

Buffett
Early Childhood
Institute
at the University of Nebraska

Our ECE Workforce:

Stress, Well-Being and Promising Directions for Research and Practice

Kathleen Gallagher, Ph.D.
University of Nebraska at Kearney
Buffett Early Childhood Institute



CONSIDERATIONS...

What is wellbeing?

What is stress?

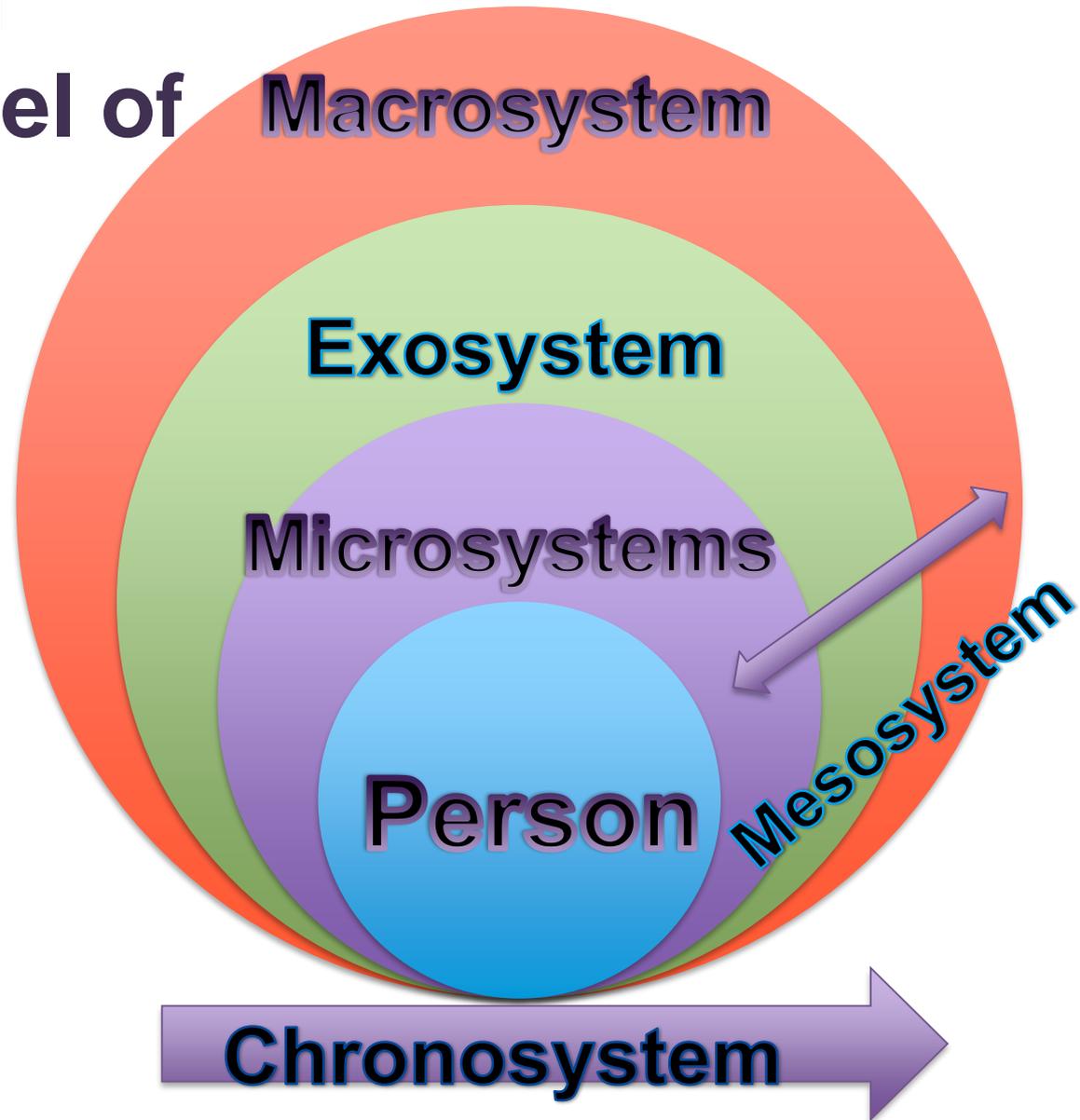
Why does it matter?

How are ECE professionals doing?

What are promising next steps?

Bioecological Systems Model of Development

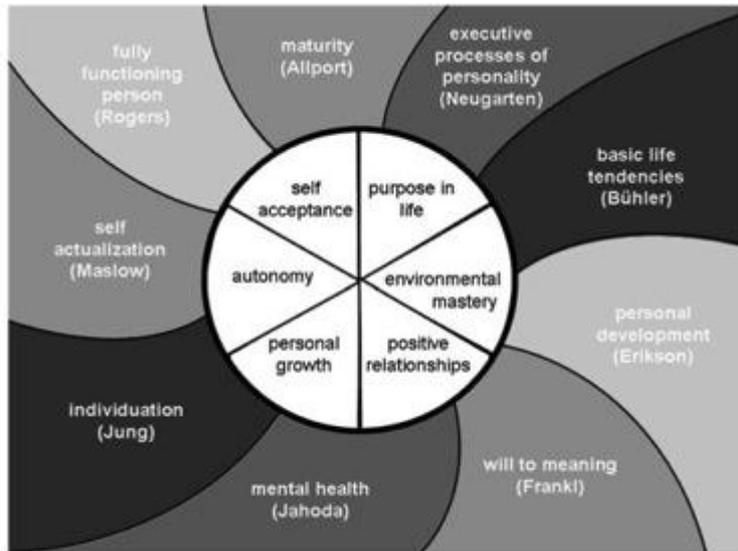
- Biopsychosocial
- Person-Process-Context-Time (PPCT)



(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1993; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

What is WELL-BEING?

The state of being happy, healthy or prosperous; flourishing



(Ryff, 2014)

- ❖ Self-acceptance
- ❖ Personal growth
- ❖ Purpose in life
- ❖ Positive relations with others
- ❖ Environmental mastery
- ❖ Autonomy

Definition of Health

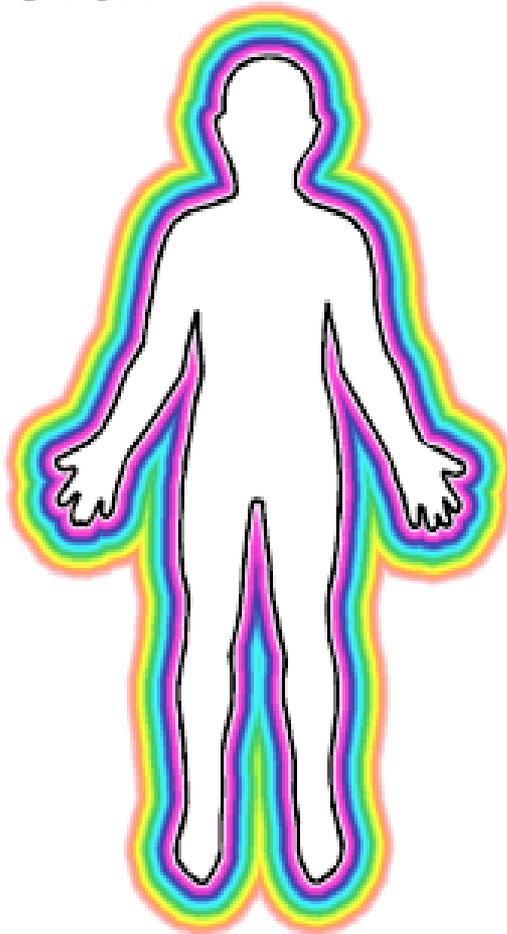
“more than merely the absence of disease – it is an **evolving human resource** that helps children and adults **adapt to the challenges of everyday life**, resist infections, cope with adversity, feel a **sense of personal well-being**, and interact with their surroundings in ways that **promote successful development.**”

~ Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University

What is STRESS?

Biopsychosocial

- *Sensitivity*
- *Health*



*The body's
response
to any
demand for
change...*

(Hans Selye, 1936)

What is STRESS?

Contextual:

