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What Factors Contribute to the Turnover Rate in the Field of Early Childhood Education?

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What Factors Contribute to the Turnover Rate in the Field of Early Childhood Education?

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Table of Contents

Abstract	4
Chapter One: Introduction	5
History of Early Childhood Education	6
Reasons for High Turnover	7
Turnover within ECE	8
Chapter Two: Review of Literature	10
Burnout	10
Cynicism	12
Exhaustion	13
Inefficacy	15
Burnout and Turnover Connection	15
Job Dissatisfaction	16
Compensation	17
Work Conditions	18
Professional Development and Educational Opportunities	20
Job Dissatisfaction and Turnover Connection	23
Impact of Turnover	23
Combatting Turnover.....	25
Chapter Three: Discussion/Application/Future Studies	27
Summary of Findings	27
Application of Findings	28
Suggestions for Future Studies	29

References31

Abstract

Approximately 27 percent of early childhood professionals leave positions or the field entirely on an annual basis (McMullen, Lee, McCormick, & Choi, 2020). Although the majority of early childhood educators report that the work is valuable and meaningful, other stressors are driving nearly a third of the field to seek other opportunities. These stressors include low compensation, lack of benefits, and poor work conditions. With nearly twelve million infants, toddlers, and preschoolers participating in early childhood programming, their experiences are impacted by this high turnover rate. In comparison, elementary educators experience an annual turnover rate of seven to eight percent on average annually (Phillips, Austin, & Whitebook, 2016). This paper utilized studies that analyzed how the above factors impact the turnover rate within the field of early childhood education. The results suggested that addressing staff preparation, consistent professional development opportunities, support for continued education, and fair compensation would improve the current turnover rate within the field. The program quality, staff qualifications, and child outcomes may be positively impacted in the process by addressing the turnover rate.

Keywords: turnover, burnout, early childhood education (ECE), compensation, teacher shortages

Chapter One: Introduction

Education is a vital resource within society, it could be assumed that those responsible for education would be held in high esteem. This has not been the case for many of those that educate the youngest learners, early childhood educators. For decades, early childhood educators have fought to be professionalized and fairly compensated (Boyd, 2013). Early childhood education (ECE) demonstrates an imbalance regarding wages, benefits, and professional development opportunities compared to other educational settings. Early childhood professionals include infant, toddler, and preschool teachers that serve students from birth to five-years-old. These professionals carry the responsibilities of developing school readiness skills, ensuring positive, purposeful interactions, providing individualized learning opportunities, and proactively managing a classroom environment (Phillips et al., 2016). Despite these job duties aligning with those of elementary educators, research showed that early childhood professionals are among the country's lowest-paid workers, receiving far below the average wage of elementary educators (Phillips et al., 2016).

ECE requires professionals to be both mentally and physically engaged throughout the day. Professionals have experienced stress and emotional exhaustion due to these demands. When coupled with factors like high-stress environments, low compensation, and lack of ongoing education opportunities, turnover has occurred at a rapid pace. Teacher turnover and burnout is an issue that the United States is facing at an alarming rate, especially within the field of ECE (Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2014). Nearly one-third of early childhood professionals choose to leave positions on an annual basis (McMullen et al., 2020). The research question that guided this review of existing data explored, what factors contribute to the turnover rate within the field of ECE?

History of Early Childhood Education

ECE was established between the late 1800's and early 1900's. The workforce's initial need was born out of a practical need for care, as both family members were being called to work. In 1964, Head Start began bringing a greater federal involvement to the field of ECE. In addition to federal involvement, Head Start opened the door to growth in programs and diversified curriculum (Goffin, 2013). ECE has seen tremendous growth over the past three decades. The field has shifted from small, individual programs to a recognized field of practice that serves nearly twelve million children birth to age five (Phillips et al., 2016). The current composition of the field of ECE includes individuals with educational attainments ranging from graduate-level training to those that have not obtained a high school degree (Phillips et al., 2016). This range of educational differences speaks to the lack of consistency across early childhood programming within the United States. Unlike other fields, ECE does not have unified program expectations regarding academic standards, rating scales for employee performance, and coherence across programs (Goffin, 2013). Due to this lack of clarity, ECE has not become a professionalized field within education. Currently, within the United States, ECE is a patchwork system with the majority of early care occurring within the private market that is largely funded by parent fees (Phillips et al., 2016). There has been an increase in public spending on ECE, but the bulk of this funding has been aimed toward expansion of programs to meet the demand needed for early care (French, 2010). Unlike elementary education, ECE has not been fully embraced as a public good, contributing to the fragmented system. With numerous areas impacting unity within ECE, many of these same areas relate to factors that contribute to turnover.

