

The Sustainability of Daily Routines in Family Child Care as Resilience in the Face of Difficult Working Conditions

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Introduction

- ❖ An often neglected sector of the child care work force is Family Child Care (FCC): regulated programs that provide child care services in a provider's home. Although estimates of how many children are in FCC at a given point in time vary from 6 to 16% (Porter et al., 2010), one-quarter of children are in family child care at some point during their first five years of life where they spend an average 31 hours per week (Morrissey, 2007).
- ❖ Extensive research documents challenges faced by providers in family child care (FCC): long hours, isolation, difficult relationships with children's families, and the complexity of running a licensed business in one's home (Albanese, 2007; Rusby, Jones, Crowley, & Smolkowski, 2013; Tuominen, 2003). Nonetheless, increasing research, including early results from the National Survey of Early Care and Education, suggests that at least some FCC providers stay in the field a long time. What allows some providers to persevere despite the challenges?
- ❖ This research extends the concept of sustainability of daily routines (McConnell et al., 2013; Weisner, Matheson, Coots, & Bernheimer, 2005) from research on families to FCC: **sustainable daily routines** are
 - ❖ Predictable and stable (i.e., individuals know what to expect)
 - ❖ Fit with resources (i.e., resources are not stretched too thin)
 - ❖ Aligned with personal meaning (i.e., ideals of the "right" thing to do)
 - ❖ Congruent or balancing the competing interests of stakeholders (i.e., children, children's families, regulatory bodies, and often helpers and the providers' own family members)
- ❖ Such work is essential for workforce development because efforts to improve the quality of environments young children experience in family child care settings may have superficial or short-lived effects if they are not grounded in descriptions of what child care providers actually do and think about their complex daily lives.

Research Questions

- ❖ Is the concept of sustainability of daily routines useful for characterizing daily life in family child care homes?
- ❖ What are the characteristics of sustainability of daily routines among family child care providers?
- ❖ What differentiates family child care providers who can construct more and less sustainable daily routines?

Method

Participants

- ❖ Snowball sampling was used to recruit a full sample of 29 providers. Providers who had previously participated in a mail survey and agreed to be contacted for future research were invited to participate. In addition, providers were recruited from training workshops and events.
- ❖ This poster presents results for 11 of those providers.
- ❖ Comparisons with the most recently published report of child care providers within the region suggest that these providers were more experienced and better educated than is typical in the region.

Procedures: Initial Interviews

- ❖ The eco-cultural family interview was previously validated for use with families (The Ecocultural Scale Project, 1997) and was adapted by us (Tonyan, Romack, Weisner, Ayala, & Corral, 2014) for use with family child care providers with input from Weisner, one of the original authors.
- ❖ This adaptation was necessary because family child care:
 - ❖ Involves multiple families
 - ❖ Operates as a small business
- ❖ The EFI adopts an ethnographic style that is semi-structured and comparable to a conversation.
- ❖ Daily routines are a topic that people can easily talk about, and describing what, how, and why daily activities are structured as they are provides a window into individuals' values, beliefs, resources, and constraints (Weisner, 1997, 2002).

Examples of EFI Prompts:

- Tell me about a typical day from the moment that you wake up to the moment that you go to bed at night.
- Think back to the last really great day (bad day) that you had, what was that like for you?
- Why do you do it that way? What would be different if you did it a different way?

Procedures: Follow-up Interviews

- ❖ Follow-up interviews with providers were conducted several weeks later using a photo-stimulated interview. Providers were left with a digital camera at the initial interview and were asked to take up to ten photos that they felt were meaningful or important to them or their care.

Examples of Photo-Stimulated Prompts:

- So can you tell me about this photo that you took? Where is it taken? What were you doing?
- What was this child doing?
- Why did you select this one? How is it significant/important/meaningful to you?
- Is this something that you do a lot?

