

Wellbeing and Support Among Family Child Care Providers in Quality Improvement Initiatives

CSUN

Holli Tonyan

Professor, Psychology, California State University, Northridge

Justification

- The National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) suggests that 7 million children are cared for by 3.7 million caregivers in home-based settings (NSECE Project Team, 2015). Despite this prevalence, the working conditions of home-based child care remains ill understood.
- Provider wellbeing may be particularly important in family child care (FCC), or licensed child care taking place in the provider's own home, because the providers themselves are responsible for so much of the operation of FCC homes.

Theoretical Perspectives

- Eco(logical)-cultural theory suggests that human activity is embedded in particular niches with documentable ecological (i.e., physical and material) and cultural (e.g., ideological) features that influence how activity is organized (Weisner, 2002, 2005).
- Specifically, Weisner, Matheson, Coots, and Bernheimer (2005), examining families of children with disabilities, found that caregiver wellbeing was more likely when daily routines were sustainable, or
 - Rich in personal meaning
 - Congruent (balancing inevitable conflicts)
 - Fit with resources
 - Stable and predictable
- Starting from the work of Weisner and colleagues (2005), we examined provider wellbeing in the context of the sustainability of daily routines, using a mixed-method approach to understand the cultural organization of FCC.

Purposes

- This poster is part of the California Child Care Policy Research Partnership (CCCPRP). A partnership with the California Department of Education, the Child Care Resource Center, and CSUN that specifically examined the conditions in which FCC providers opted into QRIS.
- This poster examines provider wellbeing and sustainability of daily routines from mixed-method case studies conducted within the CCCPRP.

Sample Characteristics

- The California Child Care Policy Research Partnership (CCCPRP) included
 - Brief Regional Surveys
 - In-depth, mixed-method case studies of licensed FCC providers
- Los Angeles Case Study Providers (n = 54)
 - More often Hispanic (LA: 61%; Sac/El Do: 24%)
 - More often had difficulty paying bills (LA: 81%; Sac/ElDo: 63%)
- Sacramento and El Dorado Providers (n = 30)
 - More likely to have a 2-year degree or higher (Sac/ElDo: 58%; LA: 32%)
 - More likely to be White (Sac/ElDo: 60%; LA: 16%)
- Both samples were mostly women over 40 years old (some couples)

Procedures

- Regional Surveys were mailed to providers' homes with a postage-paid reply envelope
- Case studies included
 - An Initial Visit to the FCC home.
 - A survey of demographic information, background, provider characteristics, stress, beliefs, economic situation, and more.
 - Photographs providers took of their daily activities with children.
 - A semi-structured Interview based on the Ecocultural Family Interview as adapted for FCC homes (Tonyan, Romack, Weisner, Ayala, & Corral, 2014). In addition to asking about the topics (see below), providers were asked about their feelings about and wishes for change for each topic.

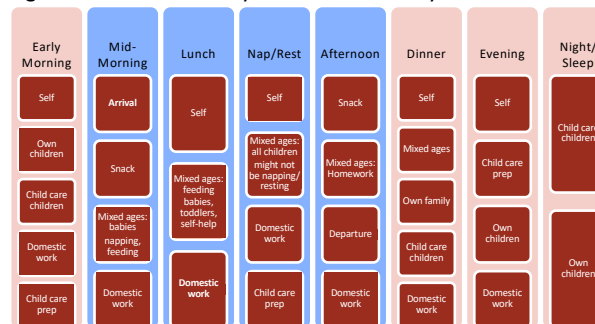
Measures

- Our provider survey included the same subset of items selected from the original Child Care Worker Job Stress Inventory (CCW-JSI; Curbow, Spratt, Ungaretti, McDonnell, & Breckler, 2000) by the researchers in the Quality Interventions in Early Childhood Education (QUINCE) project (Bryant et al., 2009).
- After a few warm-up questions, the interviewers began the Eco-cultural Family Interview by asking the participant to "tell me about your day." Topics included
 - Daily routines
 - Subsistence (economic situation)
 - Home and neighborhood
 - Domestic workload
 - Own family and children's families
 - Support and information
 - Services

