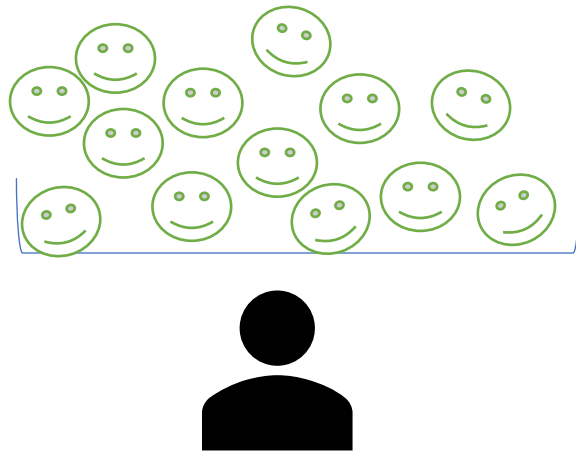# Working Conditions, Well-being, and Support Needs of Center-based ECE Leaders

Timothy G. Ford and Kyong-Ah Kwon
University of Oklahoma

CCEEPRC
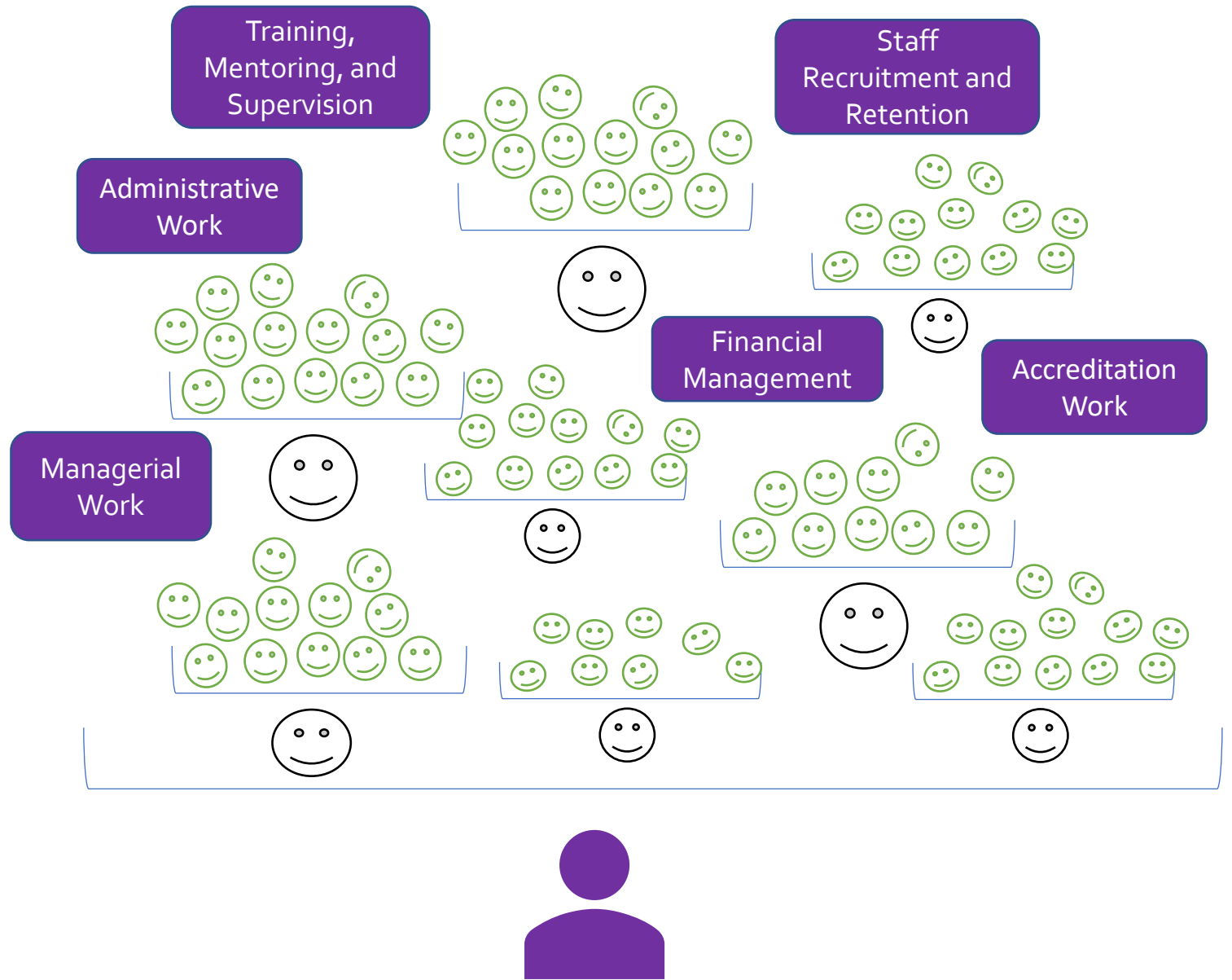June 2023

Introduction:
ECE Leaders' Working Conditions
and Well-Being

Training, Mentoring, and Supervision

Staff Recruitment and Retention

Administrative Work

Financial Management

Accreditation Work

Managerial Work

Teachers' Job Demands

Leaders' Job Demands

3

Working Conditions/Well-being of ECE Leaders

- ECE leadership is highly demanding, challenging work;

- Yet, fewer formalized pathways/preparation for ECE leadership for proactive succession planning (Douglass, 2017; Rodd, 2013)

Working Conditions/Well-being of ECE Leaders

- Quality educational leadership is linked to various aspects of student, educator, and organizational improvement, development, and success.

- Yet, being able to support teachers' working conditions and well-being means that leaders need these things too!

- We have much still to understand about the health and well-being of ECE center leaders, however.

Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to:

1. *Understand the working conditions and well-being of center-based leaders in formal leadership positions;*

2. *Why leaders are leaving and what supports continuing leaders say they most want to improve their working conditions/well-being.*

Method

Method

Wave 1 Data Collection

