than 3,000 places - and there is evidence that this provision is rapidly diminishing as the recession deepens.

The voluntary sector consists mainly of playgroups, which cater for large numbers of children (about 590,000 in England and Wales in June 1977<sup>10</sup>), but on a very part-time basis - as with nursery classes the hours are usually too short to be of much benefit to working parents.

So the vast majority of working parents looking for formal day-care



arrangements for their children are forced on to the private market. In 1979 the number of full-time day-care places in England and Wales was 121,000 - equivalent to 40 places per 1,000 children under five. Of these, 2% were in workplace nurseries, 18% in private day nurseries, 23% in local authority day nurseries and the greatest proportion, 57%, with childminders.<sup>11</sup>

## CHILDMINDERS AND HOMEWORKING

According to official figures, the number of registered childminders has been steadily rising: from 24,300<sup>12</sup> in 1972 to 30,000<sup>13</sup> in 1980 in England alone. The most recent figure for the UK as a whole was 43,000 childminders registered to care for 106,000 children.<sup>14</sup> However, these figures should be treated with some caution. They are an estimate based on local authority returns, and it is known that local authority childminding lists are frequently out of date, take no account of the actual numbers of children cared for and do not include the school-age children cared for by minders. In addition, we have no way of knowing whether this apparent increase in childminding represents a real increase or simply an increase in the number of minders coming forward to be registered.

But if childminders are the main form of formal day-care provision, providing for many families the only means of attaining the second wage necessary to drive a wedge between their current living standards and poverty, the childminders themselves are extremely vulnerable. As we shall demonstrate, childminding is a poorly paid occupation. In part this is because the working mothers who use their services are often themselves low paid. Child care costs represent a large proportion of net earnings for many working women. Childminders charge varying rates according to what they think parents can or will pay. The expenses they face (including heating, food and equipment) further reduce their net rewards. Childminding also tends to provide an insecure form of employment, the demand for their services reflecting fluctuations in the general demand for women in the labour force.

The need to combine work and domestic responsibilities acts as a major constraint on women who choose to enter the labour market. These domestic responsibilities usually include the care of dependents, both young children and elderly or disabled relatives. The lack of adequate childcare facilities and facilities for the elderly and disabled, has forced many women into low-paid part-time employment,<sup>15</sup> or into homeworking. A Low Pay Unit survey of homeworkers in 1979 found nearly half receiving less than 40p per hour, and many suffering considerable hidden costs not covered by their employers<sup>16</sup>.

Childminding is a form of homework, and childminders share many of

the characteristics of homeworkers employed in manufacturing or service industries: they tend to be mainly, though not exclusively, women, who choose to work at home in order to combine work and domestic responsibilities. As we shall see, they share many of the disadvantages of isolation and poor rewards experienced by other groups of homeworkers.

This report begins by looking briefly at the history of childminding and the current legislation. We discuss some of the differing views of childminding and outline the areas of debate. The second section describes the findings of a recent Low Pay Unit survey of 833 childminders which revealed the following disturbing facts:

- \* full-time minders were earning an average net income of less than £16 per week
- \* this was for an average working week of 42 hours
- \* most received no holiday pay and no sickness pay
- \* the majority received minimal support from their local authorities.

In the third section we look at the reasons why childminders receive such low rates of pay. We go on to describe the measures currently being taken by local authorities and central government to support childminders, and conclude with recommendations for future action.

# Childminding in Perspective

## EARLY HISTORY

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, when economic and social changes led to women with children working outside the home in increasingly large numbers, the care of their children while they are at work has been a major problem. For the most part this has been a problem in which the State has not seen fit to intervene, leaving the women to make their own arrangements as best they can. The main exception to this rule was during the Second World War when the increased need for female labour occasioned a rapid increase in the provision of state day nurseries to cater for the children of the women who were drafted in to the factories. But after the War most of the nurseries were closed down and mothers were once again left to make their own arrangements.

Childminding, or the care of other people's children in the home for payment, therefore has a long history. R. I. Mawby describes the concern of Victorian reformers in the 1860s about the quality of care received by children in the care of 'baby farmers', as they were then called. They were concerned that

*"if profit was the primary motive behind baby-farming, one would expect the farmer to be most interested in how much money she could make, and only secondly in the welfare of her charges."*<sup>17</sup>

This belief, that earning a decent wage and providing high quality care for the children are incompatible, has persisted and, as we shall see, continues to influence attitudes to childminding today.

## LEGISLATION

Legislation was introduced at the turn of the century to regulate fostering and adoption, but the care of children during the day was

excluded, according to Mawby,

*"because of fears that it would interfere with the liberty of the individual and discourage childminding, with a resulting decline in the female workforce."*

The major piece of legislation affecting childminders was introduced in 1948 prompted by the tragic case of children who died while in the care of a childminder when an oil heater overturned causing a fire. Under the Nurseries and Childminders Regulation Act of 1948, local health authorities were required to register "persons in their area who for reward receive into their homes children under the age of five to be looked after".

Following further reports expressing concern about the quality of care received by the children, the legislation was strengthened by the Health Services and Public Health Act of 1968. In the 1968 Act a childminder was defined as a person who looks after a child to whom she is not related, for reward and in her own home, for more than a total of two hours a day.

The local authorities have the power to impose certain requirements and to refuse registration if those requirements are not met. These requirements may include a restriction in the numbers of under fives cared for by a childminder at any one time, the use of safety precautions such as fire guards, etc., adequate arrangements for feeding the children, the keeping of records, and precautions against exposure to infectious disease. Failure to register is a prosecutable offence, and anyone caught minding children illegally can be subject to a fine or a short prison sentence. In practice though, such prosecutions are rare.

The 1968 Act was accompanied by Circulars issued by the Ministry of Health giving guidance on the supervision of childminders, and recommending training and other support and allowing for payment or sponsorship of childminders caring for children from the 'priority' groups. But the only mandatory obligation on the local authorities was, and still is, to 'police' registration. In 1970 the Local Authority Social Services Act passed the responsibility for registration of childminders from the Health Departments to the newly-formed Social Services Departments.

## THE NEED FOR SUPPORT

The early 1970s witnessed another wave of public concern about childminding. In an article in *New Society*,<sup>18</sup> Brian Jackson, who spent many years researching childminding, drew attention to poor standards among illegal, i.e. unregistered, childminders. At that time he estimated that up to 100,000 children were in the care of illegal childminders who had no contact with the statutory authorities and whose standards



of child care must provide cause for concern. Jackson argued that the law, by taking a punitive line, had simply driven the problem deeper underground. What was required instead was a positive and supportive attitude towards childminding - the minders should be trained and helped to provide good quality care.

Some local authorities began to develop services for childminders. Training courses were developed, drop-in centres were opened, toy and equipment loan schemes were set up, and a few sponsored and even salaried minding schemes were started. By 1975, 53 local authorities in England and Wales provided some sort of service for childminders,<sup>19</sup> but in many cases these services reached only a small proportion of the minders in an area, and there were still many local authorities who restricted themselves simply to carrying out their statutory duty to register childminders. Not surprisingly, in some of these areas very few childminders were registered, because no positive effort was made to induce them to register. For many childminders there was no incentive whatsoever to undergo the lengthy process of registration, other than to 'stay within the law', and indeed it is probable that many women minding children remained ignorant of the requirement to register. Similarly, since registration in no way implies a guarantee of the quality of care offered, there was little incentive for parents to inquire whether the person looking after their children was registered or not.

#### DAY-CARE ON THE CHEAP

In January 1976, the Department of Health and Social Security and the Department of Education and Science organised a conference in Sunningdale revealingly entitled 'Low Cost Day Provision for the Under Fives'.<sup>20</sup> A DHSS-sponsored OPCS survey<sup>21</sup> had revealed that there was a large unmet demand for day care. Nevertheless it was obvious that there was to be no massive injection of resources to provide nursery places for all those children whose parents needed and wanted them. 'Low cost' was to be the order of the day. Parents would have to continue to make do with the private and voluntary sector provision that was available to them - playgroups, for part-time care, and childminders for the children of working parents. With the reductions in statutory services now taking place, this approach is once again in the ascendency.

Encouraging childminding fitted well with the newly-fashionable emphasis on 'community care'. Institutional provision was increasingly coming under attack, and a return to the 'caring human response' of local communities was advocated. But too often this was an excuse for placing the whole burden of responsibility for the elderly, the disabled and children on to women at home, without giving them the necessary additional support.