Analysis: Code Development

- ❖ Interviews were transcribed and coded from transcripts. Each code was developed by a leader in consultation with the team (two graduate-student interviewers and two Principle Investigators) by:
 - ❖ reading all materials (transcripts of interviews and any fieldnotes or memos written by interviewers) for each provider. While reading, we identified quotes that we thought represented the four components of sustainability: predictability/stability, fit with resources, personal meaning, congruence.
 - ❖ writing initial coding memos. We started from the operational definitions in the EFI Manual (The Ecocultural Scale Project, 1997), and adapted them for family child care (Tonyan et al., 2014).
- ❖ We then classified our first 10 providers into three groups: low, moderate, or high. We wrote descriptions of what differentiated groups from each other.
- ❖ Thus we used a process of abduction. We began from a concept in the literature, established anchor points for low, moderate, and high from our sample, then revised the definitions to fit our data (Charmaz, 2006). We are now in the process of formulating and testing hypotheses about those codes.
- ❖ The final step will be to have new coders apply these codes to new transcripts. In a mixed-method tradition, coders identify quotes from the transcripts to justify each classification – thus our final data include ordinal classifications and verbal justifications for the classification.

Results

Sustainable

- ❖ In programs that were sustainable, providers' statements suggested that stakeholders knew what to expect, their needs were met (there were no signs that stakeholders' needs were unmet or compromised), they got a lot of personal meaning out of their work (i.e., explicitly stated that it was worth it, at least for now), and had enough resources to run the program as they would like (either through income or support from others).
- ❖ **Examples of Sustainable Daily Routines:**
 - ❖ *"I've been doing daycare for thirty years, so...I think it's good, if you know what you're doing. I don't do it because just the money, cause if I don't like some family, that I never have that problem, I will not do it just because the money. If I don't feel that I get attached to the family, it's not going to work. So [uh] I will never do it, but I think it's, I've been doing good since I started my business and I do, do like a job, not like just for the money, like put my person there to serve the families and to, to help the kids to be ready for kindergarten."* (DeeDee)
 - ❖ *"You know, I take a lot of um, **well I'm very passionate about what I do and I really enjoy and I and, and so that's why I put the extra effort because um, because you know it's it's my business its my home, its my my children's life, cause my children you know participate in everything so, um, ...I know I service a low income base um, clientel, but, and then in that sense I mean I'm happy because I'm giving, I feel I'm giving them a quality experience. It's not like okay come over here and watch television, you know. I'm actually I put a lot of effort into it and in that sense I'm helping-helping kids and it makes me feel good. I mean to be totally selfish it makes me feel good to help um, under privileged kids. ... [when asked to describer her ideal day] I mean we have ideal days all the time, to be honest with you, I mean the kids are really great, they're happy to be here,***

um, my child is here, um, I have central air so I'm pretty much cool all day long. So I have a pretty ideal day. I mean I can't complain too much. Um, so, I pretty much live my ideal day. I mean the only thing I wish I had more sleep. [laughs]" (Nadia)

Isolated/Temporary Threats to Sustainability

- ❖ In some programs, we saw signs of strain in one or two domains, or strain from a temporary situation. Providers described challenges, including at least times of not having enough resources or not being able to run the program as they would like; things may have been precarious, but we had indication that something would have had to get worse before they would have had to close the program or leave the work; overall, these providers stated that the rewards outweighed the challenges.
- ❖ **Example of Isolated/Temporary Threats to Sustainability:**
 - ❖ *[Asked what, if anything, she would change about her daily routine]: "Well, I wish I was younger [laugh] that sure would be a lot easier. Um, **it was really nice to have an assistant.** I wish we could get the kids back [enrolled] besides the fact that my, my best friend who was my assistant hasn't worked in two years and I feel really bad for her. **Um also it's really nice having a second person um to be able to you know do simple things go to the bathroom do the dishes maybe** you know I put the laundry in last night and I need to transfer it you know. To have ten minutes to run off and do something...**is really nice a to...to know that someone can be sitting outside and someone can be in here so if I got you know two age groups it's covered.** [Asked "And what would an ideal day look like for you?] **Um well like I said add, the add the assistant and um have the assistant do a whole bunch of cleaning for me that would be ideal [laugh]. Ah, yep pretty much um pretty much everything will be the same except just having two people so that we can divide the kids up um by age group whenever necessary... So just having a second person here doing everything that we currently do would be fine but we could do, we could get more out of it."** (Carmen)*