- Workplace
- Family
- Social



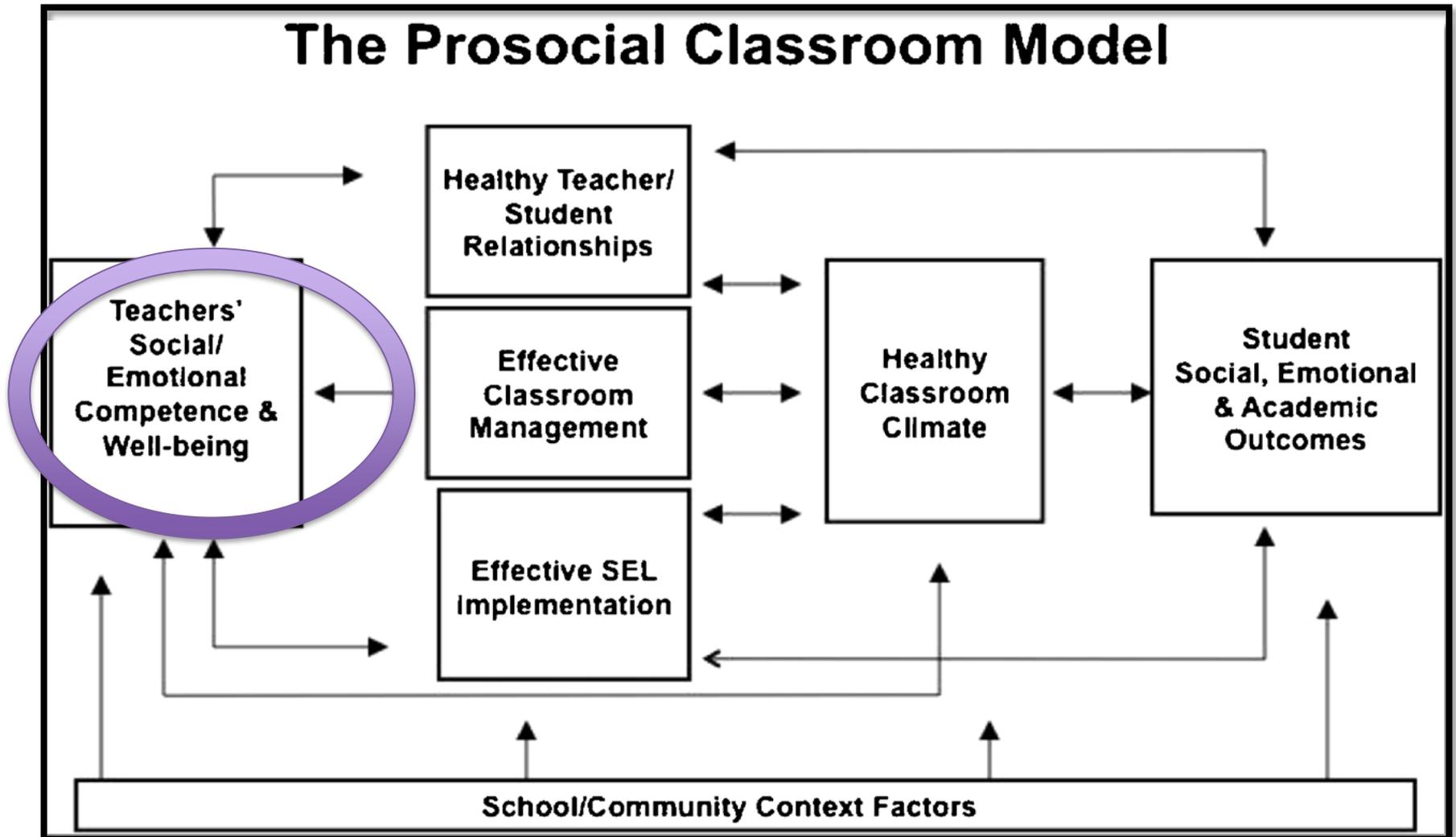


Why do stress and well-being matter?

Impact of wellbeing and stress on the ECE workforce...

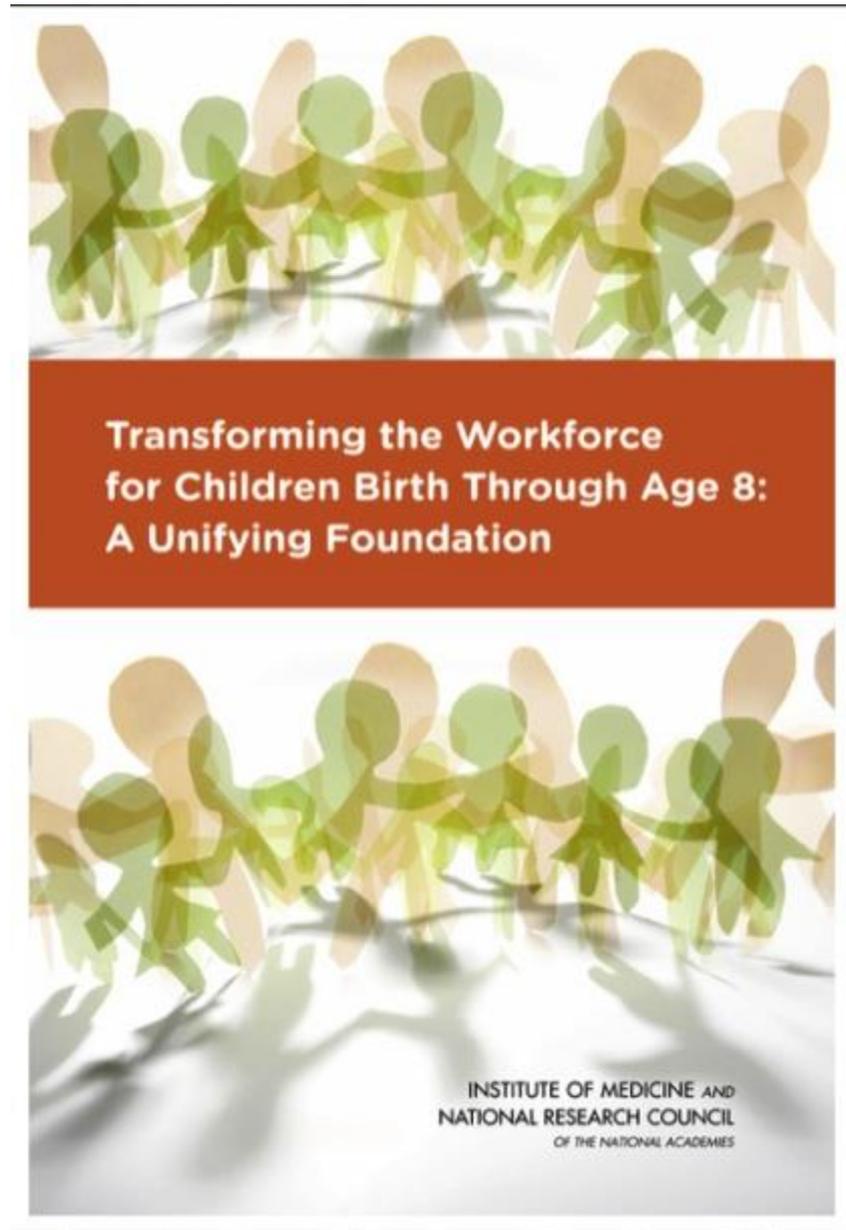
A Social-Emotional Perspective

Jennings & Greenberg, 2009



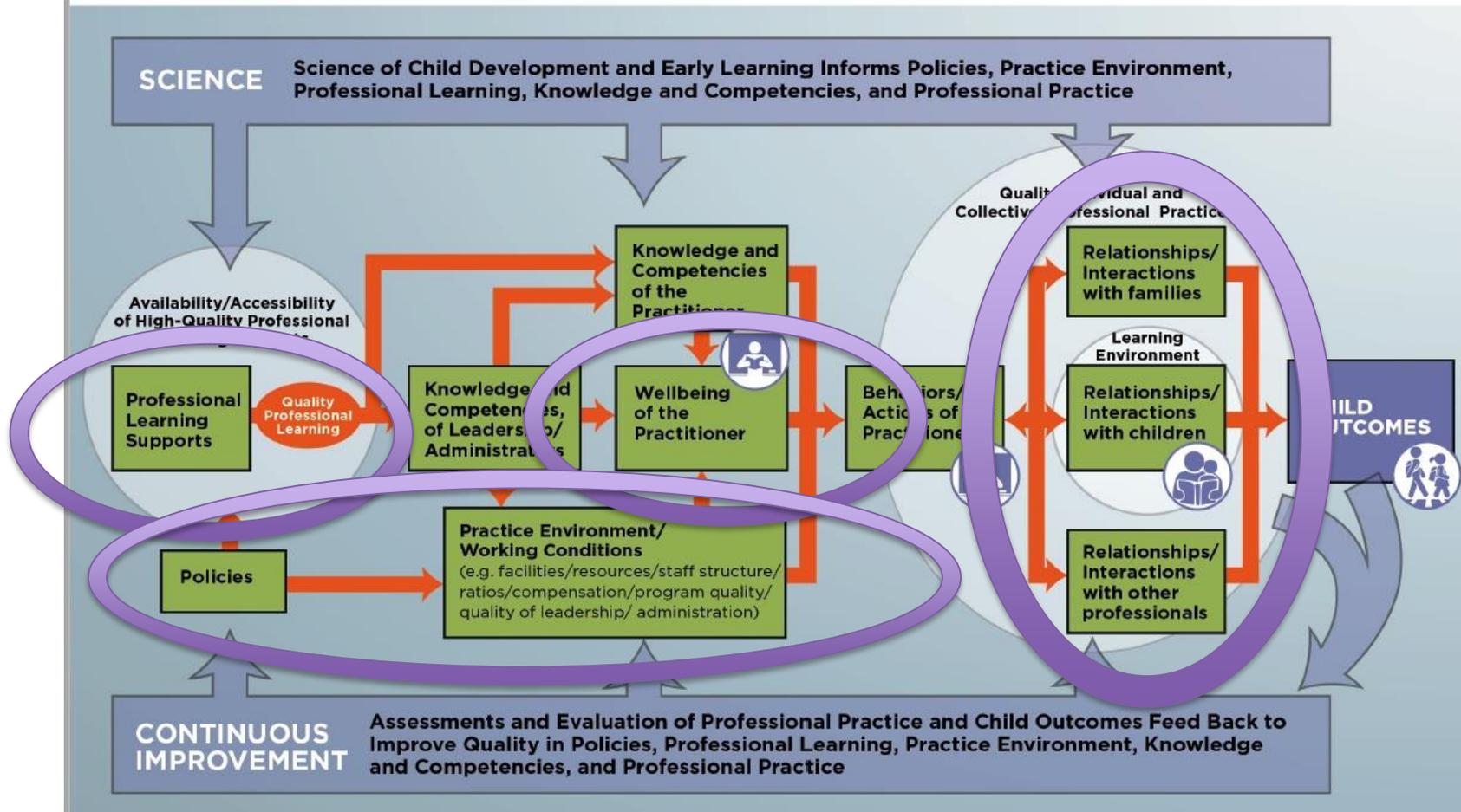
Supporting ECE Professionals' Knowledge and Skill Development

(IOM & NRC, 2015)



Transforming the Workforce

Figure 8-1. Factors that contribute to quality professional practice and ultimately to improving child outcomes.



