

Child Care Dissertation Grants

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Project Title: *Help Me Feed Me: A Mixed Methods Study of Factors associated with Infant and Toddler Teachers' Feeding Styles*

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Project Abstract:

The first 1,000 days of life are a critical window of childhood development. Yet, 8.1% of US children age 2 years or under are at risk for obesity and adverse health outcomes. Children have a greater need for multiple nutrients relative to body weight compared to adults, but attaining adequate nutrition can be a challenge due to caregiver feeding styles and cultural traditions, and the development of child feeding-independence and food preferences. During this important period, it is imperative that children be allowed to develop appropriate self-feeding skills and be provided with nutrient-rich diets to help them achieve healthy growth and establish lifelong healthy eating habits which can reduce risk for chronic diseases in later childhood and adulthood.

Parents and childcare providers serve as the architects of children's healthy eating environment. The US Surgeon General and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified childcare settings as important for obesity prevention efforts. Moreover, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) identified caregiver responsive feeding style as an obesity prevention strategy. *Responsive feeding* style involves reciprocity between the caregiver and child, whereby the caregiver starts and stops a feeding based upon the child's hunger and satiety cues. *Nonresponsive feeding* styles in which caregivers control, restrict, pressure, indulge, or ignore children while feeding have been associated with poor dietary habits and obesity in children. Potential caregiver feeding style differences may exist among different racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, evidence suggests that despite existing guidelines for providers, there may still exist knowledge and skills gaps on how to use developmentally appropriate feeding practices with or provide nutrient-rich diets for very young children.

Only one published responsive feeding intervention study conducted in the US early care and education (ECE) setting has been identified. While the research literature contains guidance on nutrition intervention development for the ECE setting, formative research is still needed to elucidate key understandings on child care center (environmental) and infant and toddler childcare provider (individual level) factors that influence and can be intervened on to specifically promote provider responsive feeding. This study's research questions will address significant research gaps in the literature:

- (1) Is the Infant Feeding Styles Questionnaire (IFSQ) valid for use with infant and toddler childcare providers?
- (2) What are the factors associated with infant and toddler childcare providers' feeding styles?
- (3) What are the attitudes and beliefs among infant and toddler child care center providers surrounding provider feeding styles?

This study proposes to use a sequential mixed methods design of a quantitative (secondary analysis of the Baby Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment for Child Care, a.k.a Baby NAP SACC, intervention study data) followed by a qualitative (semi-structured interviews with providers) method as the analytical approach to answer the research questions. Study results can help inform the development or refinement of culturally-sensitive responsive feeding intervention research trials, programs, trainings, and policies for the ECE setting.