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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between day care center size and child care workers' level of job commitment and job satisfaction. Surveys were completed by 128 teachers and aides who worked full-time in non-profit child care centers in the Chicago metropolitan area. The results of the data analysis revealed that there was not a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. Working conditions, pay, and opportunities for advancement were, however, positively related to center size, as measured by total staff employed. In addition, workers' total level of job satisfaction appeared to have a positive relationship with center size. The results of the study suggest that there is a moderate relationship between center size and the job satisfaction of child care workers. (A copy of the survey questionnaire is appended. Contains 29 references.) (MDM)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CENTER SIZE AND CHILD CARE WORKERS' LEVEL OF JOB COMMITMENT AND JOB SATISFACTION

by

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between center size and child care workers' level of job commitment and job satisfaction. One hundred twenty-eight teachers and aides who work full-time in non-profit child care centers in the metropolitan Chicago area were the participants in this study. The participants completed a self-report questionnaire that was distributed at local conferences and workshops. Correlational statistics were used to determine the relationship between center size and level of workers' job commitment and job satisfaction. The results of the data analysis revealed there was not a statistically significant relationship between these two variables. Working conditions and pay and promotion opportunities, however, appear to be positively related to the center size as measured by total staff employed. In addition, workers' total level of job satisfaction appears to have a significant positive relationship with center size. The results of this study suggest that workers are highly committed to the field of early childhood education and to their respective workplaces and that the nature of the work itself is a key factor contributing to their commitment and job satisfaction.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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Statement of the Problem

As the number of working parents increases, the concern for qualified and available caregivers also continues to grow. Competent staff are essential in the provision of quality child care (Modigliani, 1985). However, the staffing crisis in early childhood care and education continues to threaten the quality of care for young children (LaGrange & Read, 1990). According to the National Child Care Staffing Study, teaching staff turnover has tripled in the last decade (Whitebook, Howes, Phillips & Pemberton, 1989).

It is widely agreed that the first area of concern in the issue of turnover is the low pay of early childhood professionals. Higher pay would certainly help to attract and retain workers, but child care advocates must also look for ways to retain staff with the salaries that are currently offered (Ritchie, 1991). Many studies suggest that dissatisfaction with the conditions of child care work may be key factors affecting decisions to leave the field (Stremmel, 1991). Although Kontos and Stremmel (1988) found that there was little evidence to suggest that working conditions significantly contribute to job satisfaction and commitment, they still believe that these variables are related.

As director of a small child care center that will be expanding in the near future, I wonder if increasing the size of my organization will have an adverse effect on the job satisfaction or commitment of my staff. Staff turnover is certainly an issue for me as I seek to hire and retain qualified and competent staff. I believe that employees' strong commitment to their organization may help reduce turnover. Therefore, the purpose of this

study will be to assess the relationship between center program size and the level of job commitment and job satisfaction of child care workers.

Rationale

Modigliani (1985) found that many people stay in the field of early childhood for two years or less, suggesting a high rate of turnover. Turnover rates range from 15% to 60% depending on who is reporting the rate (Jorde-Bloom 1986b; Jorde-Bloom 1988a; Kontos & Stremmel, 1988; LaGrange & Read, 1990; Whitebook & Granger, 1989). Although there is a wide range in these reported rates, it is undisputed that turnover rates are high and that the economic incentives for commitment to careers in child care are low (Kontos & Stremmel, 1988).

Not only does high turnover negatively affect the job performance and increase the level of stress for workers, it also affects the quality of care for children (Strober, Gerlach-Downie, & Yeager, 1989). Children who attend centers of low quality and high staff turnover have been found to be less competent in language and social development (Whitebook, Howes, Phillips, & Pemberton, 1989). Researchers now emphasize that determining the characteristics of caregivers and their work environments may be key factors in determining child experiences and outcomes (LaGrange & Read, 1990).

Kontos and Stremmel (1988) found that how child care workers experience their workplace affects their teaching and the quality of care they provide. More attention is being paid to the needs of the child care workers to improve working conditions, thus

contributing to the improvement of quality (Benham, Miller, & Kontos, 1989). Stremmel (1991) hypothesized that understanding one's responses to work indirectly influences turnover through intentions to leave or remain.

Studies indicate that higher standards are important for children and are also indicators of the working conditions of the program (Russell, 1989). Levels of satisfaction with the workplace are also accurate predictors of the overall climate of the school (Jorde-Bloom, 1987).

Jorde-Bloom (1988b) has defined several facets of job satisfaction. She believes that addressing issues related to job satisfaction is central to attracting and retaining quality teachers in the work force. The five facets of child care work used to assess levels of satisfaction are: co-worker relations; supervisor relations; the nature of child care work itself; pay and opportunities for promotion; and general working conditions.

In general, job satisfaction is defined as the degree to which an employee has a positive affective orientation toward the organization. How the individual evaluates existing conditions of the job and how these conditions meet the individual's needs and expectations are the essence of this affective orientation (Jorde-Bloom, 1986b; Jorde-Bloom, 1987; Reyes & Keller, 1986).

Webb and Lowther (1990) assessed the predictors of job commitment by looking at several variables of level of job satisfaction: the worker's perception of different job characteristics, the caregiver's age, and caregiver's level of education. They cite job

satisfaction as the most powerful predictor of overall commitment to the organization. These results support the research of Jorde-Bloom (1988b) who also found that one's level of job satisfaction is strongly related to one's level of commitment. Commitment is characterized by a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization, and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b; Stremmel, 1991). In general, researchers define organizational commitment as the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in the organization reflecting one's attitude and moral involvement (Reyes & Keller, 1986; Webb & Lowther, 1990).