Reasons for High Turnover

Turnover is a state of exhaustion that leads to cynical thinking relating to personal value and occupation (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2008). It is frequently witnessed to occur at a higher percentage within helping professions, such as nurses, doctors, social workers and educators (Schaufeli et al., 2008). It is believed that turnover is a product of the rapid change that occurred over the past four decades from an industrial society to a service economy (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Within helping professions, it is common for demands to increase and for resources to fail to keep pace with the rising demands (Schaufeli et al., 2008). As resources fail to meet demand, it fuels turnover's cyclical nature. Lack of resources lead to employee stress and exhaustion, which contributed to employees seeking opportunities outside of their workplace. Within places of employment, turnover is known for negatively affecting the environment and those working within it (Seferglu, Yildiz, & Yücel, 2014). This phenomenon financially impacts industries due to the need to fill vacant positions and train new employees. Studies of industries estimated that the cost associated with replacing personnel and providing training is about 20% of the earnings associated with the position (Phillips et al., 2016).

Through recent years, retaining qualified educators has been called a national crisis by researchers, members of the media, and policymakers (Yoon, Mihaly, Moore, Regional Education Laboratory Northwest (ED), & Education Northwest, 2019). Addressing teacher turnover is imperative to solving teacher shortages across the country (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Within the field of ECE, approximately 27 percent of professionals were reported to turnover annually (McMullen et al., 2020). In comparison, collectively within elementary, middle, and high school the turnover rate is 16 percent. To further compare, European countries have a turnover rate between three and four percent for educators across

these varying age-levels (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Researchers suggested that through lowering turnover rates nationwide, teacher preparedness would rise eliminating many shortfalls that lead to turnover. When turnover occurred, schools frequently filled vacancies by hiring less qualified and experienced individuals. Both of these impacted student learning outcomes. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond explained that students within schools with higher turnover rates and a higher percentage of inexperienced teachers negatively impact student learning. Turnover impeded collaboration and instructional improvements, while adding financial strain to a school or program. It is estimated that replacing educators within urban districts cost approximately \$20,000 per educator (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Turnover within ECE

Early childhood programming has a variety of purposes. Some programs were created to emphasize access through providing flexibility and low cost to families (Phillips et al., 2016). Other programs were developed to prepare school readiness skills with an emphasis on exposure learning opportunities (Phillips et al., 2016). With diverse programs making up of the field of ECE, professional requirements depend greatly on the program (Phillips et al., 2016). As touched on previously, the average turnover rate within ECE is 27 percent annually. This is nearly double the rate of elementary, middle, and high school educators combined. Knowing that turnover impacts student learning outcomes and prosperity of programs, identifying factors that contribute to the turnover rate may help to lower the rate in ECE. These factors have been identified to be compensation, the work environment, and lack of professional development opportunities and continued education opportunities (Phillips et al., 2016).

Wages for early childhood professionals have remained among the lowest of any occupation. The rate of pay for early childhood professionals have not always corresponded to objective criteria as seen within upper educational settings (Boyd, 2013). Poor compensation had been found to fuel turnover within the field. Job requirements and qualifications for professionals within the field vary drastically between states and programs. Professional development and continued educational opportunities within the field are scarce and inconsistent (Phillips et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Teaching is a profession known for its demanding nature. Research concluded that educators need effective communication skills, the ability to problem-solve, and an understanding of early childhood development to meet the needs of diverse student growth. Coupled with factors like low compensation, unreasonable time demands, and lack of proper training, early childhood professionals are choosing to leave positions to seek better opportunities (Phillips et al., 2016). These turnovers not only impact the work environment, but the children within these programs. Quality within ECE relies heavily on interactions that occur between caregivers and children (Phillips et al., 2016). The quality of early childhood settings is most strongly determined by the professionals who work within the setting (McMullen et al., 2020). Turnover disrupts the continuity of quality care, impacting educational and emotional development of children. To address turnover, the factors that have led to this widespread issue must first be addressed. The following chapter will explain the factors that have been identified to cause turnover and discuss the impact that research has linked to these areas.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Teaching has been acknowledged as a field that has a high likelihood for turnover (Seferoglu, Yildiz, & Yucel, 2014). Within the past decade, as knowledge of the importance of school preparedness has grown, early childhood practitioners have taken on greater responsibilities to prepare young learners for primary grades. As the responsibilities have grown within the field of early childhood education (ECE), little to no advancement has been made regarding wage parity, benefits, and job qualifications. ECE experiences nearly twice the turnover rate as other educational settings, which has caused researchers to try to pinpoint what factors contributed to professionals leaving positions and the profession. Researchers linked burnout and job dissatisfaction to turnover within early childhood practitioners (Phillips et al., 2016, Serefoglu et al., 2014, & Boyd, 2013). Burnout and job dissatisfaction are overarching subsections of turnover that can be further broken down into smaller components that include varying job requirements and qualifications, lack of ongoing education opportunities, and poor compensation (Phillips et al., 2016). Research showed that any combination of these components contributed to practitioners being less equipped to promote developmental growth and more likely to turnover.

