

To whom little is given, much is expected:

ECE teacher stressors and supports as determinants of classroom quality

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Introduction

- Much is expected of early care and education (ECE) teachers, as they shape children's experiences in ECE classrooms (Hamre, 2014; IOM & NRC, 2015; Phillips, Austin, & Whitebook, 2016).
- Research on teacher characteristics that predict classroom quality has typically focused on structural characteristics of teachers – teacher education and certification level; teacher turnover and pay.
- But less is known about teacher characteristics more proximal to daily interactions with children
- An emerging research base focuses more intently on the teacher characteristics most likely to influence proximal interactions with children.
- Teacher mental health and economic stressors have received the most attention (e.g., Buettner et al., 2016; Whitaker et al., 2015)
- Less attention on the supports provided to ECE teachers at home or in the workplace.
- Such supports could mitigate teachers' negative emotions, bolster their emotion regulation, and enhance their capacities for patience and sensitivity with children.

Current Study

- Examine key stressors, both those previously noted as predictors of ECE quality (e.g., depressive symptoms) and other stressors not previously explored
- Examine a wide range of workplace and family supports
- Test for associations between stressors and supports and a wide range of observed classroom quality measures

Method

- Data were collected as part of the larger Tulsa SEED study, a 7-year longitudinal study following low-income children in Tulsa from 3-year-old pre-k (in 2016) through 4th grade (in 2023)
- Teachers self-reported on stressors and supports, and 2 observers documented quality in a typical morning in the classroom
- **Sample:** 109 lead teachers who taught Tulsa SEED study children in their 4-year-old pre-k year (2017-18)

Measures

Teacher stressors

- Economic stressors: food insecurity; low salary relative to living wage in Tulsa
- Life stressors: household chaos; elevated depressive symptoms; poor physical health

Teacher supports

- Workplace supports: drawn from the Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning (SEQUAL) survey (Whitebook & Ryan, 2015)
- 6 subscales measuring quality of work life, teamwork, wellness supports, applying learning in the classroom, child assessments use and supports, and pay and benefits
- Family supports: emotional and instrumental support from family members

Classroom quality

- Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS Pre-K; Pianta et al., 2008): Emotional support, Classroom organization, Instructional support
- Adapted Teaching-Style Rating Scale (ATSRS, Raver et al., 2012): Classroom management, Social-emotional instruction, scaffolding of peers
- Narrative Record (NR; Farran et al., 2015): quality of instruction, count of "red flags" (e.g., sarcasm, eye-rolling)

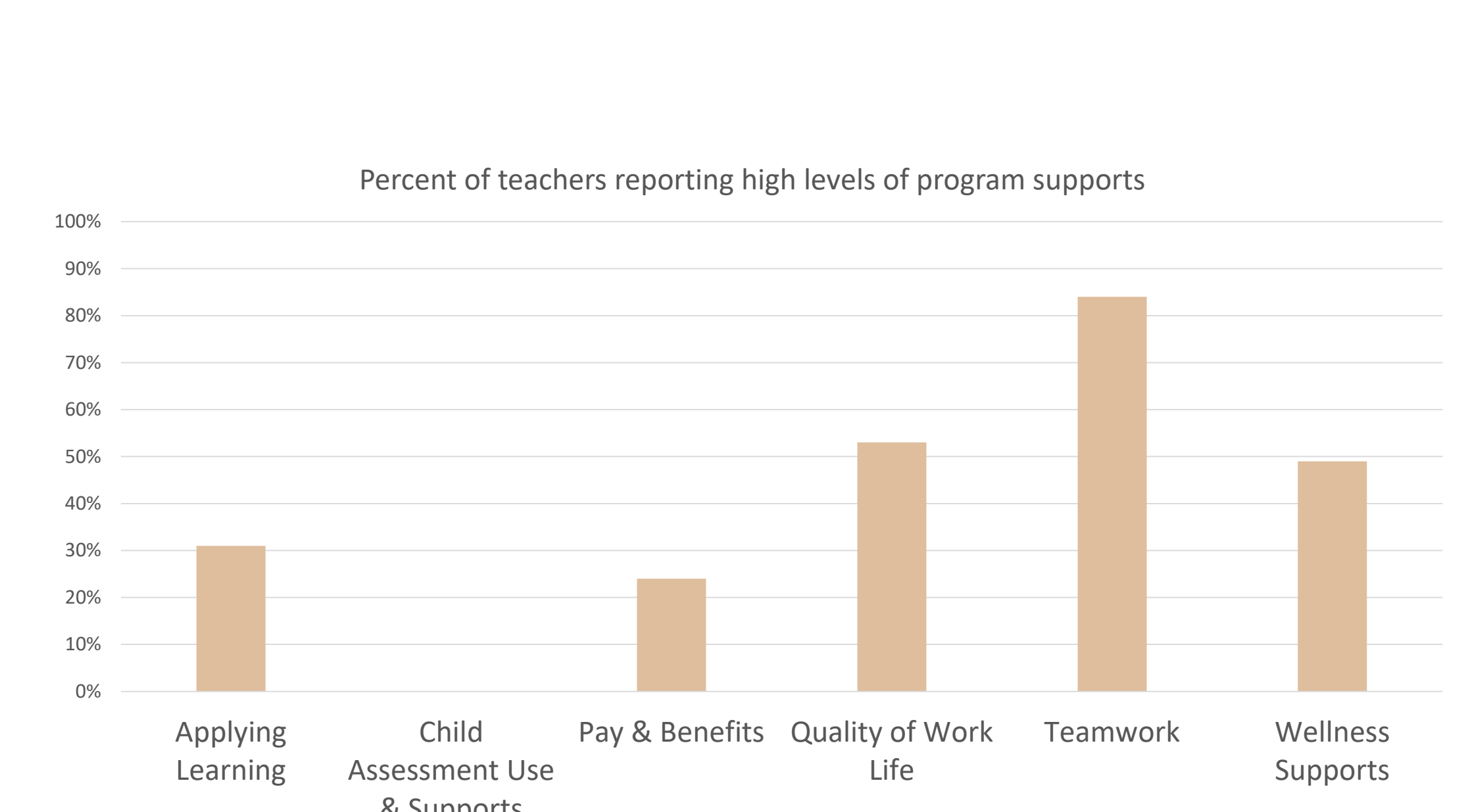
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Results