- An online survey on leaders' working conditions and well-being was administered at the end of the 21-22 school year (May to June 2022)

- Yielded 2,347 survey responses from all 50 states and the District of Columbia

- **861** identifying as early childhood education leaders in a variety of ECE centers such as public/private childcare and Head Start/Early Head Start

Analytical Approach

- Descriptive analysis of working conditions and well-being.

- Content analysis of intent to leave and workplace supports.

Method

Wave 1 Sample Demographics

Categories	By Leader Level		
	ECE Leaders (n=861)	K-12 Leaders (n=1486)	*p*-value
Female	97.4%	66.2%	**<.00** ⬅
Race: Asian/Pacific Islander	2.2%	1.0%	**.02**
Race: Black	8.0%	8.2%	.45
Race: White	81.1%	83.8%	.07
Race: Hispanic	6.1%	3.8%	**.01**
Race: Native American/Alaskan Native	1.0%	1.5%	.21
Race: Multiracial/Biracial	1.5%	1.7%	.49
% Leaders of color	18.9%	16.2%	.06 ⬅

Method

Wave 1 Sample Demographics

Categories	By Leader Level		
	ECE (n=861) M(*SD*)	K-12 (n=1486) M(*SD*)	*p*-value
Demographic Characteristics			
Age	50.92(10.47)	50.17(8.67)	.10
Working Conditions			
Leadership experience (years)			
In current school	9.51(8.19)	5.37(5.55)	**<.00**
Total	12.06(10.00)	9.36(7.56)	**<.00**

Leader Working Conditions Measures*

Job Demands

- **Workload** (Job Satisfaction Survey, Spector, 1994)
- **Job Skills** (Job Content Questionnaire, Karasek, 1998)
- **Role Ambiguity/Incongruence** (COPSOQ-III, Pejtersen et al., 2018)
- **Hours Worked per Week**
- **Workplace Discrimination** (James et al., 1994)
- **Political Climate** (new)