Assumptions...

Well-Being of ECE Professionals

Is Impacted by...

- Health
- Stress
- Events

Impacts...

- Emotion
Regulation
- Relationships
- Teaching
Capacity

Pennsylvania Head Start Staff Wellness Survey

- Design
 - Anonymous, voluntary, web-based
 - All staff in PA Head Start and Early Head Start
- Data collection
 - March to June 2012
 - 30-45 minutes to complete
 - 200 items



Whitaker, et al., 2014

Goals of the PAHS Staff Wellness Survey



Program and Staff Participation

- 66 of 91 programs (73%)
- 37 of 54 Head Start programs (69%)
- 29 of 37 Early Head Start programs (78%)

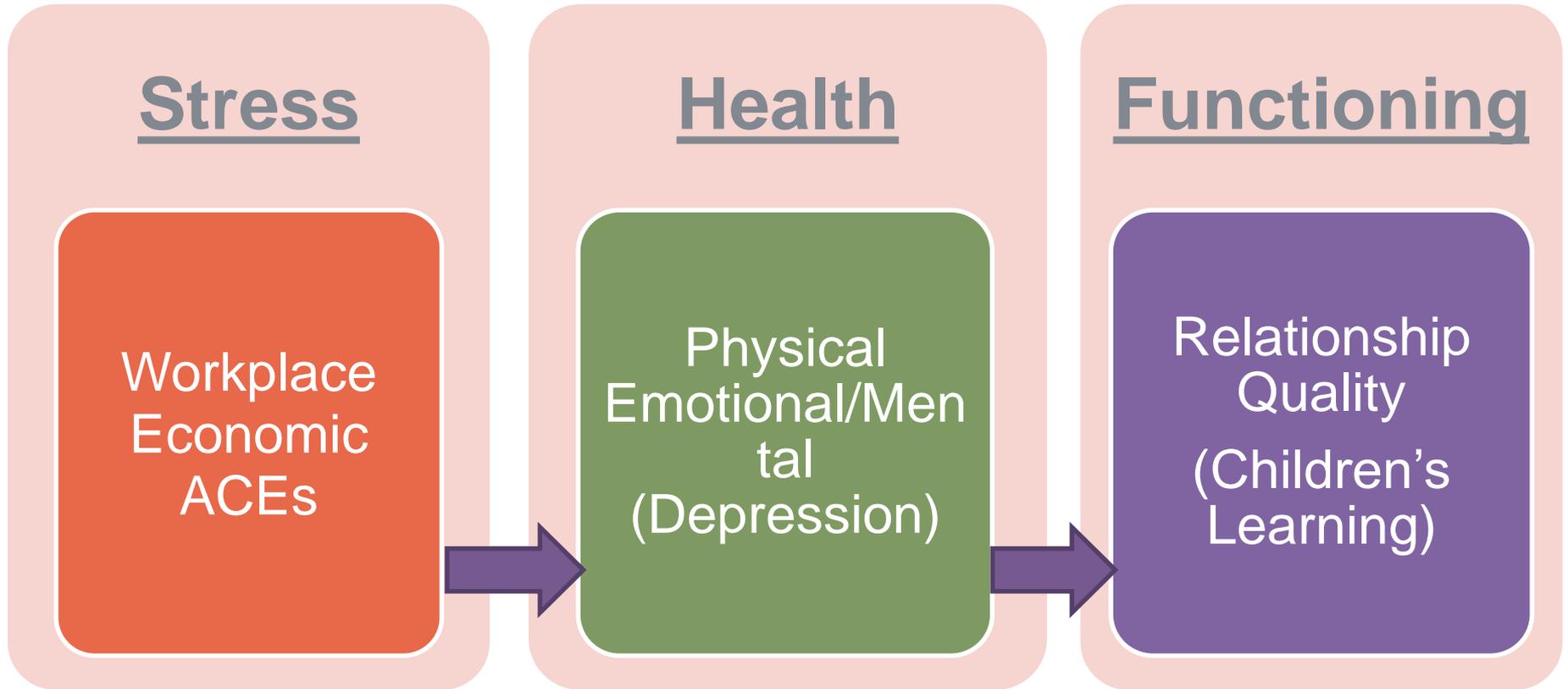
Job Category	Number of Responses	Response Rate	Percent of Sample
Teachers	596	61%	27%
Assistant Teachers	466	50%	21%
Home Visitors	312	75%	14%
Family Support Staff	329	67%	15%
Managers	496	91%	23%
All	2199	65%	100%

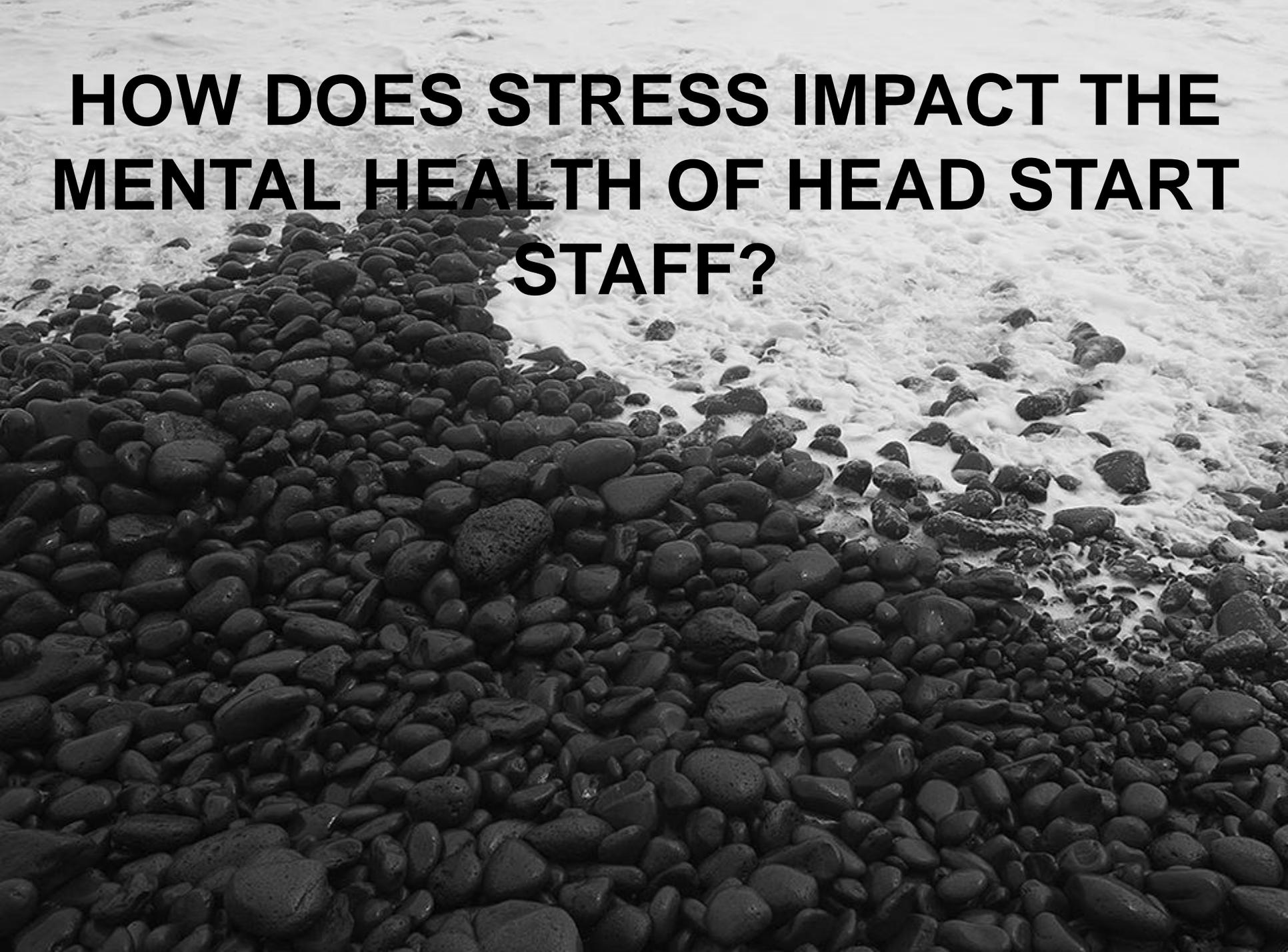
Staff Characteristics

Characteristic	%
Female	97
Non-Hispanic White	86
Married or cohabitating	73
Bachelor's degree or higher	61
Age \geq 40 years	56
Child attended Head Start	26
Attended Head Start as a child	6
>15 years in early childhood workforce	32



Impacts of Stress on Health and Functioning



A black and white photograph of a rocky beach. The foreground is filled with dark, smooth, rounded stones of various sizes. In the background, white foam from waves is crashing against the shore, creating a stark contrast with the dark rocks. The overall scene is serene yet powerful, suggesting a natural, perhaps somewhat harsh, environment.

HOW DOES STRESS IMPACT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF HEAD START STAFF?

