Caregiver Characteristics, Process, and Children’s Development: Results of the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development

Aletha C. Huston
Department of Human Development & Family Sciences
University of Texas at Austin
Acknowledgements

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The remainder represents findings from Catherine Malerba’s 2005 dissertation at the University of Texas.
Expanded Model of ECE

Malerba, Catherine (2005)
Child care observed when target child was 6, 15, 24, 36, 54 months old

All types of settings included

Caregiver training, attitudes, beliefs, psychological well-being measured

Observations of target child’s experience

- Minute-by-minute frequency counts
- Rating scales completed after each 10 min. and at end of observation
- Scales rating environment
Caregiver & Structure Predicting Process

- Caregiver Characteristics: e.g., Education, Beliefs
- Caregiving Environment: e.g., Ratios, Group size
- Adult/child Behavioral Processes in Child Care Setting
Infancy (6 months) – all settings

® Positive caregiving (quality) includes sensitivity, positive regard, cognitive stimulation

® Observed quality higher when
  § Low child/adult ratio
  § Low group size
  § Caregiver had nonauthoritarian child rearing beliefs
  § High quality of physical environment
  § No additional contribution of CG experience, specialized training, or formal education
Prediction to Observed Quality for Toddlers

- Importance of ratio declines with age
- CG nonauthoritarian beliefs most consistent predictor of observed positive caregiving

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<th>15 MO</th>
<th>24 MO</th>
<th>36 MO</th>
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<tr>
<td>Child/adult ratio</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonauthoritarian beliefs of CG</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.26***</td>
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<tr>
<td>CG Education</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
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<td>CG Specialized training</td>
<td>.13**</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
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<td>CG Experience</td>
<td>.01</td>
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Caregiver Characteristics at 24-month Observation: 5 Factors

- Education, formal training in ECE, nontraditional beliefs about child rearing
- Years experience, age
- Concerns about job & caring for young children, low depression
- Professionalism and recent training (FC only)
- Rewards – enjoys caring for children and CG meets own needs

* Centers and family child care included (Malerba 2005)
Relations to Positive CG/Child Engagement

® Positive engagement = positive verbal & nonverbal interaction between CG, children

® Centers
  § Caregiver nontraditional beliefs, professionalism, concerns predict positive engagement BUT
  § Environment (ratios, healthy practices) much stronger predictor

® Child care homes
  § CG characteristics minor predictors
  § Environment (ratio, having a schedule) strong predictors
Caregiver & Structure Predicting Child Competence

Caregiver Characteristics: e.g., Education, Beliefs

Caregiving Environment: e.g., Ratios, Group size

Child Cognitive & Social Competencies
Tested 4 components of standards in centers: ratio, group size, CG education, CG training

Low child/adult ratios predict high positive social behavior and low behavior problems at both ages

At 36 MO only, CG education and training predict high school readiness, high language comprehension, low behavior problems
Full Model of ECE

Caregiver Characteristics: e.g., Education, Beliefs

Caregiving Environment: e.g. Ratios, Group size

Adult/child Behavioral Processes in Child Care Setting

Child Cognitive & Social Competencies
Full Model Results

- **Centers at 54 MO**
  - High education/training & low child/adult ratio associated with cognitive and social competencies—mediated by observed quality

- **Family child care homes 15, 24, 36 MO**
  - Better educated CG and CG with nonauthoritarian (child centered beliefs) show more positive caregiving and higher home environment quality.
  - Children with better educated/trained CG performed better on cognitive and language tests
Conclusions

- Structural features of environment, especially ratios, often outweigh caregiver characteristics at early ages.
- Relative importance of CG characteristics and ratios changes from infancy to preschool settings.
- Nontraditional child-centered beliefs about child rearing mediate at least part of the benefits of CG education and formal training.
- Need to consider differences in what constitutes quality for children of different ages.
Implications

- Training may be most effective if it deals with beliefs and attitudes about child rearing, not just curriculum and specific techniques.
- Even best trained caregivers are limited by the structural and environmental constraints of their settings.
- Attempts to upgrade the work force involve upgrading the environments in which people work as well as upgrading skills.


Thank you!