Our ECE Workforce:

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

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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

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

(Ryff, 2014)
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

The Prosocial Classroom Model

- Teachers’ Social/Emotional Competence & Well-being
- Healthy Teacher/Student Relationships
- Effective Classroom Management
- Effective SEL Implementation
- Healthy Classroom Climate
- Student Social, Emotional & Academic Outcomes

School/Community Context Factors
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.

Science of Child Development and Early Learning Informs Policies, Practice Environment, Professional Learning, Knowledge and Competencies, and Professional Practice

Availability/Accessibility of High-Quality Professional Learning Supports

Professional Learning Supports

Quality Professional Learning

Practice Environment/Working Conditions (e.g., facilities/resources/staff structure/ratios/compensation/program quality/quality of leadership/administration)

Policies

Knowledge and Competencies of Leadership/Administrators

Wellbeing of the Practitioner

Knowledge and Competencies of the Practitioner

Relationships/Interactions with families

Relationships/Interactions with children

Relationships/Interactions with other professionals

Behaviors/Actions of Practitioners

Learning Environment

Assessments and Evaluation of Professional Practice and Child Outcomes Feed Back to Improve Quality in Policies, Professional Learning, Practice Environment, Knowledge and Competencies, and Professional Practice

INSTITUTE OF MEDICINE AND NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
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

Short-range
• Provide a needs assessment
• Increase attention to staff wellness

Medium-range
• Develop approaches to increasing staff wellness

Long-range
• Improve child outcomes
Program and Staff Participation

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Category</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
<th>Percent of Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>596</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Teachers</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home Visitors</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>Family Support Staff</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>23%</td>
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<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>2199</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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# Staff Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>97</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Hispanic White</td>
<td>86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Married or cohabitating</td>
<td>73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree or higher</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age ≥40 years</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child attended Head Start</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended Head Start as a child</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;15 years in early childhood workforce</td>
<td>32</td>
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Impacts of Stress on Health and Functioning

- **Stress**: Workplace, Economic ACEs
- **Health**: Physical, Emotional/Mental (Depression)
- **Functioning**: Relationship Quality (Children’s Learning)
HOW DOES STRESS IMPACT THE MENTAL HEALTH OF HEAD START STAFF?
Sources of Stress

- Workplace Stress
- Trauma
- Economic Hardships

Demands Control Support

(From JCQ, Karasek, 1998)

Utilities
Health Care
Housing
Food

Mechanisms by Which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan
How Common are Stressors?

**Number of Economic Hardships**
- None: 63%
- 1: 17%
- 2: 12%
- 3-5: 8%

**Number of Adverse Childhood Experiences**
- None: 41%
- 1: 23%
- 2: 14%
- ≥3: 22%

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)

- Manager: 25%
- Family Support Staff: 24%
- Home Visitor: 25%
- Assistant Teacher: 24%
- Lead Teacher: 24%
As Stress Increases, Prevalence of Depression Increases
Workplace Stress and Depression

Workplace Stress → Teacher-Child Conflict → Poorer Teacher-Child Relationships → Depression

Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley & Gooze, 2015
WHAT DO STAFF SAY ABOUT STRESS IN THEIR LIVES?

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 micromange, are unsupportive, and communicate poorly.
“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.

- Environmental approaches: reduce exposure to stressful experiences.
- Individual approaches: help adults build their core capabilities.

Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2016
PROMISING DIRECTIONS

1. Biopsychosocial:
Increasing workforce resilience
Enhancing Emotional Intelligence

- Emotion Experience
- Emotion Recognition
- Emotion Responding
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

Stress
- Workplace Stress
- Economic Hardships
- Adverse Childhood Experiences

Health
- Physical Health
- Emotional Health

Functioning
- Relationship Quality
- Children’s Learning
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”

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

Whitaker, et al. 2014
Across Stressors, More Mindful Staff Have Less Depression

- **Workplace Stress**:
  - Low: 32%
  - Med-Lo: 6%
  - Med-Hi: 8%
  - Hi: 11%

- **Number of Hardships**:
  - 0: 5%
  - 1: 9%
  - 2: 7%
  - 3-5: 16%

- **Number of ACEs**:
  - 0: 7%
  - 1: 6%
  - 2: 1%
  - ≥3: 12%
More mindful:

Home visitors reported better relationships with parents.

Teachers have less conflict in their relationships with children.
Mindfulness and Student-Teacher Relationship Quality

Teacher Mindfulness → Teacher Depression → Student-Teacher Relationship Conflict (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

(Whitebook, McLean & Austin, 2016)
Changes in Earnings: Child Care Workers (2010-2015)
Early Childhood Workforce Policies: Compensation Strategies
PROMISING DIRECTIONS

1. Person
2. Context
3. Policy
Thank you!

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