



Buffett  
Early Childhood  
Institute

*at the University of Nebraska*

# Beyond Compensation: Burnout, Intent to Leave, and ECE Workforce Wellbeing

Alexandra Daro, Paula  
Thompson, Katherine  
Sutton, Kristen Cunningham, &  
Kathleen Gallagher

Start early. Start well.



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# Background



# Turnover in ECE

- Prevalence of turnover is 10% to 40%<sup>1</sup>
- Many are leaving the field<sup>2</sup>
- Reasons for leaving are complex<sup>3</sup>

# Turnover and Compensation

- There is some evidence tying turnover to low compensation<sup>4</sup>
- Further, there is some evidence that ECE professionals view their compensation as related to their intent to leave<sup>5</sup>

# Turnover and Burnout

- Less work looking at turnover and burnout
- Burnout as wellbeing vs burnout as an outcome of poor wellbeing
- Emotional Exhaustion aspect of burnout linked to intention to leave<sup>6</sup>

# Present Study

- Call for studies to look beyond compensation<sup>7</sup>
- Reviews of workforce wellbeing emphasize that compensation alone will not retain the workforce<sup>8</sup>
- Professionals' reasons for staying or leaving are complex<sup>9</sup>
- How do we go beyond compensation to understand intent to leave?

# Research Questions

- What is the current experience of wellbeing (physical and psychological) for HS/EHS direct service employees?
- How are workforce burnout and likelihood of leaving their program related over and above compensation for HS/EHS direct service employees?



# Research Questions

- If there is a positive relationship between burnout and likelihood of leaving their program, what are HS/EHS direct service employees' experiences regarding wellbeing in groups with high/low burnout and increased/reduced likelihood of leaving their program?

# Methods



# Mixed Methods

- Convergent design
- Quantitative survey (n = 594)
  - Electronic survey
  - Descriptives
  - Regression
- Qualitative focus groups (n = 77)
  - Content analysis
- Integration
  - Joint display table for related themes and constructs