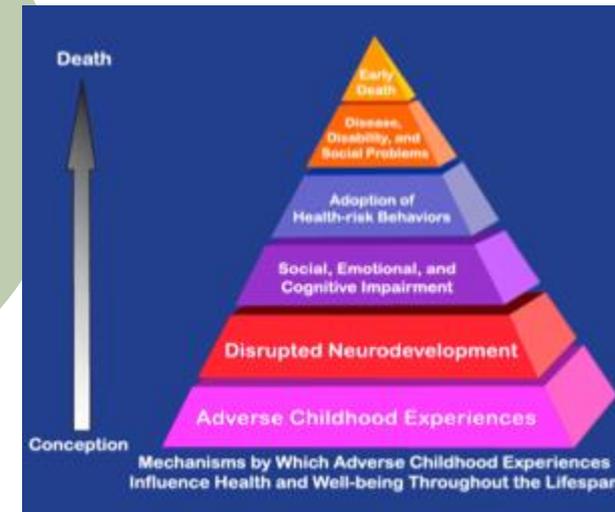
Sources of Stress

Utilities
Health Care
Housing
Food



Demands
Control
Support

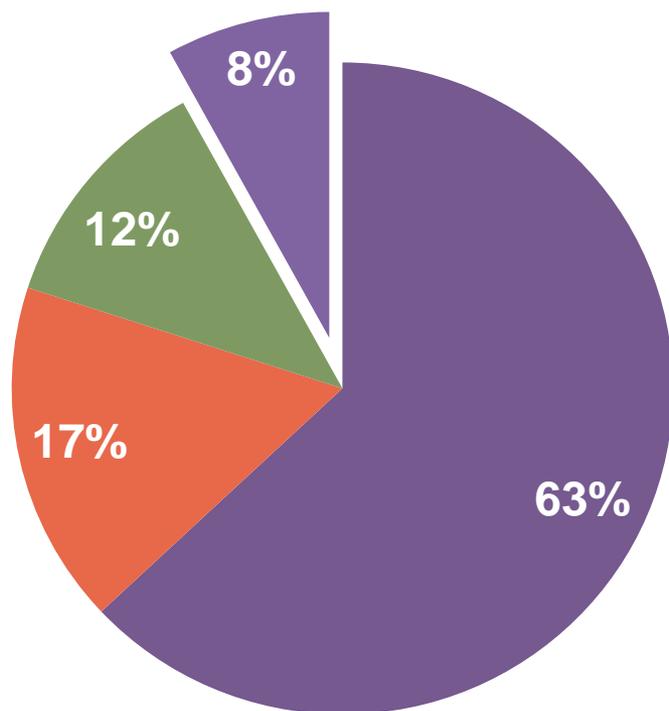
(JCQ, Karasek, 1998)



How Common are Stressors?

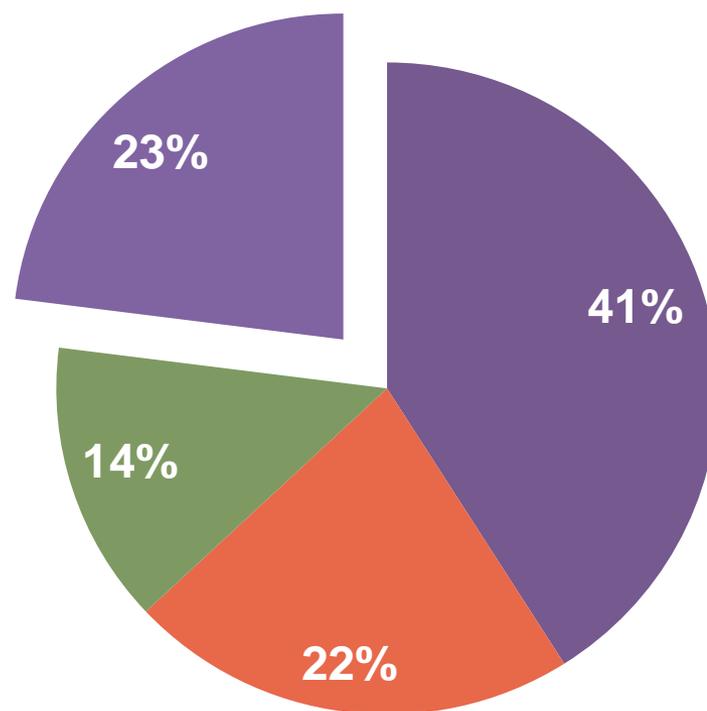
Number of Economic Hardships

■ None ■ 1 ■ 2 ■ 3-5



Number of Adverse Childhood Experiences

■ None ■ 1 ■ 2 ■ ≥ 3



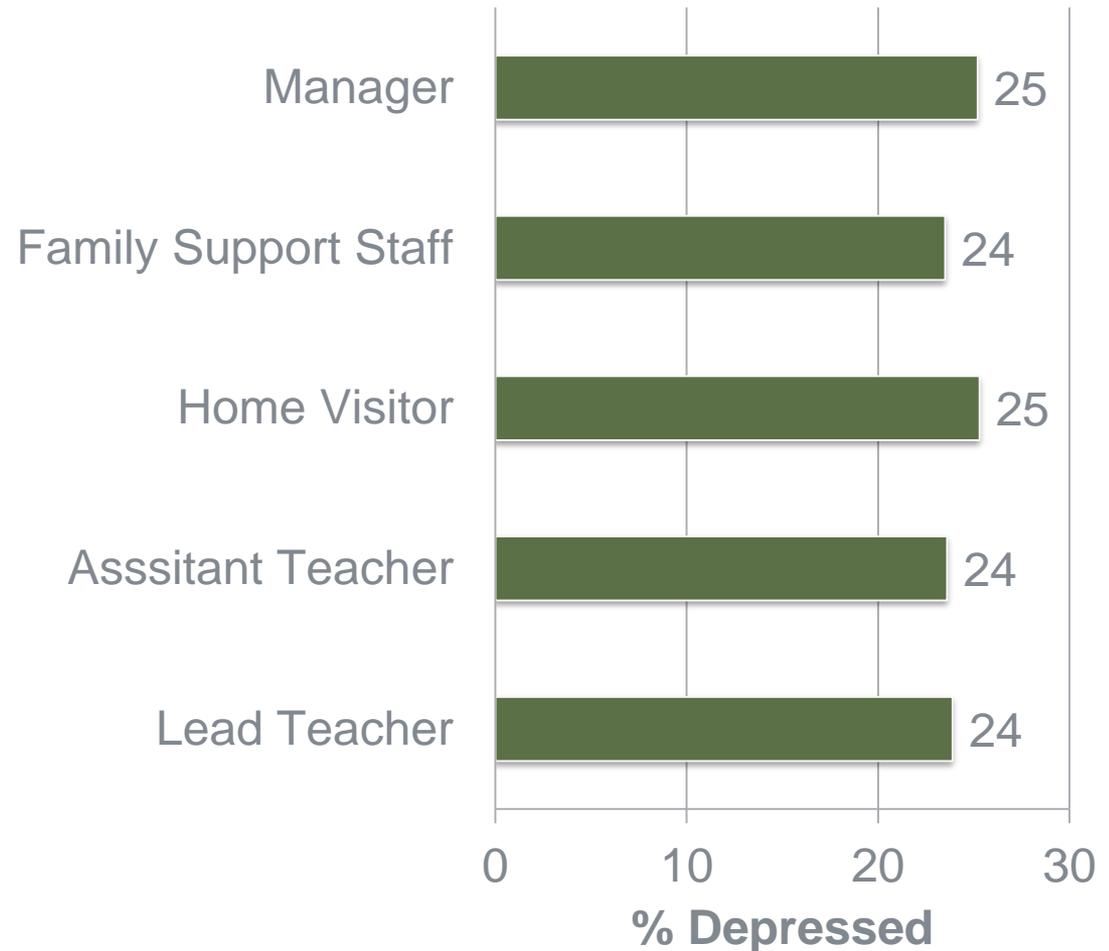
Whitaker , et al ., 2012

Why Focus on Depression?