The Government's favourable view of childminding provides an interesting case-study of this approach. Much was made at the Sunningdale conference of the virtues, or potential virtues, of these 'cheap' forms of provision. Brian Jackson described childminding as a "breakthrough point in the cycle of deprivation" and "an unusual and conspicuously low cost way of vitally helping poorer families". But it was left to Professor Jack Tizard to draw attention to the low and exploited status of childminders and their very poor rates of pay:

*"Most childminders do the job for their own convenience - and often short-term - because it fits with their domestic commitments, not out of informed, caring interest in children. The very poor rates of pay are an indication of their low and exploited status, and of the residual nature of the job. (Proof: no one ever thinks of asking men to take it on.)"*<sup>22</sup>

#### WHAT ABOUT THE MINDERS?

The early emphasis on cruel and neglectful treatment of children had meant that few people had looked at the childminders' working conditions with any sympathy. An exception to this was a study of working mothers and childminding in ethnic minority communities published in 1975 by the Community Relations Commission.<sup>23</sup> This revealed that childminders were working very long hours for very poor rates of pay - the average gross income for a working week of over 40 hours was £15 per week, but in the absence of detailed information about expenses incurred it was not possible to estimate the net income of minders in this survey.

The childminders' cause was taken up by the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) when the Sutton Childminders Action Group affiliated to the union in 1974. The union produced a Childminders' Charter<sup>24</sup> which called for direct employment of childminders by the local authorities; a substantial increase in the rates of pay and improvements in conditions of service for all daily minders, linked to formal negotiating machinery at national level; training for all childminders in aspects of child care; greatly improved communications between local authorities and childminders; and proper guidance to be given to both parents and childminders on their responsibilities. NUPE argued that the existing system, whereby the minders are self-employed and charge varying rates for the children in their care, undermines the local authorities' attempts to control minding by registration and other support. The low level of rates of pay encourage a high turnover of minders which has disturbing implications for the continuity of care on offer to the children, and means that efforts to train minders in better child care practice can have little long-term effect. In addition, they

act as an incentive for minders to take more children than they are registered for, or indeed as a positive disincentive to register at all, since they can then take on as many children as is necessary to raise their earnings to 'acceptable' standards. In other words, attempts to raise standards of childminding will largely fail unless the minders' remuneration and conditions of service also improve.

A similar view of childminding was taken by the TUC Working Party on Under Fives<sup>25</sup> and the Labour Party Working Party on Under Fives<sup>26</sup>. These organisations all agreed that the existing system of registration did not work and should be scrapped and replaced by a new legislative framework under which local authorities would be obliged to employ childminders directly and provide them with training and support. The TUC Charter on Under Fives published in 1978 made the following firm recommendation:

*"Childminders should be employed by local authorities; attached to nursery centres and day nurseries; and provided with back-up services. New legislation on childminding should be introduced laying down minimum national standards. Local authorities should have a statutory duty to administer and enforce such legislation."*<sup>27</sup>

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## OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN

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There were one or two experimental salaried minding schemes, such as the Groveway Project in Lambeth<sup>28</sup>. But these usually catered for 'priority' children only and still left the minders with very low incomes. And the legislation remained unchanged. No major shift of resources into childminding or any other form of day care occurred. Some local authorities did the best they could, given the limited resources available to them. Those who were genuinely attempting to improve the childminding service in their areas were given a boost when, in 1977, the BBC broadcast a series of programmes entitled 'Other People's Children'. In the words of the producer, the aim of this series was "to improve the public image of the minder, and to create a sense of importance in her work."<sup>29</sup>

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## THE NATIONAL CHILDMINDING ASSOCIATION

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One of the results of the BBC series was the setting up of the National Childminding Association (NCMA). Since its inauguration in December 1977 its membership has grown rapidly to over 5,000 in the space of 3 years. The objects of the Association are as follows:

- \* To foster and promote the provision of educational, happy, secure and stimulating day care facilities for young children and to encourage the recognition of childminding as a positive part of this provision.
- \* To encourage contact and communication between childminders, mainly by publication of a quarterly newsletter.
- \* To encourage the setting up of local groups.
- \* To provide help and advice to those looking after other people's children so that the quality of the service to children may be improved.

The NCMA now has a national office run by five part-time staff, and a National Executive Committee made up of elected childminders representing twelve different regions of the country. They have set up working parties to look at various areas of concern to childminders, including pay and conditions, training and legislation. They provide help and assistance to minders wanting to set up local groups, and they organise regional and national conferences.

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## THE DEBATE ABOUT QUALITY OF CARE

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Childminding continues to be a highly contentious issue. The debate tends to be polarised between those who believe that childminders provide the best form of alternative care for the children of working mothers, and those who believe that the care provided by minders is inferior to any form of collective care.

The position adopted by participants in this debate usually reflects their overall attitudes towards mothers working outside the home, which in turn is influenced by their different perspectives on child development. For instance, Penelope Leach, the writer of several influential books on child care, believes that children need the individual care of their mother throughout their early years, and that maternal deprivation can result in harmful long-term effects on the child's development. In the event of the mother having to go out to work, she sees substitute mothering in the form of childminding as the only answer. Leach sees the minders' lack of professionalism as a positive advantage since it makes them more like the children's own mothers, and she warns against too much local authority intervention because it might detract from the 'home-like' qualities of the minders' care.<sup>30</sup>



The basis for this belief has been critically examined by a number of researchers and found wanting. Bowlby's theory of maternal deprivation which underpins many of these ideas has been largely discredited. Rutter<sup>31</sup>, Schaffer<sup>32</sup>, and others, have shown that children have the ability to make attachments to several adult figures and that there is no reason for believing that an exclusive attachment to one 'mother-figure' is essential for healthy development. In addition, some recent research into childminding has cast doubt on the idea that most childminders are 'mother substitutes' in terms of the quality of the relationships they have with the children in their care.

Berry Mayall and Pat Petrie of the Thomas Coram Research Unit published a study in 1977 of childminding in two inner London boroughs which came to disturbing conclusions. They looked at childminding from the viewpoint of all three people involved in the relationship - minder, mother and child - and found it deficient in all respects.

*"The minders we saw were doing an insecure job involving conflicting roles. They were overworked and underpaid..... The children spent a low-level, under-stimulated day in unchanging, often cramped surroundings. Many did not get the love and attention they needed..... Most of the mothers were not satisfied with the standards of care offered."*<sup>33</sup>

The recently-published study by the Oxford Pre-School Research Group into childminding in Oxfordshire provided further cause for concern. Bryant, Harris and Newton found

*"only about one child in four whom we felt unequivocally was well-adjusted, active, socially outgoing, and boisterously playing in the way that young children should be. The great majority, some seven in ten, were noticeably quiet, detached and subdued at the minder's and were not, we felt, thriving."*<sup>34</sup>

In most cases Bryant, Harris and Newton felt that the children's unhappiness stemmed from problems at home rather than at the minder's, but the untrained minders were unable to give these children the special care they needed.

Sheila Shinman<sup>35</sup> is critical of the underlying assumptions of some of these studies, arguing that there is a tendency to cast the minder either in the role of 'mother' or 'teacher' and to judge her accordingly, when in fact she is neither. She concluded, as a result of her researches into minding in two inner London areas, that

*"the vast majority of minders were caring for other people's children as competently as they had done or were doing for their own children"*

and that given appropriate support, standards could be raised.

All these studies were agreed on the crucial importance of increasing support and training for childminders, if they were to be helped to do a good job: there was a clear implication that there must be a

considerable increase in the level of public resources channelled into childminding if the service was to improve. However all this research has so far failed to stimulate any change in successive governments' laissez-faire attitude towards day-care in general, and childminding in particular.

It is not surprising then if in the midst of all these conflicting attitudes - *mother substitute or the working parents' last resort, ideal form of community care or the government's cheap alternative* - the position of the childminders themselves, as workers, tends to get forgotten.

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## PROFESSIONAL CHILDMINDERS?

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An issue which has been discussed in several of the research reports has been the extent to which childminders see themselves, or could potentially see themselves, as professional child care workers. The debate about whether minders could, should, or want to, be salaried workers employed by local authorities, hinges around this issue. Bruner<sup>36</sup> asserts that *"the minder does not see herself as a professional in any way"*; Shinman however, sees two types of childminder - those who respond positively to the notion of professional status, who are keen to be trained and who would like to be salaried employees, and others who are home-orientated and who do not necessarily view childminding as a job or potential career. Whether these 'home-orientated' minders would change their view if a well-paid career looking after children was a real possibility, remains to be seen.