Job Resources

- **Job Control** (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006)
- **Prof. Growth Opportunities** (ECWES, Jorde-Bloom, 1988)
- **Support from Families** (new)
- **Coaching/Mentoring**
- **Autonomy** (Elseman, 2021)
- **Self-care Supports** (new)
- **Supervisor Psychological Support** (Elseman, 2021)

Leader Background/ Characteristics

- **K-12/ECE status**
- **Annual Salary**
- **Leader age**
- **Education Level**
- **Center Type**

*All measures adapted for use in the ECE/K-12 leader context

Leader Well-being Measures

Physical Well-being

- **Height & Weight** (BMI calculation, CDC, 2022)
- **Overall Physical Health** (SF-12 Health Survey (PCS), Hays & Spritzer, 2004)
- **General Health** (General risk factors/illnesses/conditions)
- **Exercise Behaviors** (# days exercise/week)

Psychological Well-being

- **Dispositional Hope** (Adult Hope Scale, Snyder et al., 1991)
- **Depressive Symptoms** (CES-D-10, Andresen et al., 1994)
- **Emotional Exhaustion** (MBI-ES, Maslach et al., 1996)

Professional Well-being

- **Job Satisfaction** (TALIS 2018 Principal Survey, OECD, 2020)
- **Isolation** (UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3), Russell, 1996)
- **Intent to Leave** (Meyer et al., 1993)

Findings

Overall Leader Well-Being Status

Psychological Well-Being

38% Depressive Symptoms
(22% doctor-diagnosed depression)

30% Trouble sleeping
(reported difficulties > 5 days per week)