Teachers' Stressors



Teachers' Supports



Predicting quality from stressors and supports

	CLASS									ATSRS						NR								
	Classroom Organization			Emotional Support			Instructional Support			Classroom Management			Social-Emotional Instruction			Scaffolding			Quality of Instruction			Count of Red Flags		
	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p	β	SE	p
Stressors																								
Economic Stressors																								
Household Food Insecurity	-0.02	0.04	0.62	-0.04	0.05	0.34	0.01	0.05	0.82	0.01	0.05	0.86	-0.02	0.04	0.58	-0.03	0.04	0.43	0.04	0.04	0.28	0.02	0.05	0.73
ECE Salary to Living Wage Ratio	0.09	0.22	0.67	-0.01	0.22	0.96	0.03	0.21	0.91	0.38	0.20	0.07	0.01	0.20	0.95	0.20	0.21	0.36	0.35	0.25	0.16	-0.12	0.23	0.60
Life Stressors																								
Household Chaos	-0.02	0.02	0.27	-0.01	0.02	0.47	-0.01	0.02	0.52	-0.01	0.02	0.51	-0.03	0.02	0.10	-0.01	0.02	0.71	0.00	0.02	1.00	0.02	0.02	0.23
Depressive Symptoms	-0.13	0.19	0.50	0.11	0.21	0.60	-0.43	0.22	0.06	-0.09	0.22	0.70	0.08	0.22	0.73	-0.08	0.21	0.72	-0.05	0.24	0.84	-0.11	0.20	0.57
Poor Physical Health	0.11	0.18	0.55	0.08	0.19	0.67	0.34	0.21	0.11	0.18	0.22	0.42	0.19	0.20	0.34	-0.11	0.20	0.59	-0.26	0.22	0.24	0.06	0.16	0.72
Supports																								
Workplace Supports																								
Quality of Work Life	-0.01	0.02	0.59	-0.04	0.02	0.04	-0.01	0.02	0.63	-0.02	0.02	0.40	-0.04	0.02	0.05	-0.02	0.02	0.33	0.01	0.02	0.51	0.02	0.02	0.34
Teamwork	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.06	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.81	0.02	0.03	0.55	0.00	0.02	0.89	0.02	0.02	0.36	0.02	0.02	0.27	0.01	0.02	0.73
Wellness Supports	-0.02	0.01	0.07	0.00	0.02	0.98	0.00	0.02	0.91	0.00	0.02	0.91	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.04	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.42	-0.03	0.02	0.09
Applying Learning	0.00	0.02	0.90	0.00	0.02	0.87	0.00	0.02	0.97	0.01	0.02	0.67	0.01	0.02	0.72	-0.03	0.02	0.10	-0.04	0.02	0.06	-0.02	0.02	0.37
Child Assessments Use and Supports	0.11	0.03	0.00	0.07	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.14	0.08	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.03	0.52	0.02	0.03	0.39	0.03	0.03	0.33	-0.06	0.04	0.07
Pay and Benefits	-0.01	0.01	0.30	-0.01	0.01	0.44	-0.02	0.01	0.16	0.00	0.01	0.73	-0.02	0.01	0.12	-0.03	0.01	0.06	0.00	0.02	0.97	0.03	0.01	0.01
Family Supports																								
Family Emotional and Instrumental Support	0.00	0.00	0.44	0.00	0.00	0.24	0.00	0.00	0.63	0.00	0.00	0.54	0.00	0.00	0.42	0.00	0.00	0.19	-0.01	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.35

Discussion

- This study represents an important – but preliminary – step toward understanding the role of previously understudied teacher stressors and supports as determinants of classroom quality
- Although it is premature to offer guidance for action steps, continued efforts are needed, both to identify and replicate true associations and – even for those stressors and supports not predictive of quality – to improve the working conditions and wellbeing of ECE teachers on the grounds of human rights and gender equity