The rapid growth of the National Childminding Association suggests that the 'professionally-orientated' minders may be on the increase. Many of the NCMA members meet regularly in their local groups or drop-in centres. This allows for the possibility of mutual support and joint action to improve their position. The NCMA membership survey therefore provided a valuable opportunity to discover how these childminders, possibly the most dynamic and highly motivated of all registered minders, were faring in terms of the wages they earned, their conditions of work and the amount of support they received from their local authorities.

# The Childminders

## THE LOW PAY UNIT SURVEY

In December 1980, the Low Pay Unit, in collaboration with the National Childminding Association, distributed a questionnaire to NCMA members asking for detailed information about their work, the number of children they looked after, the fees they charged, the expenses they incurred in doing their job, and the level of support they received from their local authorities, together with background information about themselves and their families. Space was left on the questionnaire for respondents to make any comments they wished to about childminding and about the development of the NCMA. Many used the opportunity to comment in full, and some of these comments have been used to illustrate this report.

The results reported here are based on the replies of 833 minders who completed and returned the questionnaires. Between them they looked after over 2,000 children (not including their own). In terms of the number of respondents, we believe this is the largest single survey of registered childminders carried out in this country to date, representing almost two per cent of all childminders registered in the UK.

Altogether, approximately 3,000 questionnaires were distributed. Overall, about one in three of these were completed and returned. Unfortunately it is not possible to calculate a true 'response rate' for the survey as a whole because 2,000 of the questionnaires were distributed via leaders of 188 NCMA local groups. We do not know how many of these actually reached individual childminders, this being dependent on the number of minders which each group leader was able to contact personally in the month or two following the mailing. The true response rate which our 833 returns represented may therefore have been much higher than one third. A response rate of this level is not uncommon in postal surveys, and the timing of the mailing (just before Christmas), together with the length and detail of the questionnaire, may have inhibited the response further. The important

question to ask is whether the registered childminders who responded to our survey differed in important respects from registered childminders as a whole. Wherever possible we have compared the characteristics of our respondents with those of other surveys to draw attention to similarities or differences. This suggests that our respondents displayed no consistently 'peculiar' characteristics which would invalidate the findings.

However, we should point out that the findings of this survey cannot claim to be representative of all childminders: for one thing, the respondents to this survey were almost without exception registered childminders, so it provides us with no new information about the nature and extent of unregistered minding. Furthermore, the NCMA members are likely to be among the most well-favoured childminders in terms of their knowledge of and access to the support available from local authorities. Many of the local NCMA groups were set up with the active support of social workers. In addition, the more 'career-oriented' minders are likely to be over-represented in this sample.

## WHERE THEY CAME FROM

The use of a postal questionnaire enabled us to gather information from minders in all regions of the country. Replies were received from childminders in 102 of the 134 local authority social services areas in the UK. The relative response from different areas was somewhat uneven, as can be seen from the table below: for example, the London boroughs were under-represented in our sample when compared with the total number of registered childminders in the area.

TABLE 1: REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSES COMPARED WITH TOTAL NUMBER OF REGISTERED CHILDMINDERS IN THOSE REGIONS<sup>37</sup>

	No. of replies	% of sample	Total minders 31st Mar 1977	% of total
Northern	51	6	636	2
Yorks and Humber	50	6	2,220	6
North West	87	10	3,419	10
West Midlands	64	8	3,753	11
East Midlands	114	14	2,923	8
London North	148	18	5,978	17
Inner London	22	2	2,900	8
Outer London	66	8	5,227	15
South	140	17	5,077	14
South West	43	5	1,380	4
Scotland	14	2	814	2
Wales	14	2	459	1
N. Ireland	8	1	705	2



## THE CHILDREN THEY CARED FOR

All the respondents were either registered childminders or in the process of being registered (a procedure which sometimes takes several months to complete). The registration certificate normally stipulates the maximum number of full-time places that the childminder is allowed to offer, and when fixing this number the local authority normally takes into account the minder's own children aged under five. The DHSS recommend a total of 3 full-time places including the minder's own children, but some local authorities register minders to care for more than 3. There is normally no restriction on the numbers of school-age children, who are virtually ignored in the legislation.

TABLE 2: NOS. OF REGISTERED PLACES PER MINDER AND NOS. ACTUALLY MINDED (NOT INCLUDING MINDERS OWN CHILDREN)

No. of children	Registered full-time places for under 5s		Children actually minded inc. part-time & over 5s	
	No. of minders	% of sample	No. of minders	% of sample
1	84	10	230	29
2	314	38	218	28
3	355	43	143	18
4	45	6	87	11
5	16	2	48	6
more than 5	8	1	58	7

As can be seen from the above table, the majority of minders were registered to care for 2 or 3 under fives and most were in fact caring for a total of one or two children of any age (not including their own). The average (mean) number of children per minder, including part-time and school-age children was 2.7. (A few respondents who were not currently minding any children or who gave no details of numbers of children were omitted from these calculations.)

There was little evidence in this survey of over-minding, i.e. caring for more children than registered places allow for. As has been pointed out, registration does not usually limit the number of school-age children who can be cared for in addition to the under-fives, and most of the minders who cared for 4 or more children had them for only part of the day, sometimes at different times of the day. In a few cases where the numbers were above average, respondents explained that they minded with a friend or ran what were in effect small playgroups. It could be argued that if respondents were caring for more children than allowed for, they would not have admitted it in the survey. It seems unlikely, however, in view of the detailed information provided, that a significant proportion of respondents were giving false information, and most of the other studies confirm

our impression that registered minders do not, on the whole, over-mind.

The CRC survey of 186 minders in Manchester, Leicester and Lambeth<sup>38</sup>, showed numbers of children per minder in strikingly similar proportions to our survey, and Berry Mayall and Pat Petrie of the Thomas Coram Research Unit, who conducted a second study of minders in London in 1977/78<sup>39</sup> found that they were caring for an average of 4.7 children including their own, of which only 3 were aged under five. Bryant et al<sup>40</sup> interviewed 66 active childminders in Oxfordshire and found that over two-thirds of them were minding only one child, not including their own. In Oxfordshire the supply of minders exceeded the demand for places - two-thirds of the sample had vacancies though only a small number were actively looking for more children to mind. Obviously the demand for places, and probably the supply as well, will be affected to a considerable extent by the state of the labour market locally and the existence of alternative opportunities for women's employment.

In all, the respondents were looking after a total of 2,098 children, of whom 30% were full-time (over 30 hours per week) and 70% were part-time (30 hours or less) or only cared for in the school holidays. 25% of the total were school-age children. If we exclude the school-age children, 40% of the under-fives spent more than 30 hours per week at the minder's. The 60% who were cared for by minders for less than 30 hours per week were either the children of part-time workers (two-thirds of working mothers are in part-time jobs), or were among the relatively large number of children for whom childminding was not the only form of care outside the home. Of the 1,568 under-fives cared for by the minders in our sample, 441 or 28% also attended a playgroup or a nursery.

## THE CHILDMINDERS' BACKGROUNDS

All the respondents were women. There are reputedly a few men who are registered as childminders but we did not come across any of them. Just over half had been childminding for less than 3 years, but some had been doing the job for 10 years or more.

TABLE 3: LENGTH OF TIME WORKING AS A CHILDMINDER

	no.	%
Less than 1 year	177	22
1 year, but less than 3	274	33
3 years, but less than 5	159	19
5 years, but less than 10	148	18
10 years or more	68	8



Once again, the minders in the CRC survey had been working for similar lengths of time, though more than half in the second TCRC survey had been childminding for more than 5 years. Proportions in the Oxford study were similar to ours, with about a quarter having more than 5 years' previous experience of minding. The length of time spent childminding is also likely to be affected to a certain extent by other locally available employment opportunities.

The majority of minders in our study were married (94%) and in their thirties. 28% were aged below 30 and 16% were 40 or over. 51% of the minders had children of their own aged under five, and 77% had school-age children (5-15 years). (35% had both under-fives and school-age children). Only 6% had no children under 16 living with them.

#### THEIR EARNINGS

The average gross weekly earnings of all respondents (before deduction of expenses) was £20.89 per week (median £18.01).