Preliminary Findings

- **Sustainability** provided a useful starting point in our analysis, but needed to be expanded to account for the complexity of family child care homes.
- **Personal meaning** was a key component for many family child care providers. Most providers described a great deal of meaning in their work. We saw a "ceiling effect" in the Job Rewards scale of the Child Care Worker Job Stress Inventory. Although personal meaning was high for most providers in our sample, some providers described no longer feeling personal meaning in their work and some providers found that they could not afford to offer FCC in a meaningful way with the resources available to them.
- **Congruence** or balance among competing stakeholders (e.g., provider, assistants/own family, children, children's families, regulators) was another key component of sustainability. Conflicts that arose among stakeholders posed threats to sustainability. In at least one case, the threat was substantial enough to lead the FCC to close.
- **Resources** included financial wellbeing, community support, and another key component of resources in the form of "in-kind" assistance from family members and, sometimes, children's parents (Mimura, Cai, Tonyan & Koonce, Online First). Fit with resources varied by region, with providers in the Sacramento and El Dorado regions more likely to report sufficient resources than providers in the Los Angeles region. Resourcefulness was particularly important among providers in LA.
- Providers in the Los Angeles area were more likely to report economic challenges than providers in the Sacramento/El Dorado area.
- **Stability/predictability** of FCC daily routines is not an aspect of sustainability that our project has effectively theorized yet. FCC providers' daily routines are clearly complex in ways that likely impact FCC providers' wellbeing (see Figure 1). One common issue related to stability/predictability that we discovered is that a substantial number of providers face threats to their livelihood when serving families whose lives are unpredictable and whose children subsequently do not attend the FCC for predictable schedules. In such circumstances, FCC providers not only face the challenges of planning for learning without knowing when individual children will be present, but also financial insecurity.
- **Support/assistance** was an important topic in every interview: having/not having, finding, compensating, training, managing, and other aspects of support/assistance.
- Figure 1, below, represents a modal daily routine, including traditional hours care (in blue) as well as the additional work outside of the purview of an employee during a shift.
- Traditional training on "management" may not apply because of the informal nature of staffing.
- **The past** was an important, and unexpected, aspect of providers' descriptions of their feelings about their work that likely relates to their wellbeing.
- For example, providers with relatively high total household income sometimes reported dissatisfaction with their current economic situation because they used to earn more.
- Similarly, providers who had sufficient help for their current circumstances missed having enough children to be able to pay a helper whom they used to employ.

Figure 1. Modal Weekday Routine in a Family Child Care Home



Note: The blue shading indicates what is typically considered to be part of a child care day and the pink shading indicates the additional workload (FCC, domestic, familial) common for FCC providers, particularly those who offer care during non-standard hours. The orange represents what some have called the "second shift" that working women often face for domestic and child care work for their own family which is complicated by also having FCC children for a subset of FCC providers. "Self" represents the self-care work that might be managed by an employer to establish wellbeing at work. "Domestic work" includes care of the child care space and materials - work that is seldom completed by center-based teaching staff. "Child care prep" includes planning activities, curriculum, assessment and professional learning.

Discussion

- Rather than thinking of provider wellbeing as a sum of component parts, our research suggests that FCC is a dynamic system in which support and assistance are key inputs and provider wellbeing is an important output.
- Existing measures did not adequately capture key aspects of FCC provider wellbeing.
- **Personal meaning and rewards** of the work were highly salient for nearly all providers, but were not well captured in the Job Rewards subscale of the CCW-JSI.
- Many of the particular challenges the FCC providers faced varied by region and individual. They may be hard to capture in a Likert-type scale. A risk inventory may be a better approach.
- Future studies of FCC provider wellbeing will need to carefully consider how best to measure the following.
- **Resources** were broader than expected, and included support available and economics beyond income.
- The quality and availability of support, in general, and assistance with the day-to-day tasks of the FCC are important resources.
- **Stability/predictability** in FCC involves children's day-to-day attendance and stability/predictability in families' enrollment patterns (i.e., how long a given family is enrolled or how much energy a provider expends to maintain viable enrollment levels).
- A provider said, "with child care, there is always something," and research has barely begun to skim the surface of the supports that would help FCC providers maintain wellbeing in the face of this dynamic, changing system.

Implications

- This holistic analysis of provider wellbeing made visible a great deal of what is not typically included in ECE professionals' work, but is essential in the care of children from birth through school entry.
- During an era when efforts are underway to professionalize the ECE workforce, it is important not to marginalize the self-care, integration between "work" and "family/home," and integration of care and education represented in these FCC providers' work.

Strengths & Limitations

- The holistic, mixed-method approach taken in this research yielded insights that would not have been possible with narrow measurement approaches.
- These findings are based on interviews with providers and only limited observations of their circumstances. Additional research to link providers' perceptions to verifiable consequences will be important.
- Yet, these findings from a non-representative sample must be confirmed in future studies with other samples.

Acknowledgements

The project described was supported by the Child Care Research Partnership Grant Program, Grant Number 90YED153, from the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Additional support was provided by First 5 California. The contents of this presentation are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or any other of our partners. For more information about the partnership, visit: <http://www.yareyouthpartnership.com>