26% doctor-diagnosed anxiety

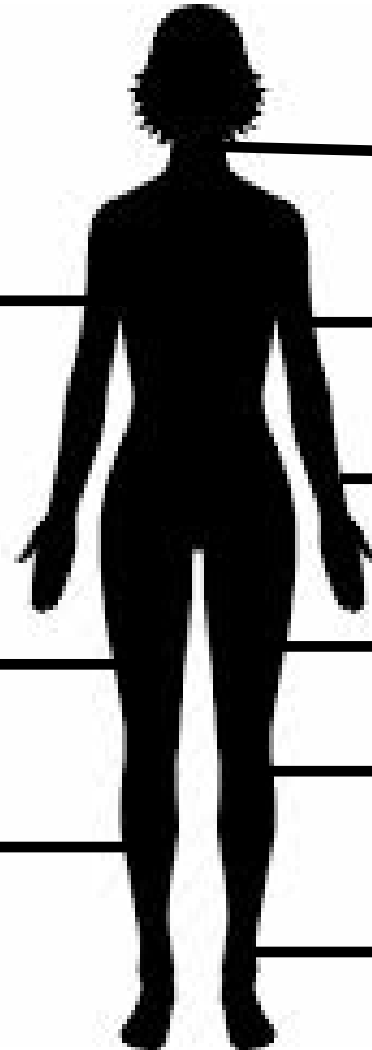## Physical Well-Being

Obese/Overweight **78%**

High blood pressure **24%**

Fast food > 2 days/wk **50%**

>2 days exercise/wk **35%**

Sedentary Hours/day **6.9**

Water consumption
8oz. glasses/day **6.5**

14

Results: Comparison of Working Conditions

Measures/Variables	ECE Leaders (n=861) M(SD)	K-12 Leaders (n=1486) M(SD)	p-value	
Annual Salary	$64,392 ($33,933)	$99,113 ($35,851)	**<.00**	←
Job Demands				
Hours worked/week	52.72(15.00)	57.45(9.48)	**<.00**	
Workload (1-5)	4.37(0.61)	4.43(0.56)	.04	
Job skills (1-5)	4.58(0.49)	4.71(0.47)	**<.00**	Higher Job Demands for K-12 Leaders
Role ambiguity (1-5)	2.31(1.00)	2.56(1.03)	**<.00**	
Political climate (1-5)	2.33(0.87)	2.58(0.80)	**<.00**	
Workplace discrimination (1-5)	1.69(0.96)	2.13(1.11)	**<.00**	
Job Resources				
Job control (1-5)	3.44(0.96)	2.93(0.94)	**<.00**	
Professional growth opportunities (1-5)	3.37(0.89)	3.25(0.84)	**<.00**	
Support from families (1-5)	4.01(0.81)	3.75(0.84)	**<.00**	More Job Resources for ECE Leaders
Coaching/mentoring opportunities (3-18)	10.03(3.78)	10.47(3.44)	**<.01**	
Self-care supports (1-8)	3.33(1.72)	2.64(1.58)	**<.00**	
Autonomy supports (1-7)	4.91(2.12)	4.31(2.01)	**<.00**	
Basic psychological needs supports (1-5)	4.10(0.91)	3.88(1.00)	**<.00**	

The table is headed "Leader Level" spanning the ECE Leaders and K-12 Leaders columns.

Results: Comparison of Leader Well-being

Categories	By Leader Level		
	ECE Leaders (n=861) M(*SD*)	K-12 Leaders (n=1486) M(*SD*)	*p*-value
Physical Well Being			
BMI	31.10(7.82)	29.87(6.48)	**<.00**
Overall physical well-being (SF-12, 5-20)	15.89(2.78)	16.38(2.48)	**<.00**
Psychological Well-Being			
Hope (8-64)	52.75(6.76)	54.42(6.03)	**<.00**
Depressive symptoms (0-30)	8.36(5.77)	8.50(5.53)	.58
Professional Well-Being			
Emotional exhaustion (0-6)	2.77(1.69)	2.87(1.62)	.21
Intent-to-leave (1-5)	2.44(1.21)	2.46(1.20)	.80

Results: Content Analysis

- **Why have you decided to leave the profession?**
  - **206 responses** (indicated they were leaving at the end of the current year)
  - 74 from ECE center-based leaders (35.9% of responses)