TABLE 4: CHILDMINDERS' GROSS WEEKLY EARNINGS

	no.	%
below £10	132	17
£10 - £19.99	281	36
£20 - £29.99	190	24
£30 - £39.99	98	13
£40 - £49.99	53	7
over £50	23	3
no details	56	

The average gross income for minders in our sample looking after full-time children was £28.37. Out of this gross income the minder has to pay a considerable amount in expenses, including the cost of heating, food, toys, fares, playgroup fees, entertainment (outings, ice creams, etc.), cleaning materials, wear and tear on the house, large items of equipment such as prams, pushchairs and safety equipment, spare clothes, and special equipment for babies, e.g. bibs, feeders, nappies, etc. When listing the expenses they incurred in the course of their job, over 90% of respondents said they had to pay for food, toys and heating. 61% mentioned fares and 23% playgroup fees.

Many respondents found it difficult to estimate the exact amount they spent per item per week. The table below gives details of the average costs per item according to those respondents who were able to give a precise figure. The expenses incurred varied considerably and depend on a number of factors, such as the number and ages of the minded children, the amount provided by the children's parents (for

example, several respondents indicated that the parents of small babies provided the formula milk feeds or other baby food themselves), and the extent of facilities provided by the minder - some minders washed all the nappies themselves, for instance, while others spent considerable sums on entertainment for the children.

TABLE 5: CHILDMINDERS' WEEKLY EXPENSES

	no.	mean*	median*
Food	584	£5.01	£4.02
Toys and play materials	460	£1.11	£0.99
Playgroup fees	151	£0.92	£0.71
Fares	222	£1.23	£1.00
Heating	421	£2.84	£2.02
Other	239	£2.24	£1.01

\* The mean and the median are different ways of calculating averages: the median is the mid-point in the range of values while the mean is the normal arithmetical average.

The average expenses for the full-time minders, according to the 264 respondents who were able to give a full and detailed account of all their normal expenses, was £12.53 per week. However, if one takes into account the expenses of setting up as a minder and the cost of the initial equipment, the minders expenses may be even higher than this.

One minder caring for 3 full-time children under three years old, gave a detailed account of her expenditure in the last year in addition to the £18 per week she spent on food, toys, fares and heating:

pram	£40.00
wear and tear	£100.00
insurance	£1.50
parties	£30.00
presents	£15.00
double buggy	£40.00
fire blanket	£12.50

She looked after the children in term-time only (37 weeks in the year) and charged £15 per child per week, giving a total income of £45 per week. Her average weekly expenses including all these items of expenditure amounted to £24.46 (averaged over 37 weeks), leaving a net income of £20.54 for a 42½ hour week (an hourly wage of 0.48p).

The average net income for minders looking after at least one child full-time (over 30 hours per week), based only on those who were able to give us a detailed account of their weekly expenses and after deduction of expenses, was £15.92.

Small wonder then that many of the respondents felt under-rated and under-paid:

*"I feel childminders do a job equal to any job outside the house and should be recognised by the rest of the country as such."*

(minder in Essex)

*"Childminding is hard work for very little pay, especially when you have to walk over ½ mile with 4 children to and from school in all weathers. It can be however just that little bit extra that a married childminder earns that keeps the family out of debt and worrying money problems."*

(minder in Wakefield)

*"Harder work than the average nursing job in my opinion. I would not choose childminding in preference to nursing employment if it were not convenient to stay at home with my child."*

(minder in Sussex, ex-health visitor)

## THE WORKING DAY

The working day for the majority (73%) of the minders starts at or before 8.30 a.m. with the arrival of the first child. A few children arrived as early as 6.30 a.m. 68% of minders finished work at or after 5.00 p.m. when the last child left, with 8% continuing after 6.00 p.m. The average (mean) hours worked per day in our sample was 8.4. During this long day the childminder is unlikely to have any breaks or time to herself unless she can persuade all the children to go to sleep at the same time, or send them all to playgroup or nursery class (normally these facilities only cater for 3 and 4 year olds).

The other studies corroborate this impression of a long working day. The CRC study found 80% of the minders working over 8 hours per day, while in the Oxford study, half had a working week of more than 40 hours. 47% of the minders in the second TCRU study were responsible for minded children for 10 or more hours per day.

So we can see that in order to earn an average wage of £15.92, many minders were working more than 40 hours per week. In addition to the low pay for long hours, the childminders' income is insecure and fluctuates to an extreme degree.

## PAYMENT FOR ABSENCE

70% of respondents used a written contract or agreement with parents (as recommended by the NCMA), but their earnings were frequently insecure and irregular. About half of the respondents charged a retainer when children were absent due to sickness or holidays. A few lucky minders received some pay when they themselves were sick or on holiday, but the vast majority - 96% in the case of inability to work due to illness and 89% in the case of holidays - received no payment at all. Some respondents said they never allowed themselves to be ill. Others tried to arrange to have their holidays at the same time as the children. 54% of the minders took responsibility for making alternative arrangements for the children to be looked after if they were unable to do it for any reason.

So we find that even in our relatively well-favoured sample of NCMA members, childminders are earning extremely low rates of pay, with no sickness pay and no holiday pay. In common with all self-employed workers they have no right to unemployment benefit and no job security - several mentioned children being removed from their care without warning and for no apparent reason, and of course when they have no children to care for they receive no money. There is little a childminder can do if a parent refuses to pay, or leaves the child for much longer hours than previously agreed (though we did hear of one successful case taken to the County Court in which the parent was ordered to pay). In this situation the childminder not unnaturally feels resentment towards the parents:

*"Childminding is classed as one of the lowest of the low jobs. People do not look at it from the childminder's point of view. Nor do they see how some parents treat childminders. The children are lovely to bring up. The trouble lies with the parents."*

(minder in Wigan)

## WHY WORK AS A CHILDMINDER?

When asked to indicate why they worked as a childminder, the most frequently mentioned reason (mentioned by 85%) was the desire for a job which enabled the minder to look after her own children or other dependents (e.g. elderly or disabled relatives) at the same time. 637 respondents (76%) said they had wanted to work with children, and 498 (60%) said they wanted company for their own children. Over half of the respondents mentioned that they needed the money.

TABLE 6: REASONS FOR WORKING AS A CHILDMINDER

	very important reason		quite important reason		total mentioned*
	no.	%	no.	%	%
care for dependents at the same time	615	74	92	11	85
wanted to work with children	504	61	133	16	77
wanted company for own children	313	38	185	22	60
need money for essentials	126	15	136	16	31
need money for extras	89	11	322	39	50
no alternative job available	25	3	71	9	12
other reason	38	5	2	0	5

\* Most respondents mentioned more than one reason

It is obvious from this that the major reason for taking up childminding for respondents to our survey was the need to combine paid employment with care of their own dependent children. In opting for this form of homework, the childminders have to make the same complex calculations that face all mothers of young children contemplating paid employment:

*"It is easier on me than going out to work with all the complications that arise - needing childminders for youngest child, minders for older children, transport and all the difficulties as well as extra expense which is an inevitable part of going out to work. I badly need the money - we have a £500 overdraft - and I was pushed into buying 2 pairs of shoes for my 2 middle children on shop account last week - which I didn't want to do."*

(minder in Wigan)

## PREVIOUS OCCUPATIONS

Of the 553 respondents who said that they had been in paid employment outside the home before starting childminding, more than a third of the previous occupations reported were manual occupations or shopwork, and another third were clerical jobs. A significantly large proportion (24%) had had previous experience of working with young children. This included those working as qualified assistants in day nurseries, playgroups or children's homes. A high proportion in the Oxford study (38%) had also had relevant training or experience, but in the second TCRU study of registered minders in London only 5% had had previous

experience of working with children.

TABLE 7: PREVIOUS OCCUPATION

	no.	%*
work with children	120	24
professional and technical	29	6
administrative and managerial	30	6
teaching	42	8
clerical	164	33
shop work	50	10
skilled manual	44	9
semi-skilled manual	10	2
unskilled manual	63	13
other	12	2

\* amounts to more than 100% since some respondents mentioned more than one occupation.

In addition, 108 minders (13% of the total respondents) had previously been engaged in other forms of paid homework; just over half of these in manufacturing jobs, particularly clothing manufacture and the remainder in 'white collar' homework.

172 respondents (21% of the total) had another part-time job in addition to childminding. About half worked in related jobs, for example in a playgroup, mothers and toddlers club or toy library (some of them taking the minded children with them). The remainder did a variety of part-time jobs, mainly unskilled manual work such as cleaning, or clerical work.