Burnout

Burnout emerged nearly 40 years ago (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Burnout was named based on a metaphor that implied that a fire was burning, but the fire cannot continue to burn unless there are sufficient resources to replenish it (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Practitioners that experienced burnout were noted to lose the capacity to make contributions that were as impactful as what was seen early on in careers (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Research observed that professionals that experienced burnout accomplished less as times went on.

Schaufeli, Leiter, and Maslach (2009) researched the concept of burnout through analyzing research from the previous 35 years to create a general review of the concept. The researchers analyzed 60 references to speak to the concept of burnout across fields. A large demographic that included numerous job fields could be both a positive and hindrance to the research. The research reviewed lacks specificity in relation to the field of education, but highlighted trends in burnout that were seen across fields. These trends included cynicism, exhaustion, and inefficacy.

Maslach's research identified three key components that contributed to burnout within the field of education. These components were cynicism, exhaustion, and inefficacy (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Cynicism is described as negative feelings toward students, colleagues, or an overall work environment (McLean, Eklund, Kilgus, & Burns, 2019). Exhaustion is the feeling of being physically tired coupled with a lack of emotional resources to complete work-related duties (McLean et al., 2019). Inefficacy refers to the general feeling of dissatisfaction with one's personal value and accomplishments as it relates to a current position or larger field (McLean et al., 2019). Bitsadze and Japaridze (2014) identified that exhaustion is documented to lead to the worst results for an organization when these three factors were compared and analyzed. Burnout impacted overall teacher functioning and effectiveness. Understanding what factors contributed to burnout gave insight into what fueled turnover.

McLean, Eklund, Kilgus, and Burns (2019) examined the impact of teacher burnout and self-efficacy. The research included 1,314 elementary age students and 56 teachers. Data was collected through teachers completing quantitative measures, that included the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale-Short Form, Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey, and Social, Academic, and Emotional Behavior Risk Screener-Teacher Rating Scale. The research connected student

behavior and burnout. Due to the organization of the research, it was not able to be identified if self-efficacy caused student behavior to occur or if student behavior lowered self-efficacy, which resulted in burnout.

Bitsadze and Japaridze (2014) studied the personal and social factors that impacted teacher burnout in Georgia. This mixed-method study utilized teacher interviews followed by three scales, Maslach Burnout Inventory for Educators, Rotter Control Locus Scale, and Wayne Hoy's Organization Climate Description for Middle Schools. The research was conducted with a participant pool of 373 Georgian school teachers. The study presented demographic information that included gender, work experience, and level of education, but information regarding what grade level the teachers taught was not presented. The data connected novice teachers to a higher likelihood for burnout, but was unable to specify if certain grade levels were more likely to burnout.

Cynicism

Cynicism is described as a negative attitude or feelings toward a workplace. Negative feelings often resulted in an individual separating one's self from the cause (Helvaci & Kilicoglu, 2018). According to Helvaci and Kilicoglu (2018), when cynicism occurred, an individual's commitment to the workplace was lowered. The lowered feelings of commitment correlated to practitioner turnover. As early childhood practitioners advocated for equity between educational settings, cynicism was witnessed to occur when advocacy was not met with change. Ongoing advocacy for change within ECE regarding wage parity, benefits, and continued education opportunities was reported to cause practitioners to experience emotional exhaustion (Helvaci & Kilicoglu, 2018). With limited results from advocacy efforts, practitioners were observed to leave the field when desired change was not witnessed (Helvaci & Kilicoglu, 2018).

Helvaci and Kilicoglu (2018) explored the relationship between cynicism and educational organizations in relation to organizational change and the level of teacher commitment. The research participants included 352 elementary school teachers in Turkey. Two quantitative scales were used to gather information from the participants, the Organizational Change Cynicism Scale and the Organizational Commitment Scale. The research identified a negative correlation to cynicism and commitment within an educational organization. Practitioners that experienced high levels cynicism displayed low levels of commitment. Vice versa, those practitioners that experienced high commitment displayed low levels of cynicism. The study was able to identify the correlation between cynicism and commitment. Due to the organization of the study, the research could not identify what causes of cynicism most impacted practitioner perception.

Exhaustion

Jeon, Buettner, and Grant (2017) explored the connection between psychological well-being and work environment. The findings suggested that workplace stress and workload contributed to practitioners' emotional exhaustion and burnout. Research indicated that educators experienced higher stress than most other occupations. Educators often encountered stress when dealing with conflict, workload, workplace environment, job demands, and personal life. Continuous and excessive stress was identified to lead to emotional exhaustion (Grant, Jeon, & Buettner, 2019). When analyzing emotional exhaustion, the work place environment was documented to play a large role in preventing or contributing to a practitioner's emotional state (Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2014). Emotional exhaustion led to fewer positive practices being utilized, a greater amount of negative communication with families, and overall less social instruction occurring (Jeon et al., 2018). Practitioners' psychological well-being has been tied to children's social and emotional development (Jeon et al., 2018). Practitioners that displayed

positive attitudes had proven to improve social and emotional learning for students (Jeon et al., 2017). Similarly, practitioners that displayed negative attitudes had been found to be less responsive to students displaying negative emotions (Jeon et al., 2017). Lacking to respond to students' negative emotions, impacted students' capacity to learn self-regulation and positive coping strategies.

