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Supporting professional development needs for early childhood teachers: an exploratory analysis of teacher perceptions of stress and challenging behavior [1]

Author: Stormont, Melissa & Young-Walker, Laine
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ABSTRACT

Early childhood teachers are a unique population of teachers and it is important to determine amendable factors that contribute to their stress. According to available research, challenging child behavior is associated with teacher stress and burnout in school-aged teachers. Given the lack of formal and coordinated in-service education and varied qualifications, early childhood teachers are particularly vulnerable to stress. Further, young children are more likely to have challenging behavior given their social-emotional developmental levels. The purpose of this study was to explore teacher characteristics and perceptions related to their stress, commitment, support, and challenging child behavior in their classrooms. Participants included 100 early childhood professionals. A teacher survey was utilized to determine their perceptions related to key variables. Regression analyses documented teacher commitment and challenging behavior in the classroom uniquely predicted variance in teacher ratings of stress and burnout. Commitment to their job was also a significant predictor to their perceptions of challenging behavior. However, only teacher stress/burnout predicted ratings of challenging behavior; thus, relationships among variables may be more complex. Teachers' years of experience and education level were not related to other variables. For exploratory purposes, teacher professional development perceptions were also surveyed and results indicated that the vast majority of early childhood educators felt professional development was a good use of their time and that they wished more opportunities were available; however, most also indicated they felt training covered information they already knew.

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