It is interesting to note that a significant number had done other forms of homework, or had additional part-time jobs, since for the most part they did not come from families who would normally be considered to be in poverty. 758 respondents were married to men who were in full-time employment, the largest proportion of whom were skilled manual workers.

TABLE 8: HUSBAND'S OCCUPATION

	no.	%
professional and technical	87	12
administrative and managerial	189	26
teaching	22	3
clerical	47	6
shop work	13	2
skilled manual	305	42
semi-skilled manual	47	6
unskilled manual	15	2
H M Forces	9	1



650 respondents gave details of their husbands' weekly earnings, and of these only 5% had net weekly incomes of less than £59, 26% earned between £60 and £79 after deductions, while 37% earned more than £100 per week.

In many ways these were a special group of childminders. A higher proportion of the NCMA respondents were married to men in professional or administrative jobs (41%), than the minders interviewed in the other studies. Our sample probably includes many of the most highly-motivated childminders. We have already seen that 70% of them had a written contract or agreement with parents - an unusually high proportion and indicative of their serious approach to the work. 75% of respondents belonged to a local childminders' group and this gave them considerable advantages over other more isolated minders in terms of their knowledge of and access to the available support facilities. Respondents valued the social contact with other childminders and the support they were able to give each other.

In the light of these characteristics, it is even more surprising that these minders received such low rates of pay.

## SUMMARY

Most of the registered childminders in our survey were married, and most of their husbands were skilled manual workers with earnings around the average. Nevertheless, the main reason why the respondents worked as childminders was the need to combine paid employment with the care of their own children or other dependents. One third said they needed the money earned for essentials, while half said their earnings paid for 'extras'. Moreover more than one in five had another part-time job in addition to childminding. Two thirds of the respondents said they had previously worked in clerical jobs, manual jobs or shopwork. But one in four had worked with children previously. One in eight had previously done some other form of paid work at home.

The childminders' earnings were very poor:

- \* On average they were looking after three children but earned less than £21 a week gross. Half earned less than £18 a week, and almost one fifth earned less than £10.
- \* Out of this they had to spend an average of £12.53 a week in expenses.
- \* The average net income for minders looking after at least one child full-time was £15.92 a week.

These are the average figures. Many minders earned much less than this. One example is of the minder in Lancashire who cared for a one-year old and a two-year old from 8.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. five days a week. Both children were from the same family, so she charged £12 per week for the little boy, and £8 per week for his sister, giving her a gross income of £20 per week. Food for the children, toys, heating, fares, and equipment cost her £14 per week, leaving a net income of £6 per week, which for this 47½ hour week amounts to an hourly wage of 13p. In the next section we consider why childminders are so poorly paid.

# Why are Childminders Low Paid ?

## NO STANDARD RATES

The question of how much to charge and the need to negotiate fees with parents was obviously a source of considerable worry to many of the respondents to our questionnaire.

*"I would like to see a set rate to be charged by all childminders, and set rules about what to charge when children are sick or do not attend for other reasons. These rates could then be printed and shown to parents wishing to have their children minded. The method of charging is so flexible at the moment that parents can refuse to pay and nothing can be done about it. I have experienced this myself."*

(minder in Hampshire)

The rates charged by minders in our sample varied considerably. Weekly rates for full-time children ranged from £10 per child per week to £25 per child per week. Hourly rates varied between 25p to £1 per hour for a few part-time children. Unless childminders in one area can all agree to charge the same rate, parents will shop around for the cheapest minder and those charging higher rates will find it difficult to find children to look after. This is likely to be the case in particular in a situation of high unemployment among women, when the supply of minders willing to look after children exceeds the demand. And if all the registered minders in one area agree a rate, they can still be undercut by unregistered minders. However, a well-publicised national minimum rate would probably help a great many minders solve their dilemma about what to charge.

Some childminders have taken action towards setting a minimum rate, agreeing a fee to be charged by all members of a local group. 41% of the NCMA respondents said that they based their fee on a local group rate. The most frequently mentioned rate was £15 per child per week, or 35p to 50p per hour. But by no means all childminders are members

of local groups and for those who are not, the decision about what to charge can be even more problematic.

In 1978 the NCMA conducted a survey of members' pay and conditions which produced 250 responses. This revealed that 74% of respondents had a net income of less than £10 per week. As a result of this survey the NCMA somewhat tentatively recommended a minimum fee of £10 per child per week (in 1978). They updated this figure in each subsequent year, but it was not widely promoted or advertised to members. In our survey only 6% of respondents said that they based their fee on the NCMA recommended minimum rate.

Only 19% of respondents said that their local social services department gave them any advice about fees. 28% said they charged the same as other childminder acquaintances or friends, but 10% said they left it up to the child's parents to suggest a fee.

## SUBSIDISING LOW PAID MOTHERS

The minders were only too aware that their earnings were dependent on the earnings of the parents (primarily the mother) of the minded children.

*"We cannot expect good pay because the working parent has to pay out of her wages which may not be a fortune. Local authorities should take more interest in our pay and conditions, instead of leaving us to get on with it."*

(minder in St. Helens)

*"I mind a child from a one-parent family and I think the Social Services should help in the financial field. I know they help in the way of benefits, but if the parent earns more than a stated amount the benefits are cut down, making life harder for the parent. My parent sometimes says she has no will to work because the harder she works the less she earns. And if she has no job neither do I."*

(minder in Berkshire)

Many minders operate an informal subsidy system, reducing their fee if they feel the parents cannot afford it. 387 respondents (47% of the total) said they reduced their fee for brothers and sisters of children they were already minding; 249 respondents (30% of the total) charged a reduced rate for children from one-parent families. 140 minders made reductions in other circumstances, mainly when parents had low incomes.

The average fee charged by minders in this sample was 41p per child per hour. As one respondent pointed out, when compared with the 75p to



£1 per hour many teenage babysitters expect for looking after children who are asleep, childminders rates appear ludicrously low.

There are several reasons why these rates are so low. Obviously childminders earnings are dependent on the earnings of the children's parents, and in particular of the mother. In our society where child-rearing is still seen as primarily the responsibility of the mother, the arrangements that must be made for alternative care if the mother goes out to work are also her responsibility. Therefore the fees paid to the childminder will usually be paid out of the mother's wages.

In 1980 women's average weekly earnings were only 63% of those of men. As Emma MacLennan<sup>41</sup> has demonstrated, this is largely because women tend to be concentrated in the lowest grades of the lowest paying industries. Women with dependent children tend to fare even worse. The majority are in part-time employment - in 1977 69% of all working mothers had part-time jobs and mothers accounted for two-thirds of all part-time women workers<sup>42</sup>. In December 1980 the average hourly wage for a full-time woman worker was £2.26, while that for a part-timer was £1.84.<sup>43</sup>

Financial necessity is not the only reason why mothers of dependent children seek paid employment outside the home, but as McNay and Pond<sup>44</sup> have shown, their earnings are often crucial in keeping the family above the poverty line. Official figures suggest that the number of poor families would treble if it were not for married women's earnings. Therefore a mother wanting to work outside the home has to calculate carefully the cost of taking up employment. If she has 2 children under 5 years old and wants to take up a part-time job, it could cost her 90p per hour in childminding fees (at 45p per hour per child). She will have to pay for more hours than those for which she is actually paid herself, since she will have to allow for travelling time to and from work (assuming the minder lives near her home). So at current rates her child care costs might be as much as £1 per hour worked or 54% of the average women's hourly part-time wage. In this situation the childminders are aware that if they try to increase their rates by a significant amount, many parents will be forced to look elsewhere for the care of their children, or give up work altogether.

## THE LABOUR MARKET

The current recession and resulting increase in unemployment among women makes the childminder even more vulnerable. According to the Equal Opportunities Commission<sup>45</sup>, in the five years between 1975 and 1980, unemployment among women has risen three times faster than male unemployment. This increase is likely to result in more women wishing to become childminders at the same time as the demand for their services is decreasing.

Another factor which contributes to the insecurity of the childminder's position is the intermittent nature of women's employment. Moss and Ponda<sup>46</sup> quote several studies which demonstrate the fact that many mothers go in and out of employment to a much greater extent than other workers. Some of these women are employed on a seasonal basis (e.g. fruit picking, tourism, temporary shop work), but many others may be forced to give up work in the school holidays to care for their school-age children. As mainly part-time workers in low paid, low status jobs, often without the protection of trade unions, women tend to be more vulnerable to redundancy and are often the first to be laid off in times of recession.

