

NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Erin Owen, (402) 554-2742 or eowen@nebraska.edu

BUFFETT INSTITUTE RESEARCH ON TEACHER WELL-BEING IN NEBRASKA HIGHLIGHTED IN TOP NATIONAL JOURNAL

Findings Come From Analysis of Data Collected for Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey

Omaha, Neb. — Well-being and depression among early childhood teachers in Nebraska were examined in a research brief just released by the Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska and in a study published last week in the *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*.

The research brief, [*Risk Factors for Depression Among Early Childhood Teachers*](#), relayed the finding that most teachers (86%) across early childhood settings reported some depressive symptoms during the prior week. Approximately one in 10 teachers reported clinically significant depressive symptoms. The results connecting teachers' depression to contextual factors suggest that teachers' and caregivers' mental health and well-being may be supported through affordable and accessible health care coverage, adequate compensation, and supportive workplaces that minimize stress.

"Teachers' well-being in the workplace is essential for supporting their engagement in high-quality interactions and instruction with young children and families. Since young children rely on these high-quality interactions for their learning and healthy development, it is important to provide environments and resources that support teachers' well-being," said Kathleen Gallagher, director of research and evaluation at the Buffett Institute and one of the report authors. "This research helps fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge about specific personal and contextual factors that may relate to teachers' well-being and depression."

According to the brief, characteristics related to increased reports of depression include lack of health insurance, lower wages, holding multiple jobs, increased workplace demands and fewer workplace supports.

"Early childhood care and education is a rewarding profession, but it's also hard work and stressful," said Julia Garrison, director of Trinity Child Care at Trinity United Methodist Church in Lincoln, Nebraska. "The issue is that a teacher needs to be paid well to feel the work is important, receive competitive benefits they could get in other fields, and have support from the administration on day-to-day challenges. Sadly, I have seen too many seasoned and new teachers get burned out."

The brief was authored by Amy Roberts, Ph.D., Kathleen Gallagher, Ph.D., Alexandra Daro, M.A., Iheoma Iruka, Ph.D., and Susan Sarver, Ph.D., and is based on the study by the same authors, [Workforce well-being: Personal and workplace contributions to early educators' depression across settings](#), which appeared in the most recent issue of the Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology.

Gallagher (with the Buffett Institute) and Roberts (now with the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver), are engaged in follow-up research, examining the well-being of staff in several early childhood programs, and developing a framework through which the complex interacting individual and contextual factors contributing to well-being can be studied and understood from a systems perspective.

The study and research brief came out of analysis of data collected for the [Nebraska Early Childhood Workforce Survey: A Focus on Teachers and Providers](#). More than 1,600 people participated in the survey, the largest, most comprehensive ever of the state's early childhood workforce. Participants represented four early childhood settings—licensed home-based child care programs, licensed center-based programs, public PreKindergarten programs, and elementary schools serving children in Kindergarten through Grade 3. The survey was conducted with assistance from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln's Bureau of Sociological Research, and supported by funding from the Holland Foundation.

In January, the Buffett Institute published a brief entitled [Early Childhood Teacher Turnover in Nebraska](#) that documented turnover among early childhood teachers in Nebraska is high and creating serious challenges for centers and the children and families they serve. This new brief provides insights into why that turnover may be so high for early childhood teachers.

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The Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska promotes the development and learning of children from birth through age 8. Our vision is to make Nebraska the best place in the nation to be a baby. Visit buffettinstitute.nebraska.edu for more information.