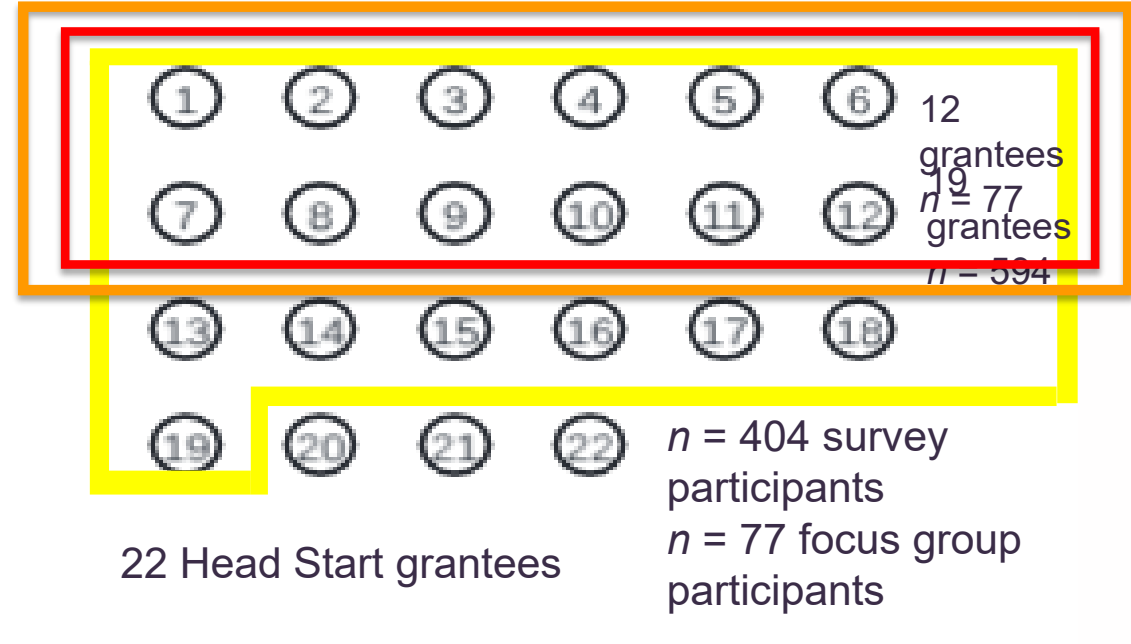


# Participants

- 19 of 22 Head Start grantees

- Quantitative survey

- Qualitative focus groups



# High and Low Groups

- Mean burnout score
- Mean likelihood to leave score
- "High" group
  - 2 grantees
  - $n = 54$
- "Low" group
  - 3 grantees
  - $n = 152$

Which of the following statements best describes your current level of burnout in your work?

- I enjoy my work. I have no symptoms of burnout. (1)
- Occasionally I am under stress, and I don't always have as much energy as I once did, but I don't feel burned out. (2)
- I am definitely burning out and have one or more symptoms of burnout, such as physical and emotional exhaustion. (3)
- The symptoms of burnout that I'm experiencing won't go away. I think about frustration at work a lot. (4)
- I feel completely burned out and often wonder if I can go on. I am at a point where I may need some changes or may need to seek some sort of help. (5)

How likely is it that you would explore other career opportunities **outside of your program**?

- Very Unlikely (1)
- Unlikely (2)
- Not Sure (3)
- Likely (4)
- Very Likely (5)

# Results



# Quantitative Findings

## *Physical and Psychological Wellbeing Items across Full Sample and High and Low*

### *Burnout/Likelihood to Leave Groups*

	Program level	Almost Never	Sometimes	Most of the time
Changes in my sleep	<b>All</b>	<b>14.9%</b>	<b>62.1%</b>	<b>20.8%</b>
	Low	16.4%	63.8%	16.4%
	High	17.4%	58.0%	23.2%
Difficulty concentrating	<b>All</b>	<b>39.4%</b>	<b>50.5%</b>	<b>8.4%</b>
	Low	42.8%	46.7%	7.2%
	High	34.8%	62.3%	2.9%
Feeling lack of control	<b>All</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>39.8%</b>	<b>9.3%</b>
	Low	52.6%	38.2%	5.9%
	High	50.7%	33.3%	15.9%
Sadness or depression	<b>All</b>	<b>46.5%</b>	<b>43.8%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>
	Low	49.3%	42.3%	3.9%
	High	47.8%	42.0%	8.7%
Changes in my eating	<b>All</b>	<b>49.5%</b>	<b>40.6%</b>	<b>7.7%</b>
	Low	52.6%	39.5%	4.6%
	High	49.3%	42.0%	7.2%
Feeling negative and/or anxious about the future	<b>All</b>	<b>37.6%</b>	<b>47.3%</b>	<b>12.6%</b>
	Low	35.5%	52.6%	8.6%
	High	40.6%	43.5%	14.5%

*Physical and Mental Health across Full Sample and High and Low Burnout/Likelihood to Leave*

*Groups*

Health		Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Physical	<b>All</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>25.5%</b>	<b>43.1%</b>	<b>17.3%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>
	Low	7.2%	21.1%	46.7%	17.1%	3.9%
	High	4.3%	24.6%	49.3%	17.4%	4.3%
Mental	<b>All</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>33.9%</b>	<b>36.1%</b>	<b>15.3%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>
	Low	3.3%	28.3%	44.7%	16.4%	3.3%
	High	7.2%	33.3%	34.8%	15.9%	8.7%



*Selected Ryff Scale Items across Full Sample and High and Low Burnout/Likelihood to Leave*