The link between the childminders' position and that of women in the labour market generally, is clear. It is obvious to some minders that improvements in their situation depend upon improved opportunities for the working mothers whose children they care for:

*"We should join somehow in the fight against unemployment and fight for job opportunities with equal pay for women and support unions who are trying to do this - then perhaps we will all earn a bit more..... We should persuade social services and local authorities that we are actually doing their job for them as they are not providing the necessary nursery accommodation and perhaps they may also pay us to make ours a realistic job."*

(minder in Wakefield)

## STIGMA

Many respondents were also acutely aware of the link between low pay and low status and the vicious circle that it creates - in the case of the childminders many people assume that the service they provide is inevitably low grade and inferior, and others find it difficult to accept that they are doing a job at all. Many of the NCMA members felt very strongly that they are under-valued and have an unfair public image:

*"I find the image people have of childminders disturbing. Someone I knew had her child minded 'illegally' by a neighbour. When this arrangement fell through she arranged for me to look after the child. Her husband would not allow the child to come to me even though she knew me because 'only mothers who don't care about their children leave them with minders' and 'no child of mine is going to a childminder'. This upset me very much and nearly made me give up before I had started."*

(minder in Wakefield)

One minder said "people think we are still a 'back street' group" and another described her "feelings of social pariahdom". It seems that childminders still suffer from the Victorian attitude towards the babyfarmers - that looking after children in the home for money is somehow reprehensible - though this attitude does not seem to extend to the private nannies who look after the children of the wealthy!

*"Some of my friends do this job for next to nothing. The people they are dealing with give the attitude that if the woman has to be at home for her own children then they have no option so they do not mind paying low wages. Some women just will not speak up for themselves or maybe they feel that they would rather be getting a little money than none at all."*

(minder in Norfolk)

Perhaps the fact that so many people find it difficult to accept that childminders are 'doing a job of work' is linked to the belief that they are only performing the domestic role expected of them as women anyway and that no special skills are required to look after other people's children.

#### A RESPONSIBLE AND DEMANDING JOB

This contrasts sharply with the view that many of the respondents had of their job:

*"I dislike the term 'childminding'. It very much under-rates the job we do. We do not merely 'mind' children. We seek to help them to develop fully and this requires the commitment of a great deal of time with the children in our care. I think it is important that once a person has decided to 'childmind', he or she decides to continue the job for several years to give the children in his or her care some security."*

(minder in Dorset)

*"My minding days are almost over but for the past 6 years I have thought of it as my career and have given my very best to the children I have cared for. I remain in contact with all the children I have ever minded and they are all like 'extra' brothers and sisters to my own girls. My husband works shifts so I have always been able to do the housework in the evenings so at no time did I do any heavy housework with the children. We always had a very full and exciting week and having my own car made trips out much easier."*

(minder in Northamptonshire)

These minders are looking to the National Childminding Association to help gain public recognition of the importance of the job they are doing and to improve their rates of pay. Many obviously enjoyed the job. The following comment was very typical:

*"I love it. I enjoy teaching the children I mind and feel proud I'm helping them and their parents. I think it's a most important job, and should be much better paid."*

(minder in Cheshire)

But how far is the importance of the childminder's role recognised by the statutory authorities? In the next section we look at what local authorities are doing to support childminders, and at the government's view of childminding.

# What is Being Done?

Several local authorities have in recent years begun to provide a variety of services for childminders. They have done so for a number of reasons. Most local authorities are unable to cater for all the children on their 'day care priority' list in day nurseries. As was pointed out earlier, the number of places in state day nurseries is extremely small and social workers are increasingly forced to look elsewhere for day care for the growing number of children on the day nursery waiting lists. Often the only alternative is a childminder. At the same time, research into the quality of care provided by childminders has demonstrated the need for training and support if minders are to do a satisfactory job. A third contributory factor has been the increasing organisation among childminders themselves, who have begun to demand increasing levels of support.

Local authorities can support childminders in a variety of ways:

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## SALARIED CHILDMINDING

They can employ the minders directly and pay them a salary. The advantages to the minders of such a scheme are considerable since they then have all the advantages of employee status, such as holiday pay, and sick pay and job security. There are very few salaried childminding schemes in existence. The Groveway Project in Lambeth is one example of such a scheme. In 1977 the Department of the Environment published an evaluation of the Groveway scheme carried out by the Shankland Cox Partnership and the Institute of Community Studies<sup>47</sup>. They pointed to the problem of having a small salaried scheme in a borough where most parents still have to resort to private childminding:

*"Thus it can be argued that the Groveway project has simply added one more level in the hierarchy of minding, a hierarchy which has salaried minding at the top, followed by fee-paid minding, then registered minding, with unregistered minding at the bottom."*

But the Groveway project demonstrated that, given adequate support, the quality of care could be improved:

*"Amongst the other advantages of the Groveway salaried minding project, it has demonstrated that a high quality of day care can be attained in a minding setting. This is encouraging for those who believe that childminding has a part to play within the general framework of day care."*

Only one salaried minder responded to our questionnaire. She was employed by a voluntary group, the Battersea Minders Project in Wandsworth. She received a standard wage of £23 whether she was minding any children or not, plus an allowance of £13 per child. She minded 3 children for 48 hours each per week, and estimated her weekly expenses at £26.50. Thus she was left with an income of £35.50 for a 48 hour week (or 74p per hour), still an extremely low wage but she had obvious advantages over other minders in terms of job security and support.

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## SPONSORED OR FEE-PAID MINDING

Some local authorities will pay all or part of the fees for certain children in the care of childminders. Usually this only applies to 'priority' children and low income on its own is not usually considered to be a criteria for acceptance to the priority list. Only 8% of our sample received any payment from Social Services for children in their care. In 41 cases Social Services paid all of the fee, and in 24 cases they paid part only, expecting the remainder to be paid by the child's parents. It is frequently the case that local authorities pay below the going rate for the 'priority' children in the care of childminders. There were several instances where the fee paid by the Social Services department was, for example, £13 per child per week, when other minders in the area normally expected £18 per child per week. In these cases it is often impossible for the minder to recover additional money from the parent. In addition, cases were reported to us of social workers or health visitors putting pressure on childminders to reduce their fees to accommodate families who were in urgent need of day care, but who could not pay the minder's normal fee.

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## TRAINING

Almost all studies of childminding have emphasised the need for training of childminders. Only 34% of our sample had undergone any training course designed for childminders. 12% of the total had attended more than one course. Half of these were courses organised



by local Social Services departments, the remainder being run by adult education colleges, the Pre-School Playgroups Association or child-minders' groups themselves.

It is often said that childminders do not see the need for training and would not go on courses if they were provided. This does not appear to be the case with the NCMA respondents. 63% of those who had not attended a course said that they would like to. Of the rest, several mentioned that they had done other courses such as the NNEB training course for nursery nurses, or the Open University courses on child development.

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### FREE MILK

One of the few forms of income supplement available to childminders is their entitlement to a third of a pint of milk per child per day. The minder is supposed to reclaim the cost of the milk from the DHSS. In theory this provides a useful sum towards the cost of feeding the children. In practice though, the claim form is so complicated and the amount received so small that many minders do not find it worth the time and trouble spent filling it in. Only 46% of our sample actually claimed their free milk allowance, though the majority knew they were entitled to it.

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### INSURANCE

The NCMA advises their members to insure themselves against liability for accidents with the children while they are in their care. It would appear from our sample that their advice is heeded since 91% said they were insured. However the majority had to pay the cost of the premiums themselves - only 17% said that their local authority would arrange and pay for the insurance policy.

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### EQUIPMENT LOAN

Having a stock of equipment to lend to minders is one important way in which local authorities can reduce the minders' costs and at the same time ensure that she has the tools to carry out her job properly. This can include safety equipment such as fire guards, stair gates, fire blankets and push chairs, cots, toys, books, etc. 46% of the respondents said they could borrow toys from their local authorities and 39% could borrow push chairs. About 30% had access to safety

equipment, and a lesser number could borrow prams, cots and other bulky equipment. However, several respondents emphasised that the loan of this equipment was subject to availability and in some cases the stock was too small to benefit more than a handful of minders.

