Profiles of Parent-Child and Teacher-Child Relationship Quality Among Toddlers in Early Head Start

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BACKGROUND

Engaging in high-quality relationships with caregivers in early care and education and home contexts in toddlerhood:

• Shapes long-term positive developmental trajectories (Magnuson & Schindler, 2019).
• Is a goal for center-based Early Head Start (EHS) programs (Office of Head Start, 2018).

Yet, caregiving experiences in EHS centers and homes are dynamic and variable (Mortensen & Barnett, 2018).

Identifying systematic variability in interactions across these contexts will inform practices and policies to ensure that all children in EHS participate in multiple supportive relationships.

STUDY AIMS

We apply a person-centered approach to describe the caregiving experiences, defined by closeness and conflict, of toddlers in EHS center and home settings.

Research Question:

What subgroups, or constellations, of parent-child and teacher-child relationship quality characterize children participating in center-based EHS programs?

METHODS

Sample (N = 1625): Toddlers (M = 25.87 months, SD = 6.87; 54% male) enrolled in center-based EHS (M = 4.87 days/week) in the 2018 Family and Child Experiences Survey (Baby FACES). Mothers’ race/ethnicity: 37% Hispanic, 33% Black, Non-Hispanic, 24% White, Non-Hispanic. Teachers worked for EHS on average 8.79 years (SD = 7.84). This subsample represents 456 centers and 779 classrooms / teachers.

Measures:

Parent-Child Relationship Quality: Parent reports on Closeness (8-items) and Conflict (7-items) (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011)
Teacher-Child Relationship Quality: Teacher reports on Closeness (8-items) and Conflict (7-items) (Pianta, 2001)

Analyses:

Multi-level Latent Profile Analysis with FIML in MPLUS 8.10 that accounts for nesting at the center-level.

RESULTS

Figure 1. Center and Home Relationship Quality Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistent High Closeness, Low Conflict</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>1065</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Low Closeness, High Conflict</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Moderate Closeness and Conflict</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>427</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistent Closeness, Consistent Low Conflict</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Most toddlers participated in high-quality relationships (high closeness and low conflict) across contexts.
• Variability in combinations of conflict and closeness underscores the value of a person-centered analytic approach.
• Teacher-child conflict and parent-child closeness were highly variable across profiles relative to other constructs.
• Next Steps: Identify center, teacher, child and family characteristics that differentiate profiles.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

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