

Project Collaborative Care: How Child Care and Early Intervention Providers Support Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities in Child Care

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Project Description

The purpose of this project is to begin to understand the needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families in child care settings. As the number of infants in child care rapidly increases as does the number of children in need of early intervention services provided in natural settings, this study addresses the needs of this particular group to best align with recommended practices and policies. Specifically, this project examines the experiences of early childhood professionals in child care and early intervention with infants and toddlers with disabilities in child care settings and professional collaboration related to these services. In cooperation with state agencies in child care and early intervention, this project aims to investigate the factors that promote and hinder services for very young children with disabilities in child care.

Research Questions

- What factors promote and hinder the support of infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families in child care settings from the perspectives of child care and early intervention providers?
- What factors promote and hinder collaboration among child care and early intervention providers?
- What are the similarities and differences between child care and early intervention providers in relation to these factors?
- What are the perceived needs (i.e., policy, training, other) of child care and early intervention providers to best serve infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families in child care settings?

Sample

Our study is conducted across a large Midwestern state. For the survey portion, participants are recruited through state-wide agencies in child care, early intervention, and related disciplines (e.g., speech pathology, occupational therapy, physical therapy) via email listservs and social media. Our target sample is at least 350 participants from each provider group (e.g., child care providers, early intervention providers). Participants may be center-based, family home, Early/Head Start, faith-based, private, or other child care providers. Early intervention providers may be from any discipline or role in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part C programs. For the focus group portion, participants will be recruited via self-nomination through the survey participants. Each focus group will have at least four participants and no more than eight for a total of 32-64 participants across eight focus groups (i.e., four per provider group). Focus group participants will be from each of four regions across the state.

Methods

This exploratory study utilizes a developmental mixed methods approach. Online surveys will be used to describe participants': (1) demographics; (2) beliefs about inclusion; (3) perceived supports and barriers to inclusion; (4) experiences with children with disabilities; (5) experiences with early intervention services in child care settings; (6) experiences collaborating with early childhood professionals; and (7) training experiences and needs in relation to infants and toddlers with disabilities and professional collaboration. Surveys will be analyzed using descriptive statistics as well as comparative statistics to highlight similarities and differences between provider groups. Focus group protocols will be developed from survey data and include topics such as descriptions of

early intervention visits in child care settings, discrepancies between ideal and actual practice, factors that support and hinder collaboration, and training needs. Focus group data will be analyzed through qualitative, thematic analysis.

Progress Update

All survey components have been approved by university entities and state agencies. Currently, survey data is being collected.

Implications for policy/practice

This project is aligned with the Departments of Health and Human Services and Education Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Settings (2015) and helps to understand professionals' beliefs and experiences with inclusion of very young children with disabilities in community-based early childhood programs. Results of this study will impact the professional development and training of professionals in the target state and inform state agencies and policymakers about the needs of professionals to best support infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families in child care settings across the state.

Implications for research

This study will update and expand the limited research base on young children with disabilities in child care settings. In particular, this study aims to fill the gaps related to infants and toddlers with disabilities, collaboration among early childhood professionals, and the needs of providers to best meet the needs of children and families.

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