Jeon, Buettner, and Grant (2017) surveyed 1,129 preschool teachers across private and public settings. Quantitative measures were used to collect data about psychological well-being, efficacy, work environment and general demographic information through the 2014 Survey of Early Childhood Educators: US project. The study showed that work environment was a predictor of general and job psychological well-being of practitioners. The researchers found that quality work environments supported positive psychological well-being, which resulted in practitioners feeling more supported in environments that were deemed high-quality. The 1,129 participants were 16% of those surveyed for this research. The other 84% did not return surveys or returned incomplete surveys. Although the number of participants is high, the overall participation is low. The low participation made generalizations regarding the field difficult to make substantiate based on the received data.

Grant, Jeon, and Buettner (2019) investigated what predictors lead to turnover within the field of ECE. Factors included practitioner attributes, high levels of stress, poor well-being, low pay, poor work conditions, and workplace instability. These findings were collected through analyzing the 2014 Survey of Early Childhood Educators: US project. 1,129 early childhood professionals took the survey. This was the same survey that was utilized in the Jeon, Buettner, and Grant (2017) research. This quantitative research dealt with similar limitations as the above

study. 16% of those surveyed responded. Due to this response rate, the researchers identified that the sample may be too small to generalize the findings across the field of ECE.

Inefficacy

Self-efficacy is described as an individual's beliefs and perceptions about their abilities to create desired outcomes in specific contexts (Jeon et al., 2017). Practitioners' efficacy was described as self-judgement of the capacity to deliver desired outcomes in an educational context (Jeon et al., 2017). Research suggested that individuals' view of their capabilities to manage challenging situations impacted psychological well-being (Jeon et al., 2017). Practitioners with lower efficacy reported higher anxiety and lower confidence when dealing with difficult situations (Jeon et al., 2017). Lower efficacy correlated to elevated levels of depression, stress, and emotional exhaustion within practitioners (Jeon et al., 2017). Practitioners who felt competent displayed a higher likelihood to be persistent, engaged, and intrinsically motivated (Jeon et al., 2017). Individuals with higher efficacy displayed a lower likelihood for turnover.

Burnout and Turnover Connection

Burnout was determined to be an underlying reason for turnover to occur. As burnout developed, professionals transitioned from being energized to being exhausted, being effective to ineffective, and being involved to disinterested (Schaufeli et al., 2008). The transitions played a key role in what fueled practitioners' decision to seek employment elsewhere or leave the current field entirely. Burnout and turnover both occurred when a practitioner experienced a lack of reciprocity (Schaufeli et al., 2008). This occurred when professional ideals no longer matched the work expectations. Through this mismatch, feelings of unfulfillment occurred (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Once this perspective developed, practitioners often felt that professional efforts were discrepant to the rewards and recognition that were received (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Evidence

suggested that new practitioners were likely to experience burnout within the first five years in the field (Jeon et al., 2017). Following these years, research observed the turnover rate decline. This suggested that there is an increased likelihood for turnover for new practitioners (Jeon et al., 2017).

Job Dissatisfaction

The field of ECE was marked with inconsistencies across programs and states, which created a challenge for professional sustainability (Phillips et al., 2016). Funding played a role in bringing about these inconsistencies within the field. Programs received funding provided through public, private, and/or voluntary funders (Kagan & Roth, 2017). With multiple funding sources, ECE had seen funders influence what was prioritized within the field. Over the past few decades, quantity of care over quality of care was emphasized (Kagan & Roth, 2017). When value was placed on quantity of care within early childhood settings, the longevity of programs was compromised at the expense of equity for both staff and students (Kagan & Roth, 2017). Lack of coordination within both the local and state government made cohesive quality service delivery to early learners nearly impossible (Kagan & Roth, 2017). One factor that contributed to job dissatisfaction was the emphasis that was placed on practitioners to provide greater care and educational opportunities without being provided additional resources. Other factors that were reported to lead to job dissatisfaction included poor compensation, overall work conditions, and lack of professional development and continued education opportunities.

Kagan and Roth (2017) investigated the challenges related to obtaining quality, equity, and sustainability within early childhood settings. The case study pulled from 68 references and discussed the factors contributed to high-quality settings, such as well-trained practitioners and proper funding. Kagan and Roth (2017) connected high-quality early childhood settings to

economic benefits within society. The outlined benefits included reduced criminal activity, greater ability for families to participate in the workforce, and advanced economic productivity from children that attended high-quality early childhood settings. The research covered a variety of topics that ranged from brain development to the importance of high-quality early childhood settings to future strategies to be considered for the field. This resulted in the research touching on each topic without delving into the topic in depth.