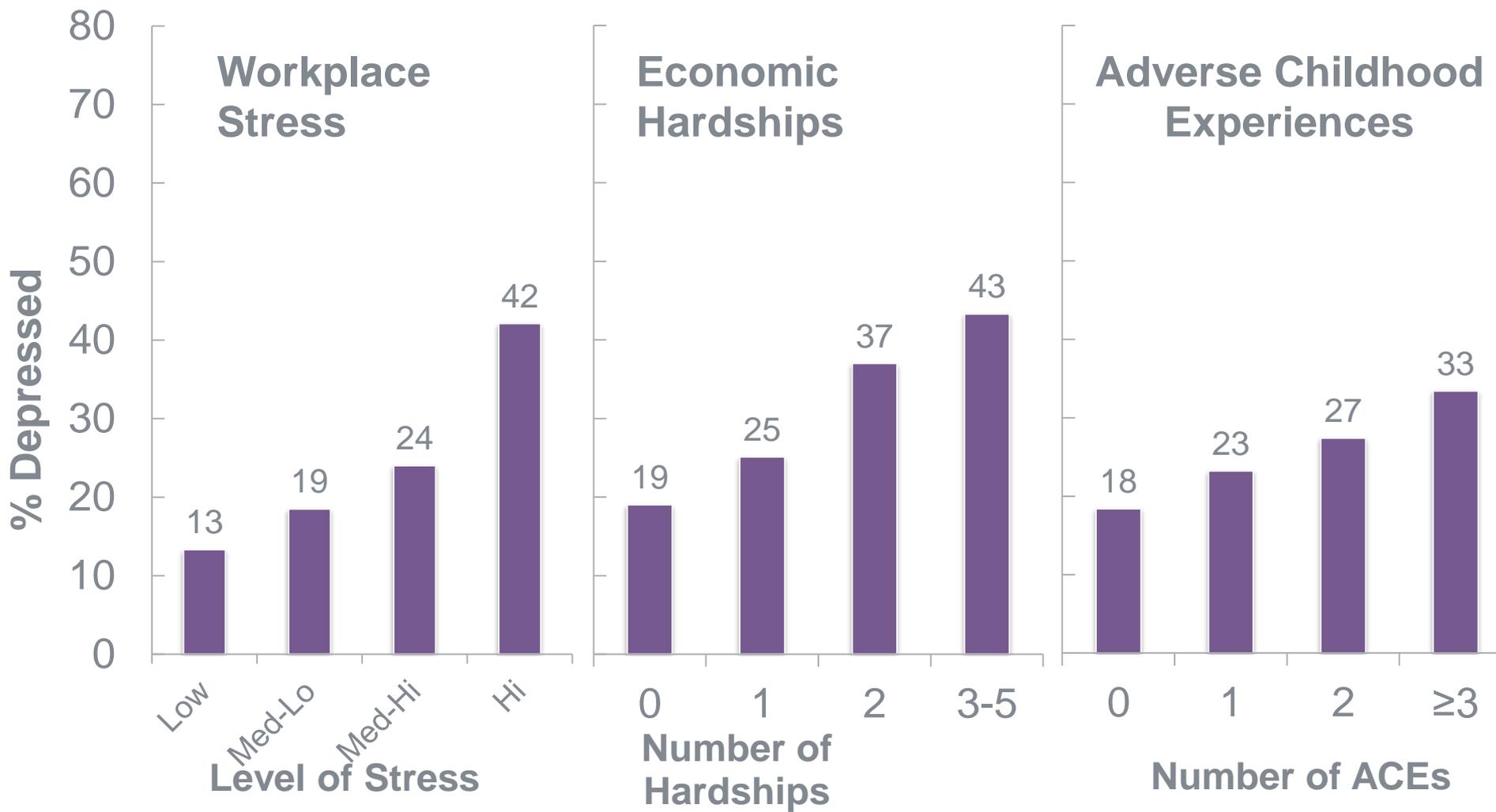
- It is a strongly associated with stress
- It affects both the mind and the body
- It impacts both relationships and learning
- It is common among all staff levels

Whitaker, et al., 2012

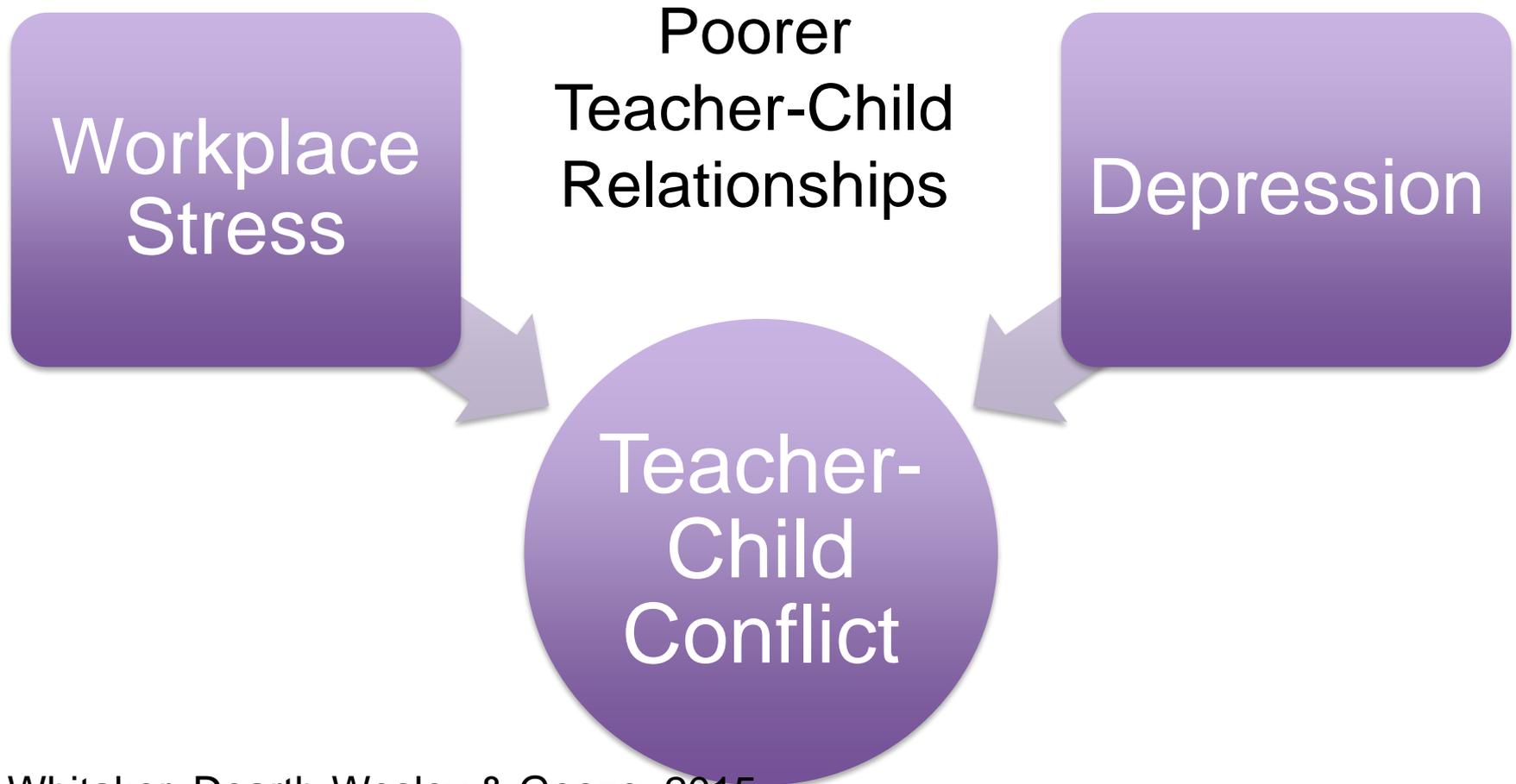
Prevalence of Depression (C-ESD Score ≥ 16)



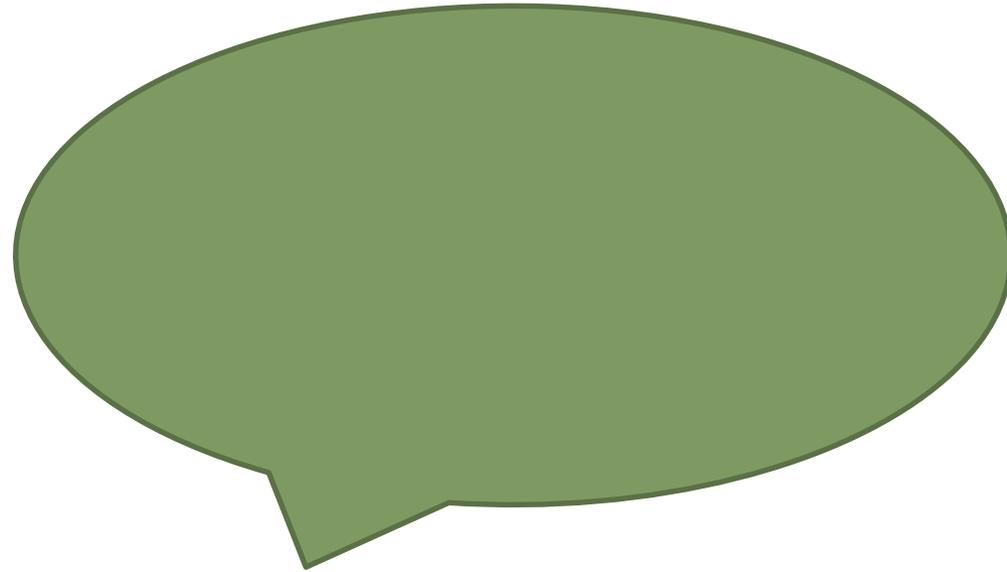
As Stress Increases, Prevalence of Depression Increases



Workplace Stress and Depression



Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley & Gooze, 2015



WHAT DO STAFF SAY ABOUT STRESS IN THEIR LIVES?

Gallagher, K.C. & Whitaker, R.C.
(under review).

OPEN-ENDED RESPONSE:

In the space below, please feel free to write anything else you would like to say about any of the following topics:

- a) the stress in your life,
- b) your physical health,
- c) your mental well-being, or
- d) how you are doing at work

Meaningful Work

- Joy, happiness, fulfillment at work
- Belief in the Head Start mission
- Sense of competency from doing well at work



“I love working at Head Start. I have worked as both a teacher and a family service worker, and I feel that the work we do is extremely rewarding and beneficial to the community.”

