Strengthening Caregivers beyond Families: Experience and Work-Related Stress in Family Child Care Settings

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Introduction

Background

- A Strengthening Families approach (Harvard Center on the Developing Child) suggests that an important way to promote children's well-being is to strengthen the capacity of the adults who care for them.
- A substantial proportion of young children (13.7%) are cared for in family child care homes (FCCH) rather than in centers (Hughes, Hegland, Sideres & Bryant, 2012).
- Growing research suggests that FCC is a challenging work environment: long hours, co-location of work and family, low pay, and low status (Tuominen, 2003)
- Tuominen (2003) offered insight into the perception of family child care providers as "babysitters" and the dissonance between the public demand for care and the value placed upon the service of caring for children.
- The Quality Interventions for Early Childcare and Education (QUINCE) study was funded by the the Child Care Bureau in 2004 to examine the effectiveness of the Partnerships for Inclusion model of intervention among child care providers (QUINCE, 2009). It happens to be one of the largest studies of family child care providers in recent decades.
  - The goal of QUINCE was to determine the conditions under which a particular assessment based, on-site consultation model of child care provider training enhanced the quality of the family child care homes or child care classrooms and caused positive outcomes for children's experiences in child care.
- Previous secondary analysis of QUINCE participants from FCCH suggested that that family child care providers with more resources were able to provide better quality care resulting in better developmental outcomes for children (Forry et al. 2013).
- The QUINCE study was initially intended to examine changes over time among providers with little experience, but the sample ended up including providers with many years of experience; thus, providers in the QUINCE study varied dramatically in years of experience as well as perceptions of their role and working conditions (Forry et al, 2013).

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Purpose

We conducted secondary data analysis of the QUINCE public use data set to examine the characteristics that differentiated providers who remained in the field for many years from those with less experience. We explored the role of providers' stress, intrinsic motivation and dissatisfaction as likely related to both capacity to support children and remain in FCC.

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Methods

Participants

- FCC providers for QUINCE and PFI consultation study were recruited from California, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, and North Carolina.
- Selection criteria:
  - Be at last 18 years of age
  - Agree to serve one year in the study
  - Have at least one child aged at least 20 months but no more than 50 months
  - Serve Children for at least 20 hours a week
  - Have less than a four-year degree
- 263 FCC Providers who met selection criteria were randomly selected to be in the QUINCE study.

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Procedures

- QUINCE Procedures
  - Randomized participants into two groups, Consultant and Child Care provider.
  - The sample was randomized into the PFI group or the control group where they did to receive the PFI but continued to use quality enhancing activities that were already being administered in the FCC home.
  - Recruitment of children occurred during the school year after providers had went through the initial PFI study.
  - Altogether, 101 consultants (46 PFI treatment and 55 control), 108 child care teachers (55 PFI, 53 control) and 263 family child care providers (127 PFI, 136 control) agreed to be in the study. A total of 710 children were involved (352 PFI, 358 control).
  - 824 providers were administered a survey.
- The analyses presented here examined responses to three sections of the Family Child Care Provider Interview:
  - Dissatisfaction and Motivation were calculated from Kontos (1995) measure of motivation.
  - Job Stress variables were measured by an adaptation of Gilliam's Job Stress Inventory (2002).
  - Years of experience from a single question about highest level of education.
- Secondary Data Analysis:
  - Preliminary analysis of the measure for years of experience indicated that the variable was not normally distributed. We divided the sample at the 50th percentile (7 years) to reflect high and low experience and was analyzed against job stress factors, and intrinsic motivation and dissatisfaction.

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Results

Levels of Experience and Job Stress

- As shown in Table 1, providers with 7 or more years of experience differed significantly from providers with less than 7 years of experience:
  - they reported significantly more resources and more control.

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Table 1. Differences in Providers' Perceptions by Experience (n= 824)

	Low Experience M (SD)	High Experience M (SD)	T (df)	Sig.
Dissatisfaction	2.23 (0.81)	1.94 (0.82)	7.69, (822, 820.26)	p >.05
Motivation	4.23 (0.64)	4.48 (0.61)	-5.56 (822, 813.774)	p >.05
Resources	4.02 (0.71)	4.39 (0.69)	-7.46 (815, 803.243)	p < .05
Control	3.68 (0.81)	4.04 (0.72)	-6.71 (815, 789.448)	p < .05

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References

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Conclusions

Discussion

- The results of this secondary data analysis suggest additional research is needed to better understand how variability in experience may be associated with other aspects of family child care work.
- The National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) suggests that home-based care providers, including family child care providers, may have more experience and greater attachment to the profession of early care and education than previously believed (NSECE, 2013).
- Additional research targeting variability in providers' years of experience will likely also prove helpful: because the QUINCE study specifically recruited providers with less experience and excluded providers with four-year degrees, the conclusions drawn based on this sample are likely not representative and the NSECE results suggest that we need more representative analyses of attachment to the profession.
- Future research on family child care likely needs to pay closer attention to within-group variation. There may be other differences among providers that impact conclusions we draw about their working conditions and perceptions of their work.

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Limitations

- This was not a representative sample and so the results can not be generalized to other samples or populations. In particular, the sample of experienced providers might be skewed because not having a 4-year degree was a selection criterion.
- This study did not randomly assign providers to type of affiliated association, so certain demo- graphic characteristics were used to try to control for self-selection, but the possibility remains that higher quality FCC homes manage to link themselves with agencies that provide consultation and support in more intensive ways than voluntary organizations.

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