


Early educators around the world feel burnt out and devalued. Here's how we can help ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY
Access online ^[2]

Attachment	Size
 Early childhood educator's burnout.pdf ^[3]	526.15 KB

Excerpts

South Australia's royal commission into early childhood education led by Julia Gillard has released an interim report. The key recommendation is preschool for all three-year-olds (in a move similar to other states). But the report notes one of the critical considerations around this change will be the early education workforce.

SA's report comes as the Productivity Commission begins a wide-ranging inquiry into early childhood education and care in Australia.

As part of this, the commission is looking at the workforce. We already know there are high rates of turnover and burnout among early childhood educators. This makes it difficult for people to make a sustainable career in the sector. It also makes it harder for services to find staff and for families to find a childcare place for their children.

Our new research looks at why early childhood educators are burning out and how we can fix this.

Educator turnover

Like other essential sectors the issue of burnout in early education has become more pressing since the beginning of the pandemic.

A 2021 a union survey of 4,000 educators revealed 73% planned to leave the sector within the next three years due to excessive workload, stress, low pay and status, lack of professional development and career progression.

It also found 82% "always" or "often" felt rushed when performing key caring tasks in the past month.

As of, 2022, educator job advertisements had doubled since the pandemic.

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Our new study

We wanted to understand what causes educator burnout, with the aim of helping policymakers and governments plan better support for the sector.

To do this, we reviewed 39 studies about the drivers of early childhood educator burnout from 13 countries, including Australia.

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How services treat staff matters

Educators from services where there was little or no focus on wellbeing were more likely to report burnout.

This included services with scarce emotional support strategies – such as being able to debrief with peers, or access counselling or coaching. These services also showed a lack of respect for educators' work-life balance – such as demanding they do extra unpaid hours or not being flexible about leave for family reasons.

Educators discussed the fatigue caused by "surface acting", where they had to pretend they were (or were not) experiencing certain emotions to please children, staff and parents. For example, an educator might be feeling exhausted and overwhelmed due to their workload, but they had to pretend to feel energetic and enthusiastic when engaging with children and families.

Poor professional relationships were associated with feelings of stress. This included feeling undermined by parents, teaching children with behavioural challenges, and negative relationships with colleagues and directors.

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Funding and status

Our research showed educators experienced stress when they had few resources, but very high expectations to produce “quality” learning environments and experiences for children.

Some work was more likely to cause exhaustion, such as constantly trying to prove to authorities they were providing a “quality” service by collecting data.

Inadequate income can push educators to leave their positions. It can also lead to reduced motivation, and increase the number of sick days.

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How can we reduce burnout?

Our review showed there are some effective ways to improve educators’ wellbeing, prevent burnout and keep them from leaving their jobs.

These include coaching, so educators can get feedback and develop their careers, peer mentoring so they know they are not alone and counselling, so they have an emotional outlet to reflect on their work.

If we want to keep educators in these vital roles we need to actively support them to stay.

Related link: Royal Commission into early childhood education & care interim report ^[4]

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[5]

Tags: burnout ^[6]

preschool ^[7]

wellbeing ^[8]

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Source URL (modified on 6 Sep 2023): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/23/09/early-educators-around-world-feel-burnt-out-and-devalued>

Links

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