Compensation

Compensation for early childhood professionals varied wildly. Some professionals earned a wage that was comparable to the median income of the community, while others were among the lowest-paid workers within the country (Phillips et al., 2016). Early childhood positions that received better compensation had a lower likelihood for turnover (Hale-Jinks, Knopf, & Kemple, 2006). Both childcare workers and preschool teachers, as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, fell below the 20th percentile of workers' wage earnings within the United States (Phillips et al., 2016). In comparison, kindergarten teachers' earnings fell into the 60th percentile for workers' wage earnings (Phillips, et al., 2016).

Childcare workers, which were defined as people who attended to children and performed a variety of tasks, such as overseeing play, dressing, and feeding, had experienced no increase in earnings since 1997 (Phillips et al., 2016). The average wage of childcare workers in 1997 was \$10.20 and in 2013 the average wage was \$10.33. Preschool teachers, which were defined as people who instructed children in activities designed to promote growth for primary school, had seen a slightly higher increase in earnings (Phillips et al., 2016). The average wage of preschool teachers in 1997 was \$12.80 and in 2013 the average wage was \$15.11 (Phillips et al., 2016). This difference is about a 15% increase. In comparison in 2013, kindergarten

teachers' average earnings were \$25.40. Phillips, Austin, and Whitebook reported kindergarten teachers had seen a seven percent increase in wages since 1997. In 1997, kindergarten teachers' average earnings could be estimated at \$23.60. In 2013, teachers with bachelor's degrees in public preschools and Head Start programs earned on average only two-thirds of what kindergarten teachers earned (Phillips et al., 2016). The wage disparity between early childhood and kindergarten illustrated the low reward for education attainments within ECE. Additionally, these low earnings contributed to job stress. As job stress increased, the likelihood for turnover increased.

Phillips, Austin, and Whitebook (2016) examined educational preparation, compensation, and professional development of the early childhood workforce in comparison to the elementary workforce. The findings suggested that the early childhood workforce had a higher turnover rate due to poor compensation, lack of professional development opportunities, and the lack of educational preparedness. This case study did not utilize participants as it covered a variety of topics that pulled from existing research. The research was unable to provide insight regarding if the mismatch between compensation and education for early childhood practitioners contributed to turnover within the field.

Work Conditions

Studies had found that turnover within education frequently related to managerial problems, such as ambiguous role expectations, unreasonable time demands, lack of resources, and large class sizes (Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2014). These factors had been reported to cause job stress among practitioners. Job stress lead to lower job satisfaction, which contributed to burnout and turnover (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006). The need for administrative support was often cited as a critical condition in determining teacher retention (Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2014). Research had

found that practitioners' satisfaction with their relationship with supervisors was a predictor of turnover (Jeon et al., 2017). Practitioners who described relationships with supervisors as positive had a lower rate of turnover than those that described relationships as strained or negative (Jeon et al., 2017). Hale-Jinks, Knopf, and Kemple (2006) analyzed job satisfaction to find that practitioners cited a supportive supervisor as the primary factor contributing to overall job satisfaction. Supervisors were reported to play a crucial role in facilitating problem solving within the workplace and guiding collaboration between team members (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006). Through these actions, practitioners felt a higher degree of investment while minimizing negative outcomes that were likely to cause stress (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006).

According to the research findings, a critical aspect of work conditions includes the work environment. When practitioners work in structured and safe environments, practitioners are capable of providing better support to children (Jeon et al., 2017). Practitioners that are in disorganized and chaotic environments tend to have more negative interactions with children (Jeon et al., 2017). Research indicates that when children are placed in more chaotic environments, they demonstrate less compliant behavior (Jeon et al., 2017). Challenging behaviors has been recognized as the most common stressor for early childhood professionals (Jeon et al., 2017). Like children, when practitioners are in chaotic environments, their ability to regulate emotions and cope with stressors is hampered due to a higher level of fatigue already existing (Jeon et al., 2017). Work environments that are described as chaotic have a higher likelihood of turnover due to professionals operating at a higher level of stress than those within organized and structured environments. Whitebook and Sakai (2004) found that professionals who had negative experiences within work environments routinely left positions.

Hale-Jinks, Knopf, and Kemple (2006) examined causes and consequences of turnover within the field of ECE. The researchers connected turnover to job stress, inadequate compensation, and inadequate trainings and/or support. Turnover contributed to lower program quality, adverse effects on children's development, and created additional stress for the remaining practitioners. The case study utilized 68 references. The research highlighted the impact that occurred following turnover, but lacked specificity regarding the impact due to drawing sources from previous studies.

Professional Development and Educational Opportunities

Research suggests that practitioners that are involved in ongoing professional development maintain expertise and educational quality within their career (Jeon et al., 2017). In addition, research found that ongoing professional development opportunities were associated with high job-related satisfaction (Jeon et al., 2017). Practitioners receiving professional development opportunities regularly are more likely to reflect on their practice, have resources to learn new skills, engage in a higher number of positive interactions with students, and collaborate more frequently with coworkers (Jeon et al., 2017). It is thought that providing professional development opportunities allows practitioners to feel more confident in abilities and promotes practitioners' maintenance of emotional well-being (Jeon et al., 2017). Hale-Jinks, Knopf, and Kemple (2006) suggested that practitioners who had more education were more likely to take part in additional training opportunities.

