

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Teachers' Comprehensive Well-being

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Background

- Research indicates 25-40% turnover rates in ECCE
 - Attrition in the field may affect the lasting impacts on fostering the developmental and academic outcomes of young children (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000)
- Aspects of well-being (high job stress, feelings of isolation and lack of value, concerns for compensation and benefits (NACCRRRA, n.d.; NTAQAC, 2009)) offer one explanation for the high turnover in ECCE
- Review of preschool teachers' well-being highlights the importance of teacher well-being on the healthy development and achievement of young children (Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, MacKay, & Marshall, 2014)
- What we know about teacher well-being is limited to stress and burnout (Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, MacKay, & Marshall, 2014)

Focus of the Study

- “...the literature [on ECCE teacher well-being] is deeply fragmented...different elements of well-being, which are generally only narrowly construed as a matter of teacher stress or turnover. Rarely is a broader view of teacher well-being taken and seldom are wider life issues related to well-being, such as health discussed,” (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2013, p. 154).
- Consulted literature on well-being from other helping professions
- Focus on multiple aspects of ECCE teachers’ well-being and how these operate in a comprehensive and systemic way

Sample Demographics

- 27 early childhood educators (50% lead teachers) that work with low-income families in a metropolitan area of the United States.
 - From 1 of 6 programs that were part of a larger study of 135 teachers
 - Majority of the teachers were Black/African American (n=14)
- Mean age: mid-40s
- Mean experience in ECE: 14 years
- Mean income: \$30,000

Data Collection

- Modified Grounded Theory approach
 - Allowed for new micro-level theories to emerge from the data while considering ideas and theories from prior studies
- In-depth audio-recorded interviews
 - Interviews held in private spaces within ECCE programs
 - Focused interview protocol on multiple domains of well-being based on domains discussed in other “helping/service-oriented” professions as well as pressing issues in the ECCE field. These four foci later merged into three. Focused on daily routines to understand the situatedness of each teacher.

Data Analyses

- 3 waves of coding: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (LaRossa, 2005)
- Initial a priori codes based on sensitizing concepts that were reflective of the literature as well as the research question
 - Codes included each of the four areas of well-being reflected in the literature: emotional or psychological, social, physical, and financial.
- Reliability across three coders ensured throughout coding process

Findings: Psychological Well-being

Feeling (dis)respected, (de)valued, and (not) supported

- **Colleagues, Administration**

- *We are so in sync about it. It is almost reading each other's mind...like I said, we are almost attached."*
- *So I definitely think, I feel safe coming to [our director] and saying 'you know I'm really upset about, this is what's going on.' And I think she'll be supportive and say, 'okay let me help you.'"*
- *"I've been here. Hey girl, what you are saying to me, I've been here longer than you. You don't have to explain to me."*

- **Children & Families**

- *"love" and "joy" of being around children*
- *"... but just the little things that they weren't able to do yesterday. You build on the things that they are able to do. And...that's what makes you come to work."*
- Family interactions as most stressful components of work

- **Broader Society**

- *But the way people look at you, the way people talk to you ...my children's friends' parents, they are lawyers... when you talk with them they look at you here, right. You say you are teacher, you see the feeling... going right here, and then when you say pre-school teacher it's here.."*

Findings: Psychological Well-being

Strategies for managing psychological well-being

- Most commonly, teachers communicated with their colleagues, families, and children for the purposes of solving problems/conflicts or for seeking help.
 - *...I call her out...So I told her, you know I don't want that to happen again. ...She didn't take it well, but she knew that I didn't like it.*
- For some teachers staying calm was a way to prevent themselves from becoming emotionally and physically hurt.
 - *I just...say in a calm way because why raise your voice and get upset all of a sudden because it just, it hurts me. Not hurts me, but it's it's not good for your body or whatever. It's not. The stress is not good for yah.*

Findings: Physical Well-being

Physical conditions

- ECCE teachers' physical well-being were linked to existing physical conditions as well as home and work environments.
 - *...we have CORE, and CORE is like anecdotes that we have to take on the kids. And I feel like that takes up a lot, and then we have to do PALS. And then we have to do our planning, and then we have to do a monthly. We do the newsletter also, but we do, gosh, what's that thing...I never experienced a migraine before, I said my head was hurting so bad, I couldn't even drop my head. So I just went to sleep. I just had to leave the books alone, I had to just leave the books alone, I said it was just too much. ... sometimes it can be a physical toll on your body.*
- Others reported the positive impacts of their work on their physical well-being. They reported that their work at the early childhood center gave them opportunities to move around and stay physically active

Findings: Physical Well-being

Strategies for managing physical conditions

Proactive

- *...Every year we have to do a physical and if you don't pass physical you can't be with children. You could have communicable disease or something like that. You can't work with children. So you have to check yourself. And when the doctor tells you,...you need to take more vitamins. You need to get some rest, you need to get some exercise for your heart. It gives you a perspective of your health, so you have to maintain yourself so you can work. So when we have physicals they keep us in check about our health. So we take care of yourself because we have to. So it really makes you conscious of yourself. And so that helps me keep working everyday. Take what I got take my vitamins. Do what I got to do. Exercise. Go back to the doctor. Check you again. Make sure you're okay.*

Reactive

- *Obviously I know I have to keep up with my treatment....And I have to go to the doctor. I have to have medication for life everyday...But when I got here I look for a doctor near you know my work. I didn't want to be absent. So I started doing my appointment at my lunch time.*

Findings: Financial Well-being

Financial Security

- Many teachers were “living paycheck to paycheck” or “barely able to make ends meet”, and described their financial situations as “not good”, “not financially secure” “a disaster”, “a struggle”, and “tight”.
 - *I’m financially trapped. The only reason why I am able to survive this is because my student loan is able to help me pay my rent. So not necessarily pay my rent because I have to check if I can pay my rent. But if I want like certain luxuries like you know certain things that I want like food, I have to use that...*
- Teachers described limited raises with some noting not receiving a significant wage increase (more than 1%) in many years. This financial insecurity also shaped how teachers were able to plan for their future or in many cases to save their money.
 - *I mean, [this area] is really expensive, so ... I hope to make a little more money next year because I feel like I just get by with rent and food...but I don't get to save much, and that would be nice in the future...*
- Some indicated the importance of benefits, especially health insurance for their financial well-being.
 - *It’s like a dream, just being able to go to the doctor if I feel sick...*

Findings: Financial Well-being

Strategies for managing financial well-being

- *We are underpaid. Really, we are underpaid. I take a second job to make ends meet. So it does take a toll. Whereas I could be home, relaxing or getting the rest that I need to prepare for the next day, I am working 'til 10:00PM. Sometimes I am coming in here, I am physically not ready for them. It does take a toll.*
- *I know how to budget. So I stretch things, or I don't really get assistance, but I know how the electric bill can wait a little bit, or the gas bill. And it just worked out that way. And it's not like I try to get out or I try to get over or anything. I know what will last and, I know you rent can't. So the rent has to be paid, and I can kind of gear it towards, ok, well when I get paid next time. I can send a little more. Something like that. So I don't let. I don't let it pass it you even that first month, I don't let it go. I just can. Something like that.*

Psychological
well-being

Comprehensive
well-being

Financial
well-being

Physical well-
being

Implications for Research, Practice and Policy

- Opportunities for supporting ECCE educators across domains of well-being?
- Contexts of ECCE teachers' daily lives inside and outside of ECCE matter
- Multi-level systemic focus--Role of administration? Role of policy?
- More research

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