*Groups*

	Program level	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Demands of everyday life often get me down	<b>All</b>	<b>40.8%</b>	<b>14.9%</b>	<b>41.6%</b>
	Low	47.4%	13.8%	35.5%
	High	44.8%	17.4%	37.7%
Maintaining close relationships is difficult and frustrating for me	<b>All</b>	<b>54.9%</b>	<b>16.3%</b>	<b>25.9%</b>
	Low	63.8%	13.2%	19.7%
	High	53.6%	24.6%	21.7%
I am in charge of the situation in which I live	<b>All</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>13.6%</b>	<b>67.3%</b>
	Low	12.5%	9.2%	74.9%
	High	13.0%	18.8%	68.1%
I am good at managing the responsibilities of everyday life	<b>All</b>	<b>7.0%</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>83.7%</b>
	Low	7.2%	5.9%	83.5%
	High	8.7%	10.1%	81.1%

	Program level	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth	<b>All</b>	<b>7.0%</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>83.7%</b>
	Low	4.7%	2.6%	89.5%
	High	0.0%	1.4%	98.6%
I think it is important to have experiences that challenge how I think about myself	<b>All</b>	<b>7.0%</b>	<b>6.7%</b>	<b>83.7%</b>
	Low	3.9%	4.6%	88.2%
	High	0.0%	2.9%	97%
People would describe me as a giving person	<b>All</b>	<b>2.9%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>89.4%</b>
	Low	3.9%	5.3%	87.5%
	High	1.4%	5.8%	92.7%
I gave up trying to make big improvements in my life	<b>All</b>	<b>59.6%</b>	<b>17.6%</b>	<b>20.1%</b>
	Low	59.8%	16.4%	20.5%
	High	68.5%	13%	17.4%
I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships	<b>All</b>	<b>64.8%</b>	<b>11.4%</b>	<b>20.8%</b>
	Low	71.1%	8.6%	17%
	High	68.1%	15.9%	14.4%

# Predictors of Intent to Leave

- Block 1: Intent to Leave Regressed on Yearly Compensation
- Block 2: Intent to Leave Regressed on Yearly Compensation and Burnout

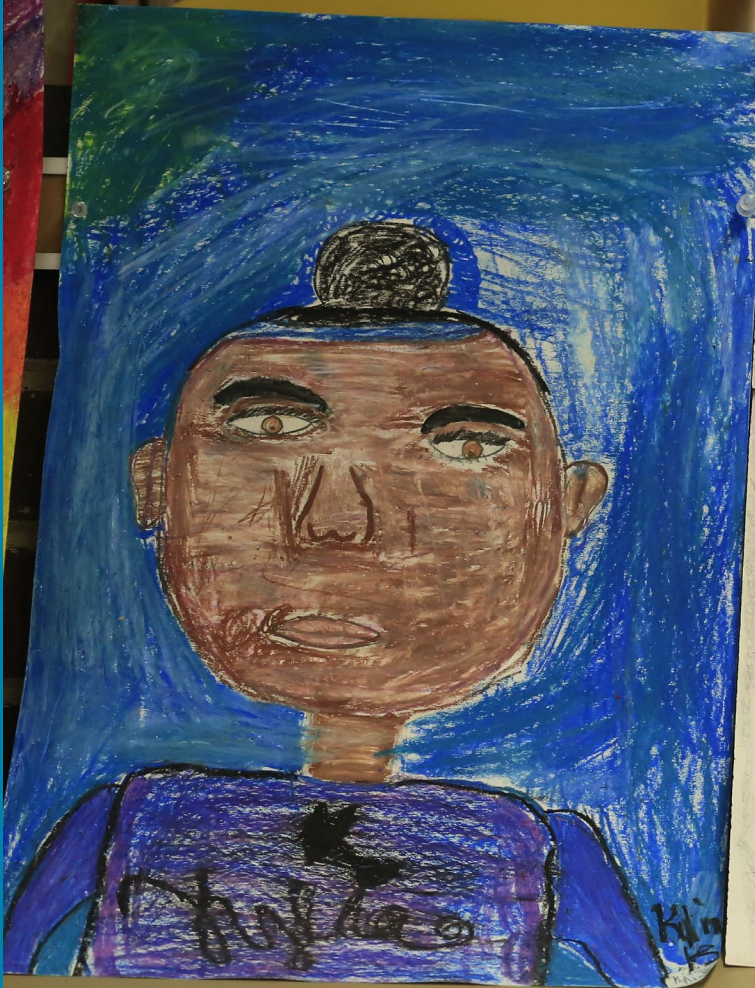
ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	0.195	1	0.195	0.152	0.697 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	415.608	323	1.287		
	Total	415.803	324			
2	Regression	55.302	2	27.651	24.698	<0.001 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	360.501	322	1.120		
	Total	415.803	324			

a. Dependent Variable: OtherOpportunities How likely is it that you would explore other career opportunities outside of your program?