Financial Stress

- Not making enough money/low wage
- Working a second job
- General financial hardship

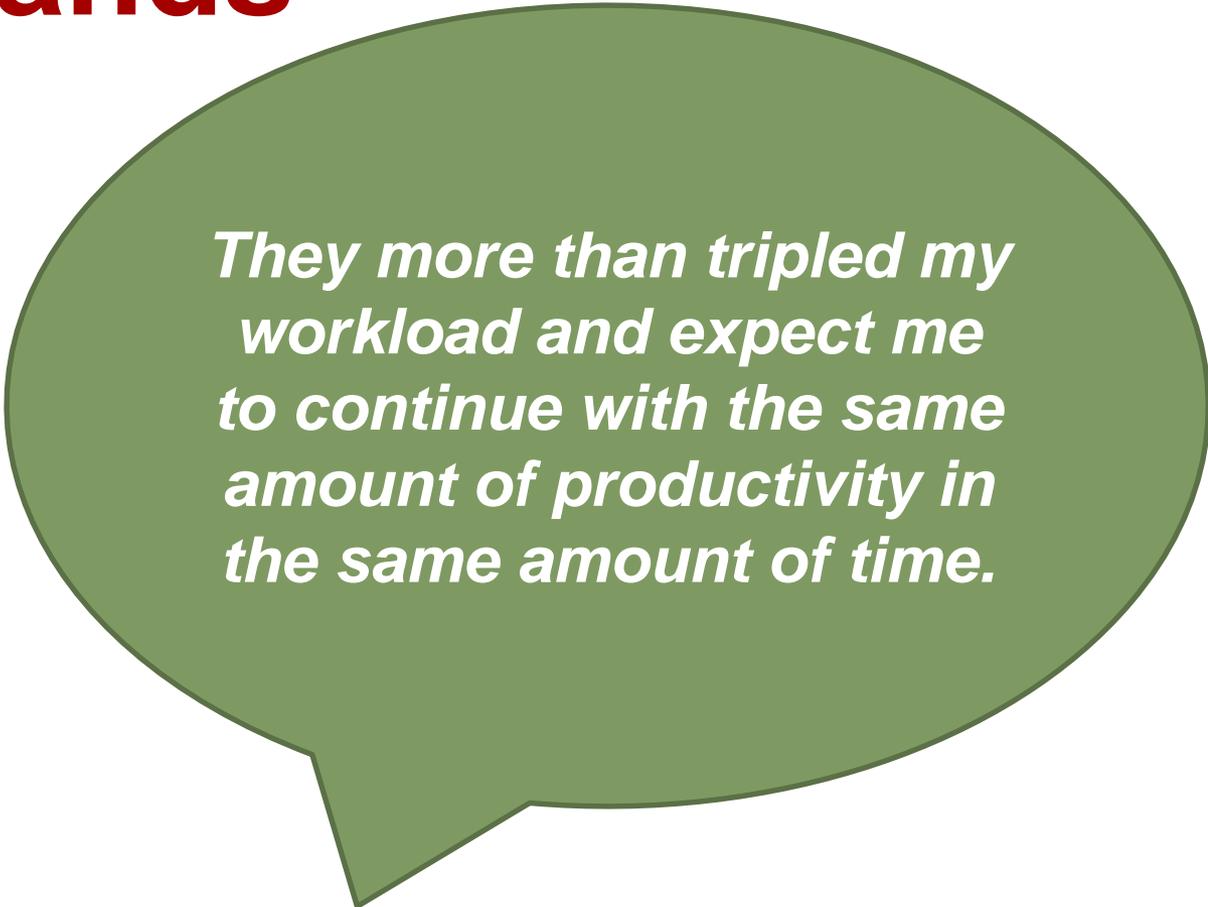


As long as I have worked for Head Start, I have always had to have a second or third job to make ends meet.

Workplace Stress: High Demands

Descriptions of high work demands:

- too much paperwork
- doing work outside of work
- doing the work of more than one person

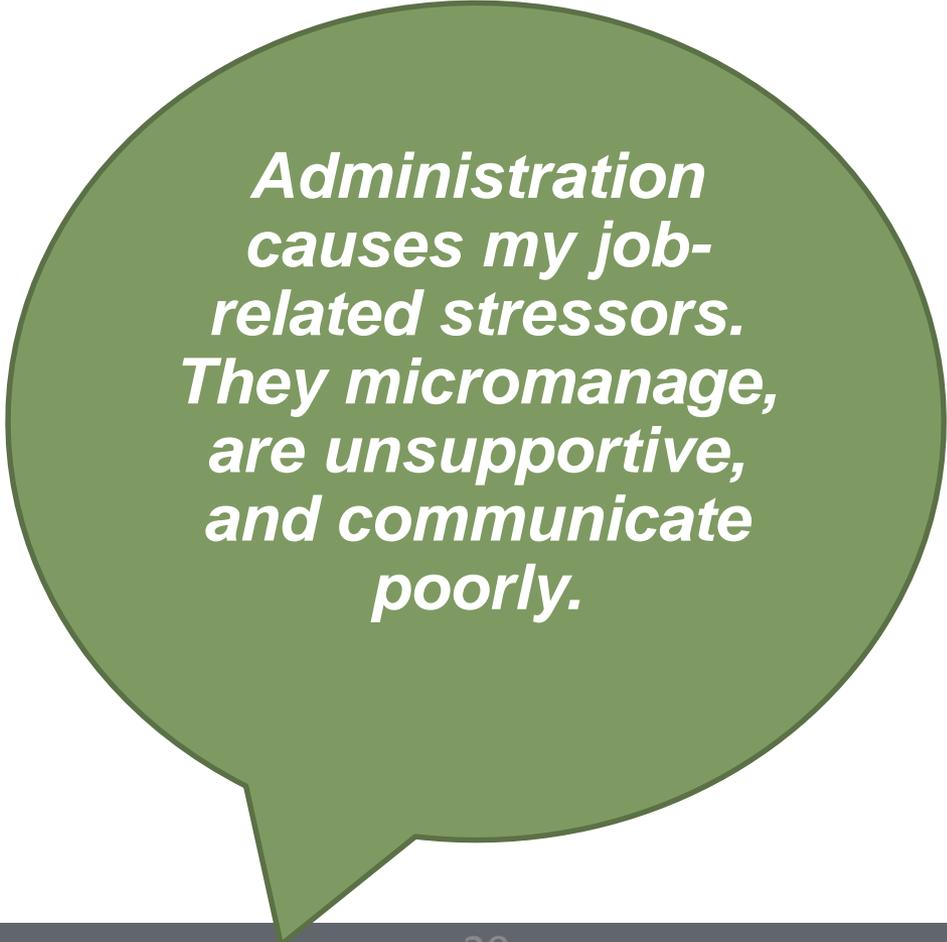


They more than tripled my workload and expect me to continue with the same amount of productivity in the same amount of time.

Workplace Stress: Low Support and Control

Those in leadership positions:

- not valuing the work they do
- providing little support or praise
- bullying; creating an environment of mistrust
- not communicating well: being out of touch
- not appreciating or respecting them



Administration causes my job-related stressors. They micromanage, are unsupportive, and communicate poorly.

Meaningful Work *and* Stress

“My job requires more and more of my time and energy each year with little to no monetary or emotional compensation. The main reason I choose to stay with Head Start is that I believe in the program and enjoy working with the children and families to help them succeed in life. I wish our program showed more care and concern for its staff.”

What we learned...

- Many HS staff are suffering – and lack resources to be well
- Meaningful work or flourishing occurred WITH stressors
- Few cited children or families as their sources of stress

HS Staff leverage the meaning they find in work, to thrive in a demanding, low reward career.



PROMISING DIRECTIONS

1. Person
2. Context
3. Policy

Promising Approaches for Reducing Stress

Two approaches can reset the balance of self-regulation in adulthood.



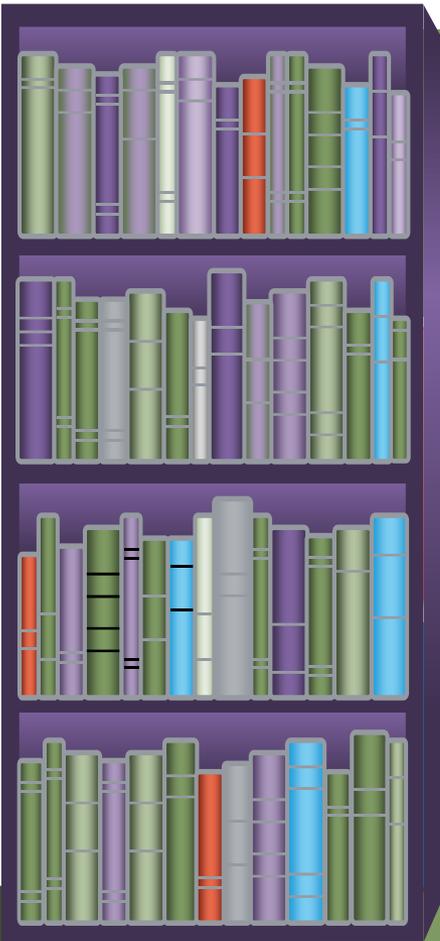
Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016



PROMISING DIRECTIONS

1. Biopsychosocial:

Increasing workforce resilience



**Emotion
Experience**

**Emotion
Recognition**

**Emotion
Responding**

Enhancing Emotional Intelligence

HEALTH:

