

Exploring Stress in the Field of Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

The teaching profession is recognized to be one of the most stressful fields worldwide (Lhospital & Gregory, 2009). This qualitative study was conducted to explore the different stresses for Early Childhood Educators (ECE's) in the workplace and further explored to see if there is a difference between general and special educators' stress. 14 individuals participated in one-on-one interviews; 7 general educators and 7 special educators. After interviews were conducted; five major themes were found, three of which were echoed in the literature. With the key findings, it was concluded that there is virtually no difference in the stresses among general and special educators. Both, general and special educators expressed that there is a lack of professional support for stress management in the workplace which contributes to their stress. In addition to that, another stress factor for educators was not receiving proper training for the position they are in. This study presented data and knowledge on what can be done to support educators and decrease their stress in the workplace.

Introduction

The purpose for this study is to gain an understanding of the causes of stress that general and special educators encounter in their work-field. This study focused on analyzing the responses received from general and special educators. This research was conducted to address the question: "how do special educators and general educators describe their work-related stress?"

Literature Review

With all of the research findings that these articles have identified, three themes have been commonly established: stress, lack of training and coping strategies. These themes were crucial to this study to further investigate the reason why educators are stressed in the first place. The provided literature has looked into both general and special educators' stress levels and how it can negatively impact their professional development. This study is an important area to understand, considering the majority of the literature has indicated that further training or a program for all educators is important.

Among the five major themes found in this research, three were similar to what the literature presented. These themes include, 'lack of specialized training', 'lack of professional support for stress management', and 'need for more time.' Several different research studies have stated, special educators are prone to higher levels of stress due to the extra effort and time spent with students (Garwood et al., 2018). Garwood and co-authors., (2018) indicated throughout their study the critical role of training, and how it can help prevent burnout and allow educators with enhanced positive coping mechanisms. Similarly, the researchers found that the participants also mentioned not having training and that it would be beneficial to their mental health as well as coping mechanisms. According to Braun-Lewensohn (2016) there is no help in the classroom to assist special educators which was also commonly found among the participants in this research study. Training in stress management was very important to the participants in the study and Kerr and Brown's (2016) research suggested that coping strategies should be part of the educators' training to prevent burnout and to manage their stress efficiently. Stress overpowers the fulfillment educators get from the teaching profession (Mueller, 2019). A lot of this may be due to the lack of training in coping strategies of stress for general and special educators.

The purpose of the study is to have a better understanding of the stress levels that general and special educators encounter in their daily lives. The literature review was crucial in answering the question "how do general educators and special educators describe their work-related stress?"

Methodology

Research Design

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research design was utilized.

Instrument

- 14 one-on-one interviews were conducted, involving seven general educators and seven special educators.
- 11 open-ended questions were asked to the participants and the use of probes.
- Each interview lasted approximately 15 - 45 minutes which was audio recorded.



FIGURE 1. A word bank; Stress is the main topic of the research which has a lot of factors that cause it. The word bank was created by using sets of words that were present throughout the research along with the procedure, created through www.wordclouds.com

Procedure

- The researchers contacted the childcare director via email to obtain permission to conduct a research study on site. The email contained a request to participate and explained the nature and purpose of the study
- Once the permission from the director was obtained, the researchers arranged a time to visit the centre to invite potential participants to participate in the study.
- The educators who showed an interest in participating were given an information letter and consent form. The researchers arranged an interview day, time, and location that was convenient for each potential participant.
- Data was collected in the form of in-person, individual interviews.
- Participants were contacted as soon as the interview were transcribed to read the transcript and made any desired changes.

Participants

- Individuals who work in the field of education, specifically special and general educators were interviewed
- Convenience sampling and snowball sampling was used

Results and Discussion

Results

Lack of Parental Collaboration

- 75% of general educators expressed the lack of understanding and support from parents. *"If parents were more supportive I think the job would be easier, parents don't want to be collaborative, they don't want to hear negative about their child and they are not willing to kind of be supportive in a sense, to them we're just taking care of their kid"*
- Communication with parents was deemed important to educators. Participants also stated that reaching parents in times of need is difficult and majorly contributes to their stress levels.

High Expectations from Superiors

- 57% of the participants felt that there was added pressure that caused them stress due to prioritizing the expectations from the superior instead of meeting the needs of the children.
- 63% mentioned feeling pressured and stressed when superiors came to evaluate.
- Similarly, the literature presented that stress would decrease in the education profession if training is implemented (Kourmousi & Alexopoulos, 2016).

Lack of Specialized Training

- 64% of the participants expressed that they did not have training or knowledge prior to getting hired for the position and believed it to be important. Majority of the participants who stated a lack of training in the field were special educators.
- According to Banahatti (2016), the special education programs in India are lacking guidance, counselling and organization of teaching and training roles which cause special educators to be stressed in the work field.

Lack of Professional Support for Stress Management

- 79% of the participants believed there needs to be more professional support for stress management in place. 100% stated that this field is stressful. *"We don't know how to deal with stress, we need better ways to deal with stress in the work field."*
- Coping is made easier if an individual is trained in how to manage their stress, especially if it is offered earlier in the profession (Kourmousi & Alexopoulos, 2016).

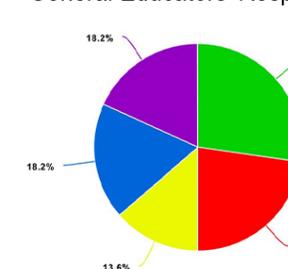
Need for More Time

- 79% of the educators acknowledged that with all of the tasks that need to be completed, there is not enough time for them to meet the needs of the children. Educators explained that they felt stressed with responsibilities such as; paperwork, planning curriculum, parents, providing attention to the children and other daily tasks. *"You're always rushing, and then dealing with different behaviours. Sometimes it's overwhelming and stressful."*

Conclusion

- With the findings, superiors can encourage and support educators to maintain success and minimize stress in the work-place.
- An implication included in this study was that the research originally had 16 participants, but two were unable to participate due to scheduling complications
- A limitation of this study was that the majority of the participants were interviewed from the same location which resulted in common answers. When participants were interviewed from different centres, their answers were different. Therefore, further research should include participants from different areas.
- For further exploration, researchers could consider conducting a study with educators in different countries to see if stresses differ.

General Educators' Response



Special Educators' Response

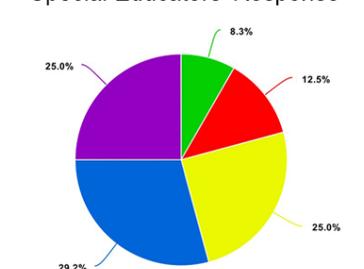


FIGURE 2. Educators' response, a pie chart that illustrates how many general and special educators mentioned the following themes. The data that was collected was used to illustrate the general and special educators' responses which was created through www.meta-chart.com/pie.