Practitioners with greater professional experience exhibit a lower turnover rate (Seferoglu et al., 2014). Greater education and professional development opportunities contribute to practitioners having more knowledge and resources to support them within ECE and when work-related stressors occur (Jeon et al., 2017). Additionally, practitioners with an associate degree or

higher were determined to better withstand the demands of teaching due to greater educational opportunities (Seferoglu et al., 2014). Educators within this group demonstrated less emotional exhaustion and overall more positive feelings toward their workplace, colleagues and students than those with lower educational backgrounds (Seferoglu et al., 2014). Research findings suggested that practitioners with greater education are better able to address challenging behaviors (Jeon et al., 2017). Challenging behaviors are the most common stressor for early childhood educators (Jeon et al., 2017).

Despite these findings, attitudes persist that educating children before kindergarten requires less expertise. Many early childhood programs receive resistance when discussion of paying added costs to support better educated professionals occurs (Phillips et al., 2016). Though our country agrees that elementary educators should maintain at least a bachelor's degree, there is no educational standard for early childhood practitioners (Phillips et al., 2016). Without standards relating to educational attainment of professionals within the field of ECE, there is little to no reasoning for programs to match the compensation level seen within elementary settings.

With research linking high-quality ECE environments and children's school readiness to early childhood professionals' educational attainments, some early childhood settings have begun to shift expectations relating to education requirements (Sakai, Kipnis, Whitebook, & Schaack, 2014). Research suggests that 29 states now require a bachelor's degrees for public preschool teachers (Sakai et al., 2014). Many professionals within public settings are looking to obtain their bachelor's degree, however, these professionals fall into a nontraditional student demographic due to combining work, school and family responsibilities. This combination makes attaining a degree very challenging, leaving these professionals at a greater risk to fail to

attain a degree or choosing to leave school before completing degrees (Sakai et al., 2014). With the rising demand for more educated early childhood professionals within the public sphere, nearly three fourths of the professionals trying to attain a degree reported being very concerned with earning enough money to support family while going to school (Sakai et al., 2014).

Seferoglu, Yildiz and Yücel (2014) utilized a relational study where burnout was examined in relation to exhaustion, personal accomplishment, and depersonalization. 163 educators completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory. The results found that participants that had served as educators for longer experienced lower rates of burnout. It was suggested that after five years, the rate of burnout decreased within educators. Results also indicated that educators with lower educational attainments had a higher rate of burnout than those that had received bachelor's degrees. The research brought forward strong correlations for the points that were made, but the sample size was small for this study. With a larger sample size, the correlation may be better understood between burnout and years of service and between burnout and educational attainment.

Sakai, Kipnis, Whitebook, and Schaack (2014) utilized a longitudinal study to interview 73 early childhood practitioners that were going back to school to obtain a bachelor's degree. The research outlined that early childhood practitioners are expected to provide instructional support for literacy, math, and science. These demands required practitioners to have the formal education and professional development to build the skills and knowledge across developmental domains. The study identified that financial aid availability supported practitioners to return to school while decreasing turnover and increasing success in the bachelor's degree programming. A limitation of this study was that practitioner progress was not followed after the degree was

attained. The research findings did not clarify if all individuals chose to stay within the field of ECE.

Job Dissatisfaction and Turnover Connection

Jeon, Buettner, and Grant (2017) suggested that organizational factors impact early childhood educators' perceptions of job satisfaction and overall commitment. Coworker relations, supervisor relations, time demands, and pay were factors that were correlated to job satisfaction (Jeon et al., 2017). When these factors were viewed favorably, the likelihood for turnover decreased (Jeon et al., 2017). Addressing poor compensation, work environment, and the lack of continued educational opportunities and professional development may lower the turnover rate within the field. Based on the provided research, improving work conditions to allow practitioners to feel supported and confident may be an easy step to improving work conditions and positively impacting staff retention. Providing support within positions, could allow practitioners to feel greater inclusion with team members and valued within the organization (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006). Furthermore, early childhood practitioners often lack the proper resources and materials to fulfill their role expectations (Kagan & Roth, 2017). Through providing needed materials, helping to alleviate some job stress that contributes to job dissatisfaction.

Impact of Turnover

Decades of research regarding brain development demonstrates that the early years are a formative period for young children (Kagan & Roth, 2017). During this period, children grow faster and learn more than any other period of life (Kagan & Roth, 2017). The skills that are developed during the early years are associated with success in school and professional life (Kagan & Roth, 2017). High quality care offers powerful benefits to young children through

offering experiences that develop social-emotional and cognitive skills (Kagan & Roth, 2017). High quality early childhood programming is correlated with increased educational attainments, increased earnings, and reduced criminal activity later in life (Kagan & Roth, 2017). Quality early childhood settings, develop secure and trusting relationships between students and staff. By developing these relationships, practitioners facilitate the use of reasoning, curiosity, problem solving, and develop cognitive and social emotional skills (Bridges, Fuller, Huang, & Hamre, 2011). Children lacking secure attachments tend to display poor social emotional skills, such as aggressive behavior, tantrums, or being withdrawn.