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### OTHER SUPPORT

Another major problem for many childminders is the isolating nature of the job. When one is looking after a number of young children, getting out of the house can be quite difficult. And yet most minders need the company of other adults and most children could benefit from additional space in which to play, new toys and play equipment and the company of other children. Some local authorities have attempted to overcome this problem by providing drop-in centres, or meeting places for local groups, play-buses and local newsletters. And yet the amount of such provision is still very small. Over 70% of our respondents said they had no access to such services.

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### THE NATIONAL PICTURE

The provision of facilities for childminders varies widely throughout the country and from area to area. Even within a borough, minders will have differing access to facilities. Some local authorities take their 'policing' role very seriously and see it as their duty continually to check up on minders but often without giving them any positive support. This can cause considerable resentment among the minders:

*"Most of us have infinitely more experience of looking after children than the social workers, but they still treat us as the standard stereotype of middle-aged, ignorant, and damaging the development of our minded children!"*

(minder in Surrey)

Other local social services departments simply register the minders then forget about them. As one minder put it:

*"Social Services rigorously inspect the premises before registration then leave the minder high and dry."*

(minder in Nottinghamshire)

A few use all the resources at their disposal to provide sensitive support to the minders in their area. Lothian Social Work Department

in Scotland is one such example. There all minders receive a training course, automatic insurance and a childminding kit on registration. There is a large equipment store where they can borrow equipment, toys and play materials and the flourishing local child-minders' groups are given financial support and encouraged to develop links with children's centres and drop-in centres.

However, by and large the minders in our sample did not have access to proper support, and in some cases it appeared that what little there was was diminishing as the public expenditure cutbacks took their toll.

In the following table, local authorities are classified according to the number of facilities provided. The respondents to our questionnaire were asked whether their local social services departments provided any of the following items:

<i>fire guards</i>	<i>stair gates</i>
<i>cooker guards</i>	<i>fire blankets</i>
<i>toys (or toy library)</i>	<i>push chairs or buggies</i>
<i>cots</i>	<i>prams</i>
<i>playpens</i>	<i>cash grant</i>
<i>insurance premium payment</i>	<i>books (or book library)</i>
<i>home help</i>	<i>laundry service</i>
<i>bus passes</i>	<i>attendance register</i>
<i>record forms</i>	<i>information about free milk</i>
<i>information about local services (e.g. mother and toddler clubs)</i>	<i>local newsletter</i>
<i>play-bus</i>	<i>drop-in centre</i>
<i>bulk-buying facilities</i>	<i>meeting place for groups</i>
	<i>safe-heaters</i>
	<i>any other items</i>

Table 9 gives an idea of the level of provision in each area, as perceived by the respondents to this survey.

This table is intended only as a guide to the extent of support provided - it gives no information about the quality of that support, nor of the context in which it is given. Some local authorities may see childminding as a cheaper alternative to other forms of day-care provision. For example, Avon appears to give relatively extensive support to childminding, but according to 1977 DHSS figures there were 602 children on the priority waiting list in Avon. It may be that for Avon Social Services Department, supporting childminders is a cheaper way of providing day care for priority children than providing an adequate number of day nursery places.

TABLE 9: LOCAL AUTHORITY PROVISION OF FACILITIES FOR CHILDMINDERS

4 facilities or less	5 - 9 facilities	10 - 14 facilities	15 facilities and over
Beds	Barnet	Barnsley	Avon
Bolton	Borders	Birmingham	Berks
Bury	Cleveland	Bromley	Bradford
Calderdale	Cumbria	Bucks	Brent
Clwyd	Derbyshire	Cambs	Cheshire
Dyfed	Devon	Cornwall	Durham
Eastern, N.I.	Dorset	Coventry	Haringey
Essex	Gloucs	E. Sussex	Islington
Grampian	Greenwich	Enfield	Lambeth
Highland	Gwynedd	Hants	Leics
Herts	Hackney	Hounslow	Lothian
Kingston	Havering	Kent	Newcastle
Kirklees	Hereford	Lewisham	Northants
Knowsley	Lancs	Liverpool	N. Tyneside
Mid Glamorgan	Leeds	Merton	Stockport
North Yorks	Lincs	Norfolk	Suffolk
Northumberland	Manchester	Redbridge	Surrey
Oxfordshire	Notts	Rotherham	Warwicks
Richmond	Oldham	Sefton	
St. Helens	Staffs	Somerset	
Salford	W. Glamorgan	S. Glamorgan	
Salop	W. Sussex	Strathclyde	
Sandwell	Western, N.I.	Sutton	
Sheffield	Westminster	Wandsworth	
Solihull	Wigan	Wakefield	
Southern, N.I.		Waltham Forest	
Southwark		Wirral	
Thameside			
Tayside			
Trafford			
Walsall			
Wiltshire			

(There were no respondents in our sample from the following areas: Barking, Bexley, Camden, Central, City of London, Croydon, Doncaster, Dudley, Dumfries and Galloway, Ealing, Fife, Gateshead, Guernsey, Gwent, Hammersmith and Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Humberside, Isle of Man, Isle of Wight, Jersey, Kensington and Chelsea, Newham, Northern N.I., Orkney, Powys, Rochdale, Shetland, S. Tyneside, Sunderland, Tower Hamlets, Western Isles, Wolverhampton.)



### THE GOVERNMENT'S VIEW

In recent years, under both Labour and Conservative administrations, central government has encouraged local authorities to support child-minding. In his introduction to the Sunningdale conference in 1976, Dr. David Owen said that the conference had been called

"because we all know that the situation currently facing the 0 - 5 age group is deeply worrying and that if we do not take every opportunity to improve existing provision then a whole generation of children's futures could be unnecessarily blighted."

But despite his concern about the situation, he made it clear that the government was not prepared to commit substantial resources to alleviate it:

"The theme is 'low cost'; we did not meet to discuss the desirable, we want to grapple with the attainable."<sup>48</sup>

Viewed from this angle, childminding is the ideal cheap option, because all major costs can be passed on to the parent and to the childminder herself.

In 1980, Sir George Young, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Security in the present Conservative administration continued the theme:

"For many young children, especially those under 3 and those with special problems, such as beset many of those in the priority groups, the sort of care such as that which a good childminder can provide, is likely to be more in tune with the child's limited capacity for social contacts than the communal experience of a day nursery.... While resource constraints will clearly limit what can be done in this field at present, we see the benefits to be gained from support and advice services for childminders, private day nurseries and other facilities as an excellent investment." 49

Sir George Young has conveniently accepted the arguments of the 'maternal deprivation' lobby, who argue for one-to-one care for children, and has apparently ignored the substantial body of opinion based on carefully researched evidence, that children can indeed benefit from good collective child care. The government's reasons for adopting this position are clear - it allows them to abdicate responsibility for financing proper childcare provision, and gives them another excuse to consign the whole problem to the vagaries of the private market.

The promise of support for childminders is revealed as an empty gesture when considered in the context of the current round of public expenditure cuts. As the increasing pressure on local authority social services departments forces them to concentrate on their statutory responsibilities, such marginal commitments as facilities for childminders become easy targets for councils looking for ways in which to reduce expenditure.

Clearly, if the "deeply worrying" situation described by Dr. David Owen is to be tackled in any serious way, it will require a far more serious commitment on the part of central government than has been shown hitherto. In the concluding section of this report we describe the radical measures that we believe to be absolutely essential if the situation of childminders, parents and children is to be improved.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

The childminders who responded to the Low Pay Unit survey were for the most part working long hours for exploitative rates of pay. They are caught in the low pay trap largely because they depend for payment on working mothers, many of whom are themselves low paid.

The childminders are working mothers themselves, although confined to the home, and in many respects they suffer to an extreme degree from the stigma that attaches to both roles - working mother and housewife.

Despite the low earnings of the minders, childminding is not a cheap option for the parents. Some mothers may be paying a third to a half of their income in childcare costs.

The childminders' low earnings and the high cost to the parents, plus the lack of support from social services departments, combine to make childminding an unstable form of child care in which quality and continuity of care for the children is difficult to achieve.

However an important fact that emerged from this survey was that for many of the respondents childminding could be the preferred solution to the problem of combining paid work and the care of their own children. It has advantages over other forms of homeworking in terms of the potential for job satisfaction - many respondents actually enjoyed looking after other people's children and did want to be at home to care for their own. In this they may not be typical of the majority of childminders - some of the other studies suggested that, given the choice, many childminders would choose alternative employment - but it seems unfair to categorise all childminders as unprofessional or uninterested, when clearly there are a substantial number who are neither.

