Child Care & Early Education
RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

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Early Care and Education Workplace Conditions and Teacher Stress: Research-to-Policy Resources

Early childhood teachers play a critical role in children’s development, and teacher-child relationships in particular contribute to the development of young children’s social-emotional competence. Research finds that teachers’ workplace stress affects the quality of the relationships they form with children in their classroom, with more workplace stress being associated with more conflict in teacher-child relationships.

Job stressors in the workplace have been defined as the work-related conditions that negatively influence one’s psychological, social and physiological well-being. The literature on teacher stress has documented several factors that can contribute to stress including financial issues (e.g. lack of adequate compensation and benefits), poor workplace supports (e.g. lack of autonomy in decision making, inadequate resources for professional development) and child behavior challenges. Research has also begun to document the effect of teachers’ financial stressors, including wages and work time supports, on the emotional expressions and behaviors of children in the classroom.

In terms of workplace supports, research finds that having more control over decision making and greater collegiality with coworkers is associated with a decrease in stress among preschool teachers. Recognizing the influence that work conditions can have on teachers’ well-being, attention has been turned to improving work environments for early childhood teachers. A new instrument, called Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning (SEQUAL) has been developed by the Center for the Study of Child Care Employment to document information about workplace conditions and teacher well-being and how these factors impact

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teacher practice. The tool addresses five areas of teachers’ work environments: “teaching supports; learning opportunities; policies and practices that support teaching staff’s initiative and teamwork; adult well-being; and how supervisors and program leaders interact with staff to support their teaching practice”.

Child behavior challenges are also a contributor to teacher stress. A recent study examined the relationship between teachers’ perceptions of child behavior problems and teacher stress and found that higher levels of perceived behavior problems was associated with higher levels of teacher stress. This may be particularly true when teachers have not received adequate training in managing challenging behaviors.

This research-to-policy resource list compiles publications from 2010 to the present on early care and education workplace conditions and teacher stress. Much of the research focuses on teachers in center-based settings and preschools. There is little research examining this issue for home-based providers. Resources are grouped under the following headings:

- Descriptive information on teacher well-being and stress
- Factors that contribute to teacher stress:
  - Financial issues
  - Workplace conditions and supports
  - Child behavior challenges
- Effects of stress on teaching practices and child behavior
- Interventions to reduce teacher stress
- Policy resources

**Descriptive Information on Teacher Stress and Well-Being**


**Factors that Contribute to Teacher Stress**

*Financial Issues*

Ullrich, R., Hamm, K., & Herzfeldt-Kamprath, R. (2016). *Underpaid and unequal: Racial wage*


Workplace Conditions and Supports


Child Behavior Challenges


Effects of Stress on Teaching Practices and Child Behavior


Interventions to Reduce Teacher Stress

There have been few studies of interventions to reduce teacher stress. However, some earlier studies examined the use of mental health consultation as a strategy for working with children exhibiting challenging behavior, which in turn can help to reduce teacher stress. A literature review from 2008 examining some of those studies is included here along with other studies.


**Policy Resources**


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