

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

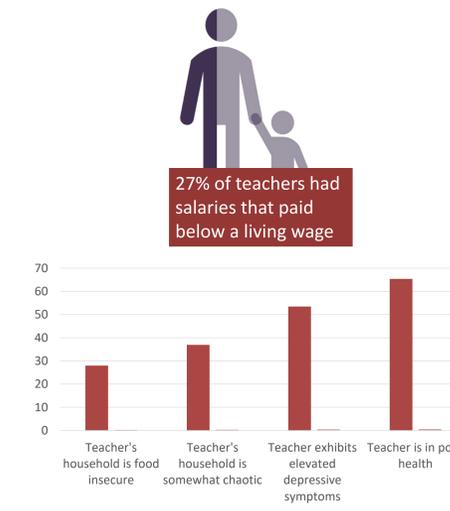
Classroom quality

- 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)

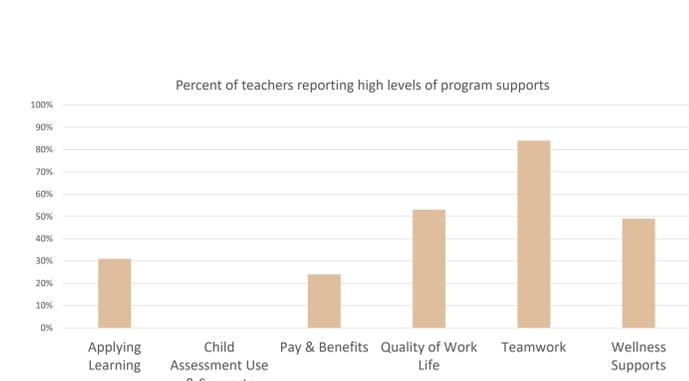
The Tulsa SEED Study is funded by the Foundation for Child Development, the Heising-Simons Foundation, the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the University Strategic Organization Initiative at the University of Oklahoma, the Spencer Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

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