

BURNOUT IN INFANT-TODDLER CHILD CARE: A COMPARISON OF HOMES AND CENTERS

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to identify and compare variables or combinations of variables related to burnout in infant and toddler child care providers from day care homes and centers. Subjects included 57 infant and toddler caregivers (32 from day care centers and 25 from day care homes). The Maslach Burnout Inventory was administered to all participants. Data were analyzed via one-way analysis of variance and Pearson *r* correlations. Findings indicated that home day care providers reported significantly less burnout and higher competence than teachers from day care centers. In addition, subjects reporting more education also reported higher burnout and more competence.

Physical and emotional well-being of adults appear to be significantly affected by life stressors. Although burnout of professionals such as corporate executives, helping professionals and white collar workers has been studied, little is available regarding the burnout of child care workers. With more and more women returning to the work force, parents have to rely on the supplemental care provided by these workers for the daily care of their young children. Researchers suggest that stress hampers the child care worker's ability to provide good care (Freudenberger, 1977; Maslach & Pines, 1977).

Townley and Thornburg (1986) studied burnout in infant and toddler child care providers. Their sample included 207 caregivers from private and community-based child care programs. The Maslach Burnout Inventory (a 22-item, 7-point Likert type scale) was used to measure burnout. The instrument was factor analyzed and two factors were indicated: burnout (10 items) and competence (8 items). Further data analyses indicated the participants who experienced the most burnout were college graduates, from 25-34 years of age, and received higher salaries. Less burnout was experienced by caregivers who had less than a college education, two or more children of their own, and were 50 years old or older. Caregivers experiencing less burnout also reported that they had more than adequate space in which to work, positive parent relations, more staff input into programs and better staff relations. Higher competence was related to better equipment, more than adequate space and better staff relations.

Other researchers have also identified variables related to burnout. The nature of the work itself has been found to be related to burnout. Factors such as inconsistent experiences with success, intense interactions and role conflict were reported as related to burnout by Mattingly (1977). Maslach and Pines (1977) reported child-staff ratio and long working hours as significantly related to burnout. Low pay and unpaid hours have been identified as major sources of stress that may lead to burnout (Whitebook, Howes, Friedman & Darrah, 1982).

Method

Subjects

A total of 32 infant and toddler day care center teachers and 25 home day care providers, who care for infants and toddlers, were the subjects for this study. These subjects were females with a mean age of 30 years (ages ranged from 20-61 years). The 18 single and 39 married subjects had worked in day care for an average of six years. Twenty-two had high school training; 35 had attended or graduated from college. Of the 57 subjects, 23 had no children, 20 had one or two children, and 14 had three or more children.

Instruments

The following data were collected on each caregiver: number of children in care; age range of children; child-staff ratio; educational level; age; years of child caring experience; marital status; and number of own children.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was used to assess burnout and competence of the subjects. The MBI (Maslach & Jackson, 1979) consisted of 22 statements that were rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The instrument was designed to measure only burnout. Townley and Thornburg (1986) factor analyzed the instrument for infant and toddler teachers and two factors resulted: burnout and competence. The specific items on the two factors are listed in Table 1 (p. 43) of the Spring 1986 issue of this journal.

Procedure

A list of day care homes and infant-toddler centers was compiled from licensing records, child day care agencies, and early childhood organizations. Day care home providers and center directors were contacted by telephone to explain the research and to ascertain if infants

and toddlers were cared for in this facility. Caregivers were mailed the questionnaires and asked to return them in self-addressed, stamped envelopes provided. Reminders were mailed to caregivers who had not returned questionnaires two weeks following the initial mailings.

A total of 62 day care center teachers were sent questionnaires. Of those returned (61%), six were discarded due to incomplete information, yielding a total of 32 day care center teachers for the sample. Seventy-five questionnaires were mailed to day care homes and 35 (47%) were returned. However, 10 of these were incomplete, leaving a total of 25 day care home providers for the sample.

Results

The relations between the dependent variables (burnout and competence) and two of the four independent variables were measured using ANOVA: type of care (center vs. home) and educational level of caregiver. They were screened for main effects and two-way interaction effects. Age of caregiver and years of child care experience were interval data and, therefore, correlations were used to determine their relation to burnout and competence.

Burnout

The ANOVAs showed that teachers from day care centers reported more burnout than providers in day care homes, $F(1, 51) = 5.24, p < .05$. Of all the subjects (centers and homes), the caregivers with more education, $F(1, 51) = 4.68, p < .05$, experienced more burnout. When considering all subjects, years of experience showed no significant correlation with burnout. However, when looking at years of experience by center and home providers, teachers who had worked in centers for more years reported more burnout, $r(57) = .44, p = .01$. There was not a significant correlation between the age of caregiver and burnout.

Competence

Day care home providers reported more competence than center teachers, $F(1, 47) = 7.66, p < .01$. The findings showed that the more education of all caregivers, the higher reporting of competence, $F(1, 47), = 4.65, p < .05$. Years of experience and age of caregiver showed no significant differences.

Discussion

Burnout

The findings showed home day care providers reported significantly less burnout than teachers in day care centers. Townley and Thornburg's (1986) research suggested that space, staff-parent relationships, staff input, and staff relationships influenced burnout. Other researchers found intense interactions, role conflict, staff-child ratio, long working hours and low pay to also impact burnout (Mattingly, 1977; Maslach & Pines, 1977). All of these findings pertain to centers or center-like settings. Perhaps the day care home provider is free of many of these issues and possible problems due to the autonomous nature of her business. Generally, she is the sole adult and therefore would not have to deal with staff relationships and input. Long working hours and low pay may be more tolerable when one is one's own boss. Although child-staff ratios tend to be higher in day care homes, licensing regulations in the state where this study occurred limit the number of infants and toddlers. Consequently, a day care home provider may care for 10 children but only two may be under the age of two years. In day care centers, teachers may be responsible for four infants and toddlers. In addition, the mixed age group in day care homes might allow the day care home provider to rely on older children to help.

Subjects with college education reported more burnout than those with less education. This finding is in agreement with Townley and Thornburg (1986). Possible reasons may include: overqualified for society's lack of value for child care as a profession; limited career mobility; and low pay for amount of education. Some of these reasons may also explain why those teachers who worked more years in day care centers reported more burnout.

Competence

As a group, home day care providers reported more competence than teachers from day care centers. No previous research has been reported comparing home and center caregivers in the area of perceived competence, therefore these data must be considered provisional. One possible explanation for these findings may be the autonomous nature of the home provider previously discussed. To be successful at "running the total business" may take a confident, self-assured person. It is not surprising to the authors that those caregivers (home and center) with more education reported more competence, even though Townley and Thornburg (1986) did not report education as a significant variable in their sample of infant-toddler center-based providers.

Interviews with home- and center-based caregivers would be useful in determining other possible explanations for these findings. If further research has similar conclusions, there may be some implications for in-service training for all child care providers.

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