These childminders in our sample were not cruel 'baby-farmers', neglecting the children and concerned only with the money. The level of dedication to the job exhibited by many of the replies to the questionnaire was quite remarkable, considering the exploitative rates of pay and low public esteem in which they are held. Too often the debate about childminding is polarised between those who believe it is

everyone's ideal solution and those who think it should be stamped out forthwith. The important point here is that there must be a free choice, for parents and minders, so that no one is forced to use a minder who would prefer good nursery provision, and no one is forced to work at home who would prefer to go out to work.

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## A COMPREHENSIVE STATE-FUNDED DAY CARE SYSTEM

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Childminding will come into its own when we have a comprehensive state-funded day care system, open to all those children whose parents want to make use of it. Such a system would ensure that parents could choose between different forms of collective childcare and home-based care provided by professional childminders. These childminders would be specially selected, trained and salaried, and provided with all necessary support services by their local authority.

However, the establishment of such a day care system will not come about until there is a fundamental change of attitude on the part of the government. It must be recognised that equality of opportunity will never be a reality until it is made much easier for parents to combine work and domestic responsibilities, if they so wish. We are certainly not arguing that all women and all men should go out to work, and indeed it should be financially possible for those parents who want to do so to stay at home when their children are small to care for them themselves. But at present many parents do not have that choice: many need to go out to work for a variety of reasons and their children need high quality child care. It is the state's responsibility to provide this.

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## DIRECT EMPLOYMENT OF CHILDMINDERS

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Once a scheme of adequate day care provision is devised, childminding will probably no longer be the major form of care. But we believe there would be a place for properly salaried childminders within such a scheme. They would be employed by local authorities and paid a realistic wage taking into account the expenses they incur in the course of their work, negotiated by the relevant trade unions and subject to all the normal benefits available to other employees, such as paid holidays, sick pay, national insurance and pension rights.

In making this recommendation for the direct employment of salaried childminders, the Low Pay Unit is endorsing the views of the TUC, the Equal Opportunities Commission, the National Childcare Campaign, the Community Relations Commission and the National Union of Public Employees, among others. We would urge these organisations to continue

to press for improvements in the provision of day care facilities.

We would impress upon the government the urgent necessity for action and the futility of looking for cheap solutions. There are no satisfactory cheap solutions to the crucial problem of providing for children while their parents are at work, and it is extremely disturbing that the Government should be putting the needs of children and their parents so low on its list of priorities.

#### TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR CHILDMINDERS

In the meantime, it is essential that all local authorities make proper provision for training childminders and for providing support services. All childminders should receive a training course on registration, free insurance, free loan of toys and other equipment, ready access to drop-in centres and other forms of support and social contact. These facilities would help to reduce the level of expenses incurred by the minders and hence increase their net income. They would also make it considerably easier for them to do their job and reduce the isolation of working in the home. As has been pointed out, one or two local authorities already do provide this level of support (Lothian Social Work Department was the example quoted). It should be mandatory for all local authorities to make similar provision.

#### THE NATIONAL CHILDMINDING ASSOCIATION

The NCMA is playing a valuable role in helping childminders to help themselves. The high proportion of respondents to this survey who made use of their block insurance scheme and their contract forms is testimony to the value of their work. Most respondents benefited considerably from membership of NCMA local groups and clearly there is a need to increase the organisation of childminders at a local level. As an immediate measure, the NCMA could firmly recommend a minimum fee per child per week (or per hour) to be charged by all its members, and produce clear recommendations on normal terms and conditions to be adhered to by minders and parents. These could include payment for children's absence for any reason, and payment for the minders' annual holidays. This would go some way towards clearing the confusion that currently exists about what to charge, but it is not a long-term solution to childminders' low pay. That will require more radical measures of the type described above.

The childminders are being exploited because of society's ambivalent attitudes towards women's employment. On the one hand the principle of equal opportunities has gained acceptance to the extent that it is enshrined in the legislation; but on the other the expansion of state-funded childcare provision necessary to make equality of opportunity a reality, is not yet on the political agenda.

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\* A new series of discussion papers on general aspects of low pay and earnings inequalities.

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## FIGHTING FOR A BETTER DEAL FOR WOMEN AT WORK

### MINIMUM WAGES FOR WOMEN

3 million workers in shops, cafes, pubs, laundries, hairdressing salons and the clothing trades are covered by legal minimum wages set by Wages Councils. Three quarters of the workers concerned are women. But the protection they get from the Wages Councils is very poor. The wage rates are low and a third of employers illegally underpay them with little threat of prosecution. Minimum Wages for Women argues that improvements to the system could do more to tackle women's low pay than the Equal Pay Act achieved.

### WORKING CHILDREN

An estimated 1/4 million school age children - one in four - have some sort of part-time job other than informal jobs such as babysitting and running errands. Yet a large proportion of this child labour is illegal, most of it is poorly paid, and some of it is dangerous. Working Children reports the findings of a special Low Pay Unit investigation in London schools, explains the law relating to child employment, and says what needs to be done to protect Britain's most vulnerable workers.

### PART-TIME PITTANCE

With one worker in every five working part-time, the UK has the largest part-time workforce in the EEC. Almost half of the EEC's part-timers live and work in Britain. Yet, as Part-Time Pittance shows, Britain's part-timers get a bad deal. Three quarters of all part-time women - 2 1/2 million in all - were low paid; they are often not entitled to basic rights at work or to national insurance benefits when out of work. And the report argues that many of those working part-time have no choice - the great majority are married women with children. The report argues for policies to protect part-time workers from exploitation as cheap labour.

### INSURING POVERTY AT WORK

National insurance contributions - the main social security tax - are causing severe hardship to part-time workers. Insuring Poverty at Work shows that, while contributions to the national insurance scheme have increased, the benefits they finance have been cut. It shows that a part-time worker earning £27 a week now faces a rate of tax of almost 38p in the £ - higher than that payable on £240 a week (nine times as much). It shows that part-timers are caught firmly in a 'poverty trap' and that many employers are trying to avoid their contributions to the scheme by sacking full-timers and taking on part-timers instead.

## DIRTY LINEN

'Coin-op cowboys' are paying some of their workers in launderettes and dry cleaners as little as 50p an hour, according to Dirty Linen - an investigation into the pay and conditions of workers in the laundry trade. Using unpublished Department of Employment statistics, it shows that one third of women working in laundries earned less than £60 a week last year. But the problem was worse still amongst launderettes and dry cleaning staff. Dirty Linen calls for the implementation of a proposal by ACAS for a legal minimum wage for all of the 80,000 women in the industry.

### THE HIDDEN ARMY

The 'hidden army' of Britain's homeworkers is growing all the time and now numbers an estimated 150,000. Yet homeworkers remain amongst the poorest paid. Nearly half the homeworkers questioned in a Low Pay Unit survey were earning less than 40p an hour, while two thirds earned less than 60p. More than half were not reimbursed for the full costs of their work, such as electricity, postage and fares. The Hidden Army calls for the extension of basic employment rights for homeworkers, legal minimum rates of pay and better health and safety protection.



### LOW PAY 1980s STYLE

Most of the low paid are women. According to Low Pay - 1980s Style, over 2 million full-time adult men earned low wages last year. So too did 2 1/2 million part-time adult women. The report shows that the small progress towards equal pay evaporated after 1977, and that the gap between men's and women's pay is widening once again. It also shows that the concept of the 'family wage', traditionally used in trade union bargaining, has weakened the ability of women to escape from low pay.

These are just a few of the reports on women's pay and employment. Other Low Pay Unit studies investigate pay in hairdressing, cleaning, catering, textiles and clothing and other 'women's' jobs and industries. And the Unit examines the effect of Britain's tax system, of unemployment and inflation. If you would like more details of the Low Pay Unit's work and a full list of publications, contact Jill Sullivan at 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG or phone 01-439 8759/01-437 1780.



# Who Minds About The Minders?

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*The 43,000 registered childminders in the UK provide the bulk of the formal day care for the children of working parents. But the invaluable contribution that childminders make is not reflected in their rewards or status.*

*This pamphlet describes a Low Pay Unit survey of over 800 childminders, which reveals disturbing facts about their pay and conditions - most minders are working long hours for exploitative rates of pay, and receiving minimal support from their local authorities.*

*The pamphlet argues that childminders should be directly employed by local authorities and given proper training and support, and it calls for urgent action to review the whole system of day care for the children of working parents.*

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**Pamphlet No. 17**

**Price £1.00**