Care2B Well

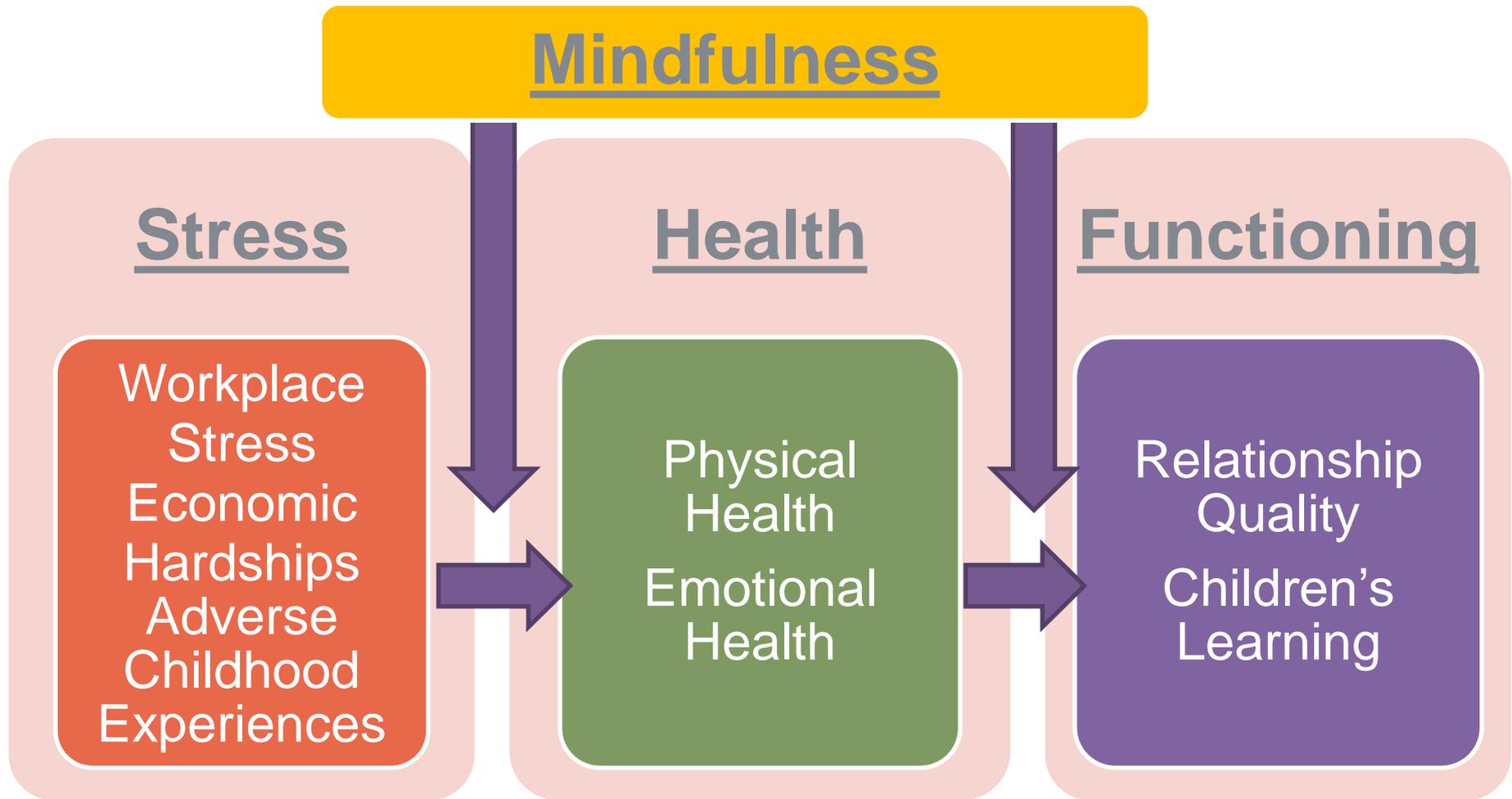
(Ward & Linnan, UNC at Chapel Hill)

- 5 year study to examine the impact of health and physical activity intervention for child care providers
- Goal: to find new ways to improve the health of child care workers and the child care center work environment.



WHAT HELPED PA HEAD START STAFF TO BE RESILIENT AND MANAGE STRESS?

Resilience to the Impacts of Stress on Health and Functioning



Mindfulness



Paying **attention** -
having awareness -
on purpose, in the
present moment,
and nonjudgmentally
(Kabat-Zinn, 1994)

Why Focus on Mindfulness?

- It may protect staff from the effects of stress on emotional health and physical health
- It may improve relationships and learning
- It can be altered through interventions that teach the practice of mindfulness

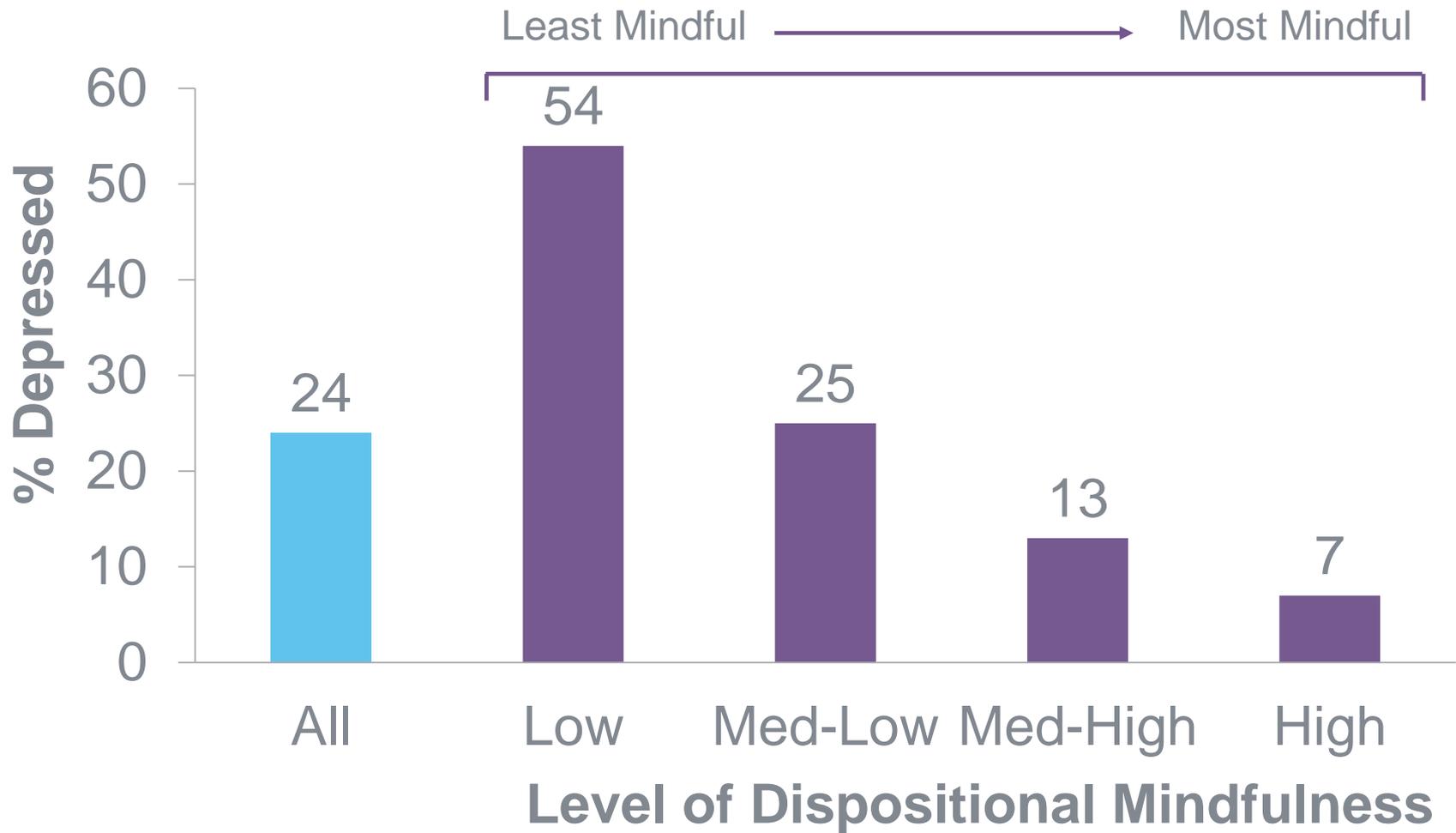
Measure of a Mindful Disposition (CAMS-R, Feldman et. al, 2007)

Rate how much each of these applies to you

- **Present-focus**
- “I am able to focus on the present moment”
- **Attention**
- “It is easy for me to concentrate on what I am doing”
- **Awareness**
- “I try to notice my thoughts without judging them”
- **Acceptance**
- “I can accept things I cannot change”

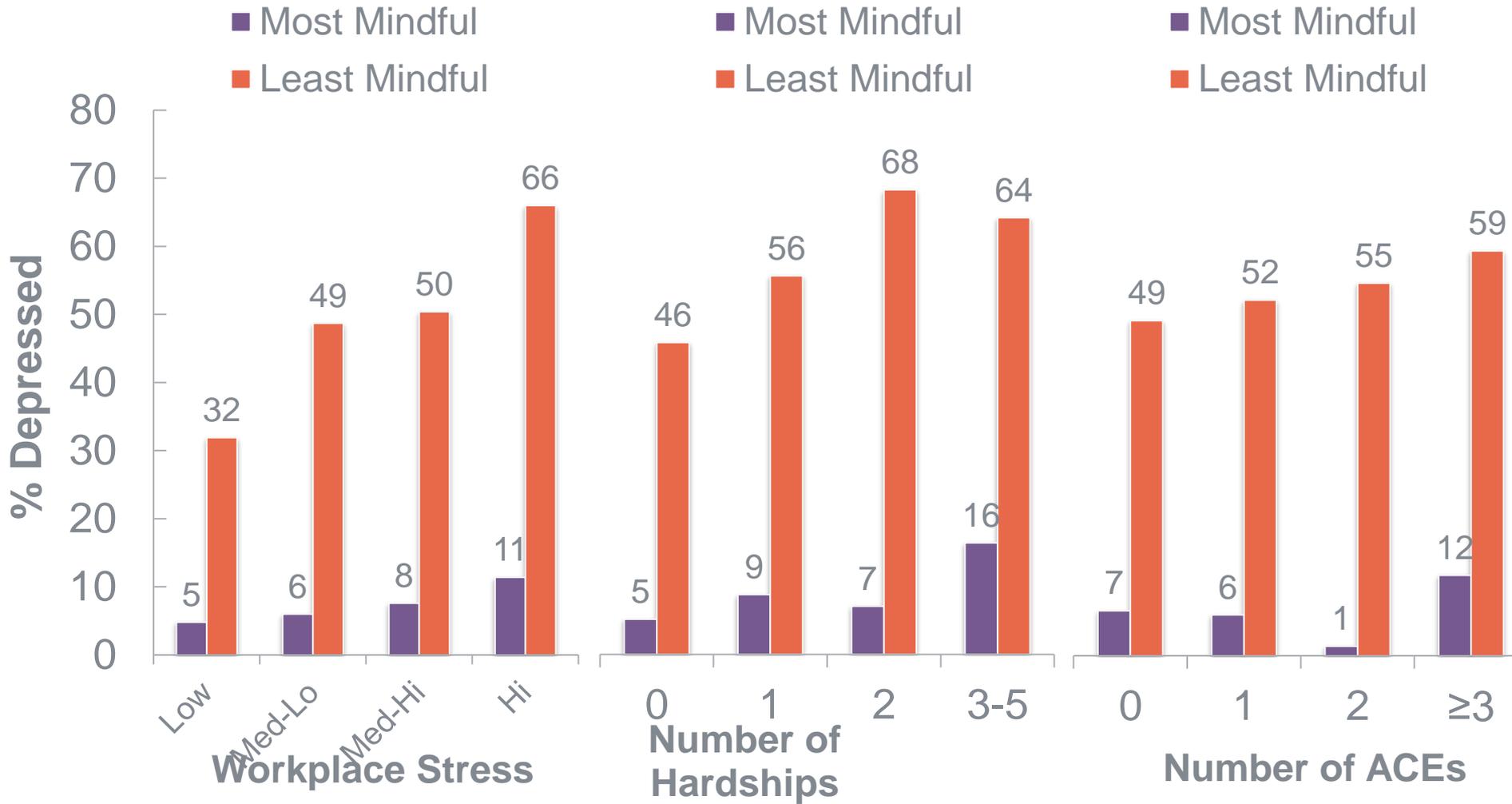
1 Rarely or Not at all	2 Sometimes	3 Often	4 Almost always
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As Mindfulness Increases, Prevalence of Depression Decreases