Nurturing relationships yield greater development benefits when sustained for an extended period (Bridges et al., 2011). As turnover happened, relationships between students and staff were ended prior to all development benefits occurred. Researchers within multiple countries have found that educator turnover caused teacher quality to lower impacting student achievement (Bitsadze & Japaridze, 2014). When a practitioner left, the setting may feel the effects of losing a team member. The loss of a caregiver can impact children's feelings of security (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006). Settings often have difficulty filling vacancies with competent and knowledgeable staff (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006).

It has been estimated that teacher turnover cost states approximately 2.2 billion dollars annually to fund recruitment, replacement of candidates, and to train in new staff (McLean et al., 2019). In comparison, researchers believe that when high quality early childhood professionals stay in the field, there is a reduction in social costs to society (Kagan & Roth, 2017). The social costs include incarceration, welfare dependency, grade retention, and special education referrals. Kagan and Roth (2017) discussed that investing in quality practitioners within ECE yielded an economic return of up to ten times the cost of the service.

Bridges, Fuller, Huang, and Hamre (2011) followed 2,783 early childhood practitioners for a three-year period to conduct a mixed-method study. The practitioners within the study included center directors, educators, and paraprofessionals. Research suggested that practitioners that were provided additional education opportunities had lower turnover rates, which led to a higher qualified workforce over time. The researchers noted that some programs offered one or two educational opportunities per year and witnessed similar results regarding retention and workforce. The research did not utilize a control group to compare participant progress. Without a control group, the workforce quality may be skewed due to human judgement.

Combatting Turnover

For decades, researchers have agreed that high-quality early childhood settings have provided conditions that value both adults and children (Phillips et al., 2016). Quality professionals and settings allowed children the opportunity develop a foundation that lends itself to lifelong learning. ECE played a vital role in assisting to create a foundation of learning for young children. Early childhood programs were often children's first exposure to school and first connections outside of the home. High quality early childhood professionals contributed to the wellbeing of children by utilizing developmentally appropriate practices and creating quality, early relationships that promoted brain development (Phillips et al., 2016). Turnover impeded these contributions. The impact of practitioner turnover had been compared to those of divorce for young children (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006). Attachments were disrupted through turnover, which caused emotional stress. Secure attachments with consist caregivers were linked to social and cognitive growth.

Continued education opportunities for early childhood practitioners contributed to positive perception of educational abilities and remaining in positions. Jeon, Buettner, and Grant

(2017) suggested that practitioners that have higher levels of self-efficacy are less likely to succumb to turnover. A policy recommendation made by Phillips, Austin, and Whitebook (2016) was that legislation should link incentives for improving professional learning to wages. Poor compensation continued to be addressed by researchers as a reason for practitioners to leave positions and the field of ECE. Elementary wages and ECE wages were discrepant even though many of the job expectations were the same. Wage parity was pinpointed by Phillips, Austin, and Whitebook (2016) as a solution to turnover within ECE. Job dissatisfaction and burnout were both tied to poor compensation.

Conclusion

Nearly one third of practitioners within ECE choose to leave their position or the field on an annual basis (McMullen et al., 2020). Researchers identified numerous factors that contributed to early childhood practitioners' rate of turnover. The factors that were identified included exhaustion, cynicism, inefficacy, work environment, lack of education opportunities, and poor compensation. Any combination of these factors caused a higher likelihood for turnover. Job dissatisfaction and burnout were main issues that played a role in practitioner turnover (Helvacı & Kilicoglu, 2018). Researchers identified that organizational characteristics are often the main contributor to turnover within the field (Barford & Whelton, 2010). Thoughtful implementation at the organizational level may lower the rate of turnover. The following chapter will summarize the research findings, discuss the application of these findings, and suggest future studies in the area of turnover.

Chapter Three: Discussion and Application

Practitioners experiencing turnover report facing the loss of motivation, energy, and perspective. Some recall it taking a toll physically, mentally, and emotionally, which led to feelings of stress, despair, and helplessness (Tornuk & Gunes, 2020). The culmination of these feelings resulted in practitioners leaving positions. Factors that are predictive of turnover include extensive time demands, poor compensation, lack of social support, and personal stressors outside of the work environment (Barford & Whelton, 2010). Demographic factors that are predictive of turnover include years of experience in the field and perceived support from colleagues and supervisors. Support from supervisors and coworkers helped to buffer job related stress and turnover (Jeon et al., 2017). Many researchers believe that characteristics of the organization were one of the most important factors in determining the likelihood for turnover. Factors that related to organizations influence on turnover included role ambiguity, work load, quality of interactions, compensation, and practitioner involvement (Barford & Whelton, 2010). Research suggests that any combination of these factors increase the likelihood for turnover within early childhood practitioners (Phillips et al., 2016).