b. Predictors: (Constant), Yrly\_Comp

c. Predictors: (Constant), Yrly\_Comp, Burnout Which of the following statements best describes your current level of burnout in your work?

# Qualitative Findings



# Sense of Purpose/Mission

*I think what's great about watching these children is that we get to see them grow from day to day. We get to see their accomplishments from day to day.*

# Job Demands

*It's also going home at night and thinking how can I help this child learn this skill? How can I make my classroom better? How can I do this differently to get through to my kids? That you're always thinking . And on weekends I'm always doing-looking up activities for lesson plans....It's not just physical, it's mental and...I don't know. It's everything.*

# Job Demands

*...sometimes the mental stuff is hard. Especially in the work that we do. The things that we deal with. The things that I see. I tend to take on everybody's problems and hold on to them...*

# Relationships with Parents

*...returning families...we really build a bond with them...when we have multiple kids over the years. I really like that aspect of it. And I think we have really good relationships*

# Compensation: Pay Structure & Pay Parity

*Our pay is completely lower than a normal [public school] teachers' pay...that's a big struggle.*

*The only reason I make what I make right now is because every time they hire someone new to be my co-worker, they have to bump me up to meet the same wage they're hiring those people [new hire] at. They can't hire anybody to do this job for what I'm actually making.*



# Compensation: Recruitment & Retention

*So you've got qualified staff...and I've watched them leave over the years because they can't pay their bills. They have to find something else you know, and the mental and emotional stress is just too much... and you watch them leave and we've dwindled down...I think that pay is the biggest factor in why we aren't getting more people in here to do what we do.*

# Benefits:

## Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)

*EAP is a program that we get perks...we'll get a gift card for going to our annual check-up.*

*They have a program that we can use for counseling...we have counseling meetings that we can use for free.*

# Benefits:

## Health Insurance

*In the early childhood field it's hard to find a place that offers healthcare, so the fact that Head Start [their particular agency] offers this is really great...*

*I can't afford to pay for the [employee sponsored] health insurance. It's awesome that they provide it..., but when you are living paycheck to paycheck...you struggle with the idea of even buying the benefit.*

# Benefits:

## Personal Time Off (PTO)

*Sick leave, being able to use that if we need a mental health day.*

*I am at 375 hours [of earned PTO] ... I know why people rack up all this leave, because you feel bad for taking any time off.*

# Staffing

*because we can't get people in [hired]...., I take so much work home or...I'm here late at night.” and “I find myself, because of being so short staffed, working a lot more hours than I'm comfortable with and therefore, I do put off physical things for myself....I find myself coming back to work to catch up.*