Whitaker, et al. 2014

Across Stressors, More Mindful Staff Have Less Depression



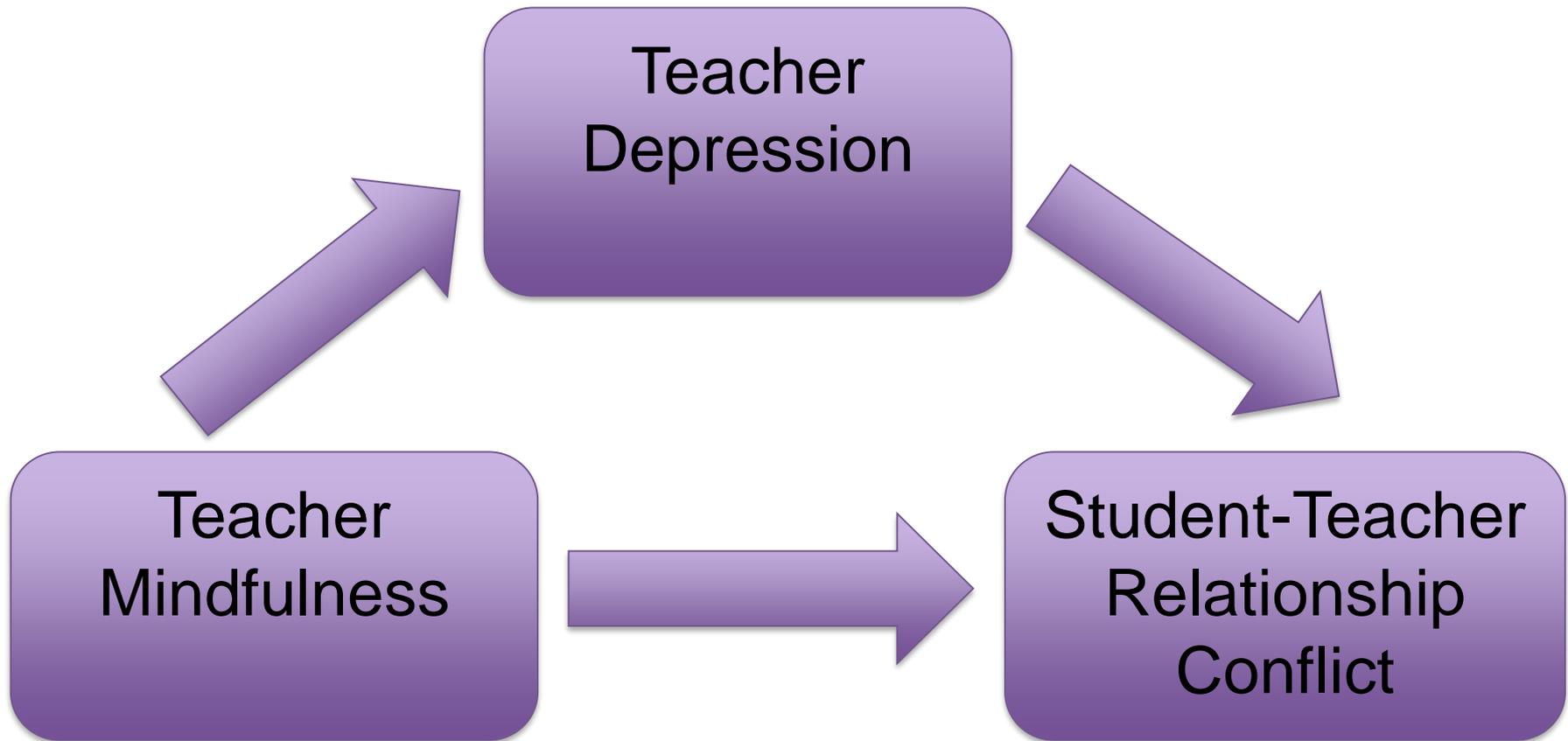
More mindful:

**Home visitors
reported better
relationships with
parents**



**Teachers have less
conflict in their
relationships with
children.**

Mindfulness and Student-Teacher Relationship Quality



(Becker, Gallagher & Whitaker, under review)



PROMISING DIRECTIONS

2. Context: Workplace Well-Being

Research and Practice Considerations for Workplace Well-Being Supports

- Relationship-focused
 - Workforce health and well-being supports
 - Trauma-informed
- Enhancing Trauma Awareness
 - Delaware County, PA
 - Evaluation to examine and enhance TA among preschool teachers

Organizational Change: The Sanctuary Model

- Growth and Change
- Democracy
- Social Responsibility
- Open Communication
- Social Learning
- Emotional Intelligence
- Nonviolence



(Sandra Bloom, 1998)



PROMISING DIRECTIONS

3. Economic Supports and Policies



**Worthy Work, STILL Unlivable Wages:
The Early Childhood Workforce 25 Years
after the National Child Care Staffing Study**

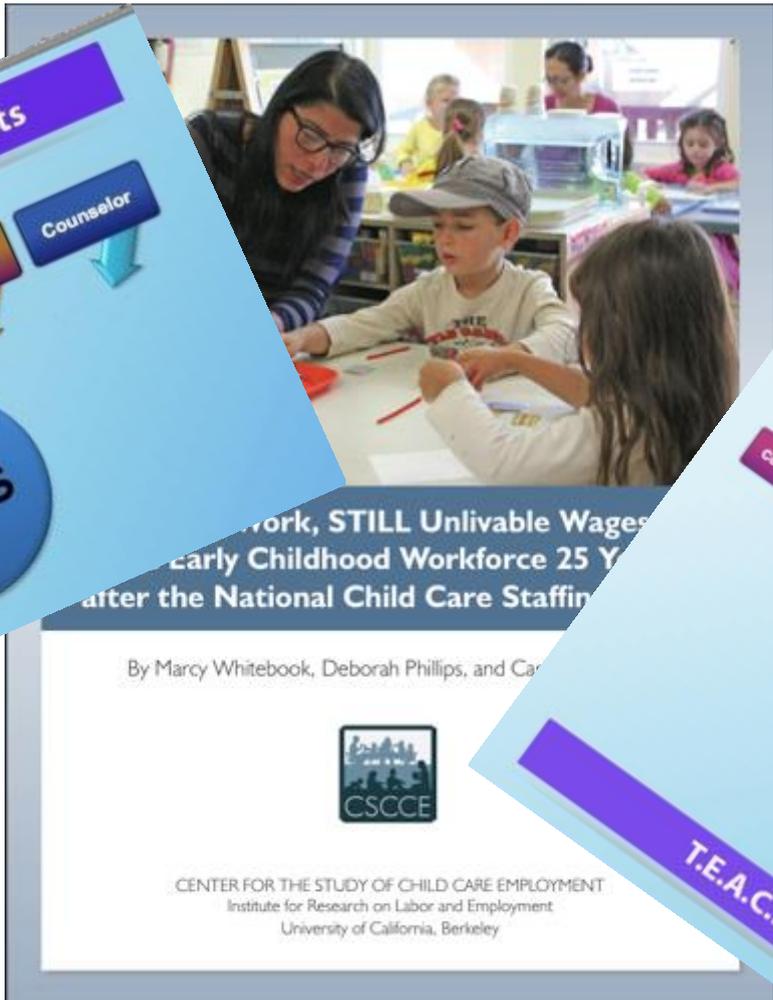
By Marcy Whitebook, Deborah Phillips, and Carollee Howes



CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF CHILD CARE EMPLOYMENT
Institute for Research on Labor and Employment
University of California, Berkeley

Early Childhood Workforce Policies: Compensation Strategies





PROMISING DIRECTIONS

1. Person
2. Context
3. Policy



Thank you!

Kathleen Gallagher, Ph.D.
gallagherkc@unk.edu