Summary of Findings

Practitioners experiencing factors that were linked to turnover were less likely to make impactful contributions within the work environment (Schaufeli et al., 2008). Fewer developmentally appropriate practices are utilized when practitioners experience factors relating to turnover (Grant, Jeon, & Buettner, 2019). Making fewer contributions that are less developmentally appropriate impacts student achievement by slowing development, offering less quality relationships, and lowering the number of learning opportunities (Grant, Jeon, Buettner, 2019). Student success relies on stable, consistent relationships from caregivers (Bitsadze &

Japaridze, 2014). Early childhood practitioners' model desired behaviors, appropriate reactions to stimuli, and foster a warm environment that welcomes students to take risks. Factors relating to turnover hinder practitioners from modeling these behaviors and forming stable relationships, hampering social-emotional and cognitive development for students (Hale-Jinks et al., 2006).

Turnover not only impacts students, but also impacts colleagues and the work environment.

Turnover is found to be a cyclical issue within organizations. Research showed that it is common for one individual to exhibit negative feelings toward the organization and for this to result in other practitioners being influenced by these emotions (Seferglu et al., 2014). The impact of practitioner turnover is also noted regarding the financial impact that occurs when trying to replace and train new staff. Recruiting and training new personnel is estimated to cost 20% of the annual salary of the position (Phillips et al., 2016).

Application of Findings

Research suggests that numerous factors contribute to practitioner turnover within the field of early childhood education (ECE). Any of these factors alone or combined may be enough to cause professionals to leave positions or ECE as a field entirely. Phillips, Austin, and Whitebook (2016) discussed that certain early childhood settings had a lower turnover rate when compared to the field as a whole. These settings included public preschool settings and settings that offered a higher wage. Research that moves beyond identifying factors that relate to turnover is needed to help identify how to retain practitioners within the field of ECE, like that of Phillips, Austin, and Whitebook. The identification of potential solutions to turnover may equip early childhood settings with the tools to better retain staff at a higher level than in the past.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Many studies identify factors that contribute to turnover in ECE. The concepts of job dissatisfaction and burnout have been studied for decades in relation to helping professions, like education. Moving research to extend beyond identifying the causes of turnover will allow organizations to better understand how to retain practitioners. ECE should address the concept of turnover to include both mobility or attrition of practitioners. Mobility is when a practitioner leaves an organization while remaining in the field. In contrast, attrition is choosing to leave the field entirely. The research examined did not document what percentage of the 27% turnover rate within ECE is due to mobility versus attrition (McMullen et al., 2020). Understanding this would allow organizations, researchers, and professionals to gain a deeper insight into whether turnover is occurring within certain organizational structures or if the larger field of ECE must continue to be analyzed. Having data to speak to this point would allow solutions to be put in place at the appropriate level.

Research identifies the correlation between educational attainment and quality care. For example, practitioners that obtained a bachelor's degree or higher contributed to overall higher setting quality (Phillips et al., 2016). However, there is little research regarding how degree attainment impacted the turnover rate. Some researchers hypothesize that acquiring a bachelor's degree may cause ECE practitioners to seek higher paying positions outside of the field. Research within this area would aid in understanding the role that wage plays regarding turnover. Wage continues to be an area of discussion throughout many research findings, but little to no research offered explanation for how likely individuals were to leave a position if a higher paying position was presented.

Turnover has been documented to negatively impact student development. Research explains that when turnover occurs, children suffer both social-emotional and cognitive effects (Kagan & Roth, 2017). Research demonstrates that these domains are impacted by turnover because students create fewer trusting relationships and less developmentally appropriate practices are utilized within the setting (Grant, Jeon, & Buettner, 2019). The current research highlights broad areas that are impacted by turnover, however comparisons are not examined between settings with stable staffing versus settings that have a high likelihood for turnover. Exploring the impact of turnover through comparing student groups may allow practitioners, researchers, administration, and legislators to better understand turnover's larger affects.

Conclusion

The impact of turnover extends beyond the decision of a practitioner to leave a position. Turnover has lasting effects on the organization and students within it. Quality early childhood settings rely on stability from practitioners. Boyd (2013) discussed that settings that were considered professionalized by providing competitive wages and educational opportunities to practitioners were found to be higher quality settings than settings that did not provide these benefits. Quality was observed to directly impact the experiences of children, families, and staff. Research found that higher quality settings were connected to lower turnover rates with practitioners, creating greater stability within the setting (Boyd, 2013). While research has been conducted to identify the factors that cause turnover, further examination of how to retain practitioners is needed to address turnover within ECE. Future studies addressing what percentage of practitioners account for mobility and attrition within the field, how educational attainments impact the turnover rate, and how turnover impacts student development may provide solutions on how best to lower the current turnover rate.

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