# Mixed Methods Findings

Mixed Methods Joint Display Table

Theme	Focus Group Finding		Survey Finding		MM Interpretation		
	Low	High	Low	High			
Demands	<p>Early childhood educators are overwhelmed by their work responsibilities and often extend their role beyond the classroom. They often have a hard time disconnecting when they are home and continue to think about their workplace responsibilities which impacts their work life balance.</p> <p>Although educators value working with families, different family situations can create challenges and influence their wellbeing.</p> <p><i>it's hard to get enough sleep when your brain is constantly going a hundred miles an hour, and trying to decompress, and trying to make sure like I make to-do lists a lot in my head, and trying to make sure that everything's getting done...</i></p> <p><i>I feel like being home based, they reach out to me a lot and are asking me to solve their problems, and I think that makes my job hard ...</i></p>	<p>The emotional labor inherent in early childhood educators' work, coupled with the intellectual and physical demands of caring for young children, can make establishing boundaries between work and personal life a significant challenge.</p> <p><i>...It's also going home at night and thinking how can I help this child learn this skill? How can I make my classroom better? How can I do this differently to get through to my kids? That you're always thinking. And on weekends I'm always doing- looking up activities for lesson plans ...</i></p> <p><i>The mental stuff is hard. Especially in the work that we do. The things we deal with. The things that I see. I tend to take on everybody's problems and hold onto them</i></p>	<b>Workplace unpreparedness*</b>		<p>Qualitative data reflects that in both the high and low groups, educators experience challenges with finding work-life balance and often find themselves spending personal time trying to address work issues. Quantitative data shows that both groups experience similar impacts on their wellbeing, as assessed by several types of items reflecting physical and psychological wellbeing.</p> <p>Furthermore, quantitative data demonstrates that there are some differences in what types of workplace challenges educators are prepared to meet. While those in the low group may experience challenges related to being unprepared to work with children with challenging behaviors, those from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and those with social emotional needs or disabilities, the high group reported being less prepared to deal with children with physical needs or disabilities, those experiencing homelessness, and immigrant or refugee families.</p>		
			Challenging behaviors			17.2%	10.1%
			Culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds			38.9%	15.9%
			Physical needs or disabilities			6.0%	44.9%
			Social emotional needs/disabilities			33.5%	13.0%
			Experiencing homelessness			9.9%	17.3%
			Immigrant/refugee families			15.8%	23.1%
			<b>Physical and psychological wellbeing*</b>				
			Changes in sleep			80.2%	81.2%
			Difficulty concentrating			53.9%	65.2%
			Feeling a lack of control			44.1%	49.2%
			Sadness or depression			46.7%	50.7%
			Changes in eating			44.1%	49.2%
			Negativity/anxiety about the future			61.2%	58.0%
			<b>Selected Ryff scale items</b>				
Every day life gets me down		35.5%	37.7%				
Difficulty maintaining relationships		19.7%	21.7%				
In charge of living situation		74.9%	68.1%				
Good at managing responsibilities		83.5%	81.1%				

# Demands

Low	High
<b>Physical and psychological wellbeing<sup>a</sup></b>	
Changes in sleep	
80.2%	81.2%
Difficulty concentrating	
53.9%	65.2%
Feeling a lack of control	
44.1%	49.2%
Sadness or depression	
46.7%	50.7%
Changes in eating	
44.1%	49.2%
Negativity/anxiety about the future	
61.2%	58.0%

Low	High
<b>Selected Ryff scale items</b>	
Every day life gets me down	
35.5%	37.7%
Difficulty maintaining relationships	
19.7%	21.7%
In charge of living situation	
74.9%	68.1%
Good at managing responsibilities	
83.5%	81.1%

Low	High
<b>Workplace unpreparedness<sup>a</sup></b>	
Challenging behaviors	
17.2%	10.1%
Culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds	
38.9%	15.9%
Physical needs or disabilities	
6.0%	44.9%
Social emotional needs/disabilities	
33.5%	13.0%
Experiencing homelessness	
9.9%	17.3%
Immigrant/refugee families	
15.8%	23.1%

*it's hard to get enough sleep when your brain is constantly going a hundred miles an hour, and trying to decompress, and trying to make sure like I make to-do lists a lot in my head, and trying to make sure that everything's getting done...*

*I feel like being home based, they reach out to me a lot and are asking me to solve their problems, and I think that makes my job hard ...*

*...It's also going home at night and thinking how can I help this child learn this skill? How can I make my classroom better? How can I do this differently to get through to my kids? That you're always thinking. And on weekends I'm always doing- looking up activities for lesson plans ...*

*The mental stuff is hard. Especially in the work that we do. The things we deal with. The things that I see. I tend to take on everybody's problems and hold onto them*