- **What supports/resources do you think you need to improve your overall well-being from where it is today?**
  - 1,853 responses
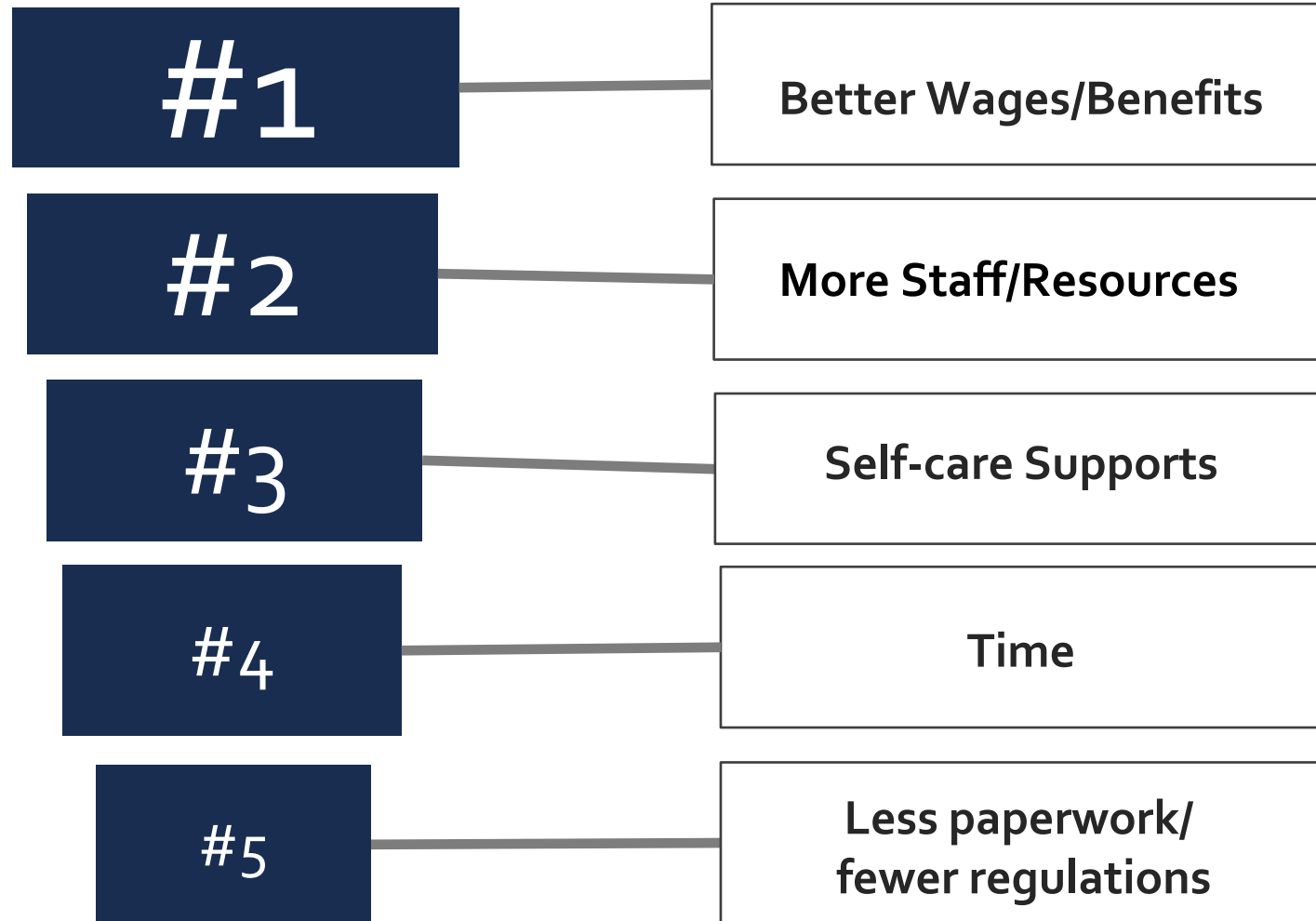 - 819 responses from ECE center-based leaders

Content Analysis: Leavers

Reason for Leaving	Frequency	Percentage of Total Responses
Dissatisfaction	48	64%
Retirement	17	24%
Personal	6	8%
New role	3	4%

Content Analysis: Dissatisfied Leavers

Reason for Leaving	Subtheme	Frequency	Percentage of Total Responses
Dissatisfaction		48	65%
	Burnout/stress	24	50%
	Lack of support from leadership	5	10%
	Staffing issues	5	10%
	Lack of respect from families/society	2	4%
	Low pay/high demands	12	25%

Content Analysis: Leader Needed Supports

#1	Better Wages/Benefits
#2	More Staff/Resources
#3	Self-care Supports
#4	Time
#5	Less paperwork/ fewer regulations

*Also (in rank order): Leadership/collegial support, Better preparation for role; Appreciation/respect; Better work/life balance

Discussion

- Leading a center is a highly-demanding role, but with limited resources.

- The health and well-being of center-based leaders is concerning: poor physical health, sleep difficulties, high risk for depression, and exhaustion.

- Center-based leaders are leaving mostly because they are dissatisfied in their roles, but particularly because of high stress and burnout.

- Wages, benefits, more staffing, and self-care resources are key supports center-based leaders are asking for.

Policy Implications

- Often discussions of the ECE "workforce" do not include center-based leaders.

- More policy attention to the health and well-being of center-based leaders, given their influence of the working environment in which other vulnerable populations work: teachers and children.

- Policy conducive to building a robust ECE teacher workforce to support center-based leadership needs.

- Additional resources and policy changes to bring the wages and benefits of leaders up to levels commensurate with the demands of the job.

Thank You!

Tim Ford, PI, Happy Leader
tgford@ou.edu

Kyong-Ah Kwon, Co-PI, Happy Leader
kkwon@ou.edu