Unsustainable

- ❖ Some providers showed multiple signs of strain that did not seem to be fully outweighed by the rewards or benefits of the work; they may have had greater challenges than providers classed as medium or moderate or they may have had fewer resources, but there were signs that they could continue the way they were running the program and that they may not be able to continue operating an FCC unless something changes (e.g., more children enrolling, another income added to the household, increases in state subsidies/vouchers, enrolling in a support program).
- ❖ **Example of Unsustainable:**
 - ❖ *I don't have that many kids right now. **I'm not full at this moment.** Uh the economy is doing it's bad work, people don't have jobs so, for different reasons, the kids are uh, staying home with their moms. (Interviewer: And with uh, how has that affected your business?) Well it's affecting my business because um, [sigh] **I'm having uh-uh a little bit financial difficulty right** now because um, you know uh whatever I get, the income that I get for the day care, I uh, pay the girls and uh I spend on stationary and I spend on food, a lot of money and uh, I don't make a lot of income and **I'm starting like thinking about closing it down.** Uh, in this summer. I don't know, it will be um, the right decision for me to do or not because I have been in this business for ten years but uh, the thing is that I might have- my children have grown up and my son is ten years old. My daughter is going to school, uh in September. She's going to kindergarten so basically she's grown out of the daycare. **And seven other children or eight including my daughter are going to school. So leaving me with three.** And uh, I know it always happens when one door closes, another door opens. And uh, for like the whole ten*

years I never uh, advertised or, I mean, uh- what happened, like one kid is going to school and another kid coming to replace. It always happened like that, but not, never happened like eight kids altogether. Like, I don't know what happened this year, all the kids are the same age, they're going to school. And will I be able to survive? Oh no; even if I let one of the assistants go I, still it will be hard to manage for me. And my kids are going to school uh I'm thinking uh I might get a job and go work outside the house and my kids will be at school and uh, do I need to do this? Forever? I don't know. (Lexi)

Discussion

Conclusions

- ❖ All providers described challenges, but providers could be meaningfully classified according to sustainability or the configuration of the resources and challenges they described.
 - ❖ Some providers had daily routines that suggested resilience or a capacity to respond to everyday challenges (“Sustainable”) and even temporary or isolated challenges (“Temporary/Isolated Threats”), often fueled by a strong sense of personal meaning.
 - ❖ Other providers described challenges that outweighed the resources they had available to them or a threshold past which they did not see the resources being enough to outweigh the challenges and strains.
- ❖ Sustainability was dynamic: many providers described changes in their challenges or resources that were sometimes sudden (e.g., birth of a new child, increases in the demands of programs like nutrition programs or quality improvement initiatives, losing a trusted helper, illness in self or family).
- ❖ Sustainability was not about absolute levels, but resources relative to challenges:
 - ❖ Most providers were high in personal meaning and low in economic situation.
 - ❖ Some providers with a better economic situation did not have enough personal meaning to sustain them.
 - ❖ Some providers with few resources – economic or emotional – kept their programs small and sustainable.
- ❖ Implications for practice and professional development.
 - ❖ Providers may need a threshold level of sustainability before they have capacity to respond to changes or economic fluctuations.
 - ❖ Efforts to support providers’ sustainability or resilience may be needed.
 - ❖ Quality improvement efforts that ignore sustainability will likely have effects of limited scope or duration.

Limitations and Future Research

- ❖ Because this was an exploratory, pilot study to discover patterns rather than to establish reliability of patterns, no efforts were made to assess inter-rater reliability, and results are not generalizable.

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