# Compensation and Benefits

Low	High
<b>Annual Compensation</b>	
M = \$34,123.34 (SD = 12,237.87)	M = \$27,559.13 (SD = 10,132.32)

<b>Financial Stability</b>	
Difficulty providing food	
25.7%	31.9%
Difficulty providing safe housing	
18.5%	21.7%
Difficulty covering utilities/bills	
48.7%	43.4%
Difficulty covering wants	
63.1%	56.5%
Have another paid job	
18.4%	30.4%

Low	High
<b>Benefits</b>	
Paid vacation days	
82.9%	53.6%
Paid sick days	
67.8%	46.4%
EAP	
52.0%	31.9%
Paid days for meetings/trainings	
83.6%	56.5%
Paid tuition/school expenses	
30.9%	24.6%
Paid time for school	
13.8%	4.3%

**Low**

*The new hires are getting paid better than what I am, that's very frustrating.*

*"Some of these jobs are starting off with lesser education and higher pay than some of my co-workers are making."*

*I think that [mental health services] is an excellent part of the program [EAP] that's offered. I did meet with a mental health therapist, and there were some confidentiality issues...and that was a struggle for me. It was something that I was very interested in, being able to have that. After the breach of confidentiality, I was really bothered by that, so I haven't taken advantage of that mental health provider.*

*Last year, we had a budget person come in and talk to us...and ask if we needed help with budgeting.*

*I'm health insurance poor.*

**High**

*We're all here...because we find passion in it, but we also deserve to have the pay match those [job role/duties] expectations.*

*A pay increase would also show that they appreciate us. It shows that they think highly of us and that we're doing our jobs and want us to be financially well and also well all around.*

*I can't afford to pay for the [employee sponsored] health insurance. It's awesome that they provide it..., but when you are living paycheck to paycheck...you struggle with the idea of even buying the benefit.*

*EAP is a program that we get perks...we'll get a gift card for going to our annual check-up.*



# Relationships with Parents

Low	High
Staff estimate 91.4% of parents have positive perceptions of their program.	Staff estimate 86.9% of parents have positive perceptions of their program.

Low	High
<p><i>A lot of parents...are appreciative of being able to have childcare...because there's a lot of places where you can't find care right now. So, they're appreciative that they can have their kids in my classroom.</i></p> <p><i>Some families, they want your help and welcome you in. And then there's some that are like I don't want a visit...I don't see the point of this.</i></p> <p><i>...returning families...we really build a bond with them...when we have multiple kids over the years. I really like that aspect of it. And I think we have really good relationships.</i></p>	<p><i>...I enjoy...doing what I do...connecting with the family...they do listen to what you're saying, and we can be a team, and you can support these little minds, to help them learn to control their large emotions, it feels really good to help them work through that together.</i></p> <p><i>Parents...really appreciate us and tell us that, you know, they've seen improvements that they can see that their child is progressing with us.</i></p>

# Conclusions



# Conclusions

- Compensation for High and Low groups is different
- However, no difference in financial stability

# Conclusions

- No apparent differences in wellbeing between High and Low groups
- But something is driving the differences in burnout and intent to leave
  - If not wellbeing and compensation, then what?

# Thank You!

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**Alexandra Daro, Ph.D.**  
[adaro@nebraska.edu](mailto:adaro@nebraska.edu)

**Katherine Sutton, M.P.H.**  
[ksutton@nebraska.edu](mailto:ksutton@nebraska.edu)

**Kathleen Gallagher, Ph.D.**  
[kgallagher@nebraska.edu](mailto:kgallagher@nebraska.edu)

**Paula Thompson, Ph.D.**  
[thompsonpj@unk.edu](mailto:thompsonpj@unk.edu)

**Kristen Cunningham, Ph.D.**  
[kcunningham49@nebraska.edu](mailto:kcunningham49@nebraska.edu)

# Discussion Questions

- How can information from this study inform or advance early childhood practice?
- How can information from this study inform or advance early childhood public policy?
- How can lessons from practice or policy inform this line of research?



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Start early. Start well.

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