Researchers in environmental psychology have emphasized that physical surroundings can have a powerful influence on one's psychological and physiological state, as well as one's commitment to an organization (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b). Strickland (1991) believes that the size of a center can also be a reliable predictor of quality.

In a study assessing the effect of center size on program quality, Prescott and Jones (as cited in Greenman, 1984) concluded that center size was a dependable predictor of program quality. In centers serving over 60 children, teachers appeared distant and less sensitive. In smaller centers, opportunities for pleasure, wonder, and delight were significantly higher. Talacchi (1960) suggests that there may also be a relationship between the size of an organization and the quality of employee relations. He believes that the organization's size affects the level of employee job satisfaction.

In their research, however, LaGrange and Read (1990) found few differences in center quality and staff relations based on center size. Size was not a key predictor of level of pay or of working conditions. LaGrange and Read concluded that most center differences are attributed to program auspice. In her study of organizational climate, Jorde-Bloom (1987) failed to find a significant relationship between the size of the organization and ten dimensions of organizational climate. However, she did find that team spirit, cooperation, and group cohesiveness were rated lower by staff who worked in larger centers. In another study (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b) focusing on the relationship between worker's level of job satisfaction and their organizational commitment, center size failed to surface as a significant predictor.

Overview of the Study

This was a correlational study assessing the relationship between program size and the level of job commitment and job satisfaction of child care workers. It was hypothesized that child care workers who worked in large centers would have lower levels of job commitment than child care workers that worked in smaller centers.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this research study, child care refers to center-based full day child care (also called day care) for children under the age of six. Child care worker refers to an early childhood teacher or a teacher's aide who works on a full-time basis. Full-time refers to any employee who works 30 or more hours per week on a regular basis. Center size

refers to the licensed capacity of a child care center, as well as the total number of staff employed by the center. Level of job commitment is defined as the strength of the worker's belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; a willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization; and a desire to maintain membership in the organization (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b; Stremmel, 1991).

Limitations

Finding a large enough sample of child care workers willing to complete the survey was difficult. Furthermore, if most of the respondents were among those who completed the survey while attending a professional workshop or conference, the results may not be representative of child care workers in general.

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CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In 1984, the Department of Labor reported that there were 677,000 child care workers in the United States. This figure has tripled in the last decade (Whitebook, Howes, Phillips & Pemberton, 1989). According to the National Child Care Staffing Study, teaching staff turnover has also nearly tripled in the last decade (Whitebook et al, 1989). The staffing crisis in early childhood care and education continues to threaten the quality of care for young children. The continuity of caregiving or caregiver stability has been reported as an important variable of quality child care (LaGrange & Read, 1990).

As the number of working parents increases, the concern for qualified and available caregivers will continue to grow. Efforts and concern to attract and retain qualified and trained staff must be the priority (Modigliani, 1985; Russell, 1989). There is growing recognition that competent staff members are essential to quality in child care (Modigliani, 1985). The National Child Care Staffing Study reported major findings which emphasized this point.

> Inattention to quality has had its costs: Child care centers throughout the country report difficulty in recruiting and retaining adequately trained staff. Nearly half of all child care teachers leave their jobs each year, many to seek better-paying jobs. As the nation deliberates on what is best for its children, the question of who will take care for them grows increasingly critical. (Whitebook et al., 1989, p. 3).

The Staffing Crisis

Staff Turnover

Staff turnover measures the number of teachers that leave a program during the year. It is most commonly measured by asking directors how many teaching positions they have in their program and how many teachers left during the year (Whitebook & Granger, 1989). Modigliani (1985) measured staff turnover by the number of years that people have worked in their centers. Her findings state that many people stay in the field for two years or less, suggesting a high rate of turnover.

Turnover rates range from 15% to 60% depending on who is reporting the rate (Jorde-Bloom, 1986; Jorde-Bloom, 1988a; Kontos & Stremmel, 1988; LaGrange & Read, 1990; Whitebook & Granger, 1989). Many of these rates suggest that child care work is among the top ten job categories having the highest turnover (Jorde-Bloom, 1986b; Jorde-Bloom, 1988b; Kontos & Stremmel, 1988). Although there is a range in these rates, the fact exists that turnover rates are high and that economic incentives for commitment to careers in child care are low (Kontos & Stremmel, 1988). Steps must be taken to understand and clarify the factors that influence work attitudes as they may help reduce turnover and improve program stability (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b).

It is widely agreed that the first area of concern in the issue of turnover is the low pay of early childhood professionals. Higher pay would certainly help to attract and retain

workers. However, the issue of pay will take many years to correct. Advocates of the child care industry must look for ways to keep staff with the salaries that are currently offered (Ritchie, 1991).

Many studies have suggested that there is a correlation between expressed intention to leave work and actual turnover. According to Stremmel (1991), this correlation is stronger than the relationship between turnover and job satisfaction. Stremmel hypothesized that understanding one's responses to work indirectly influences turnover through intentions to leave or remain.

If dissatisfaction or low commitment with child care work are factors in one's decision to leave, then "the best strategy to reduce turnover may be to generate interventions to change the conditions that affect job satisfaction and commitment" (Stremmel, 1991). Modigliani (1985) identified a partial solution to keeping child care workers in the field was to relate a staff members' job commitment with participation in center decision-making.

Not only does high turnover negatively affect the job performance and increase the level of stress for workers, it also affects the quality of care for children (Strober, Gerlach-Downie, & Yeager, 1989). Children may certainly be negatively affected by stressful, conflictual, and angry working conditions for staff (Kontos & Stremmel, 1988). Researchers now emphasize that determining the characteristics of child caregivers and their work environments are key factors in determining child experiences and outcomes

(LaGrange & Read, 1990). Trained and stable staff are necessary for young children (Whitebook & Granger, 1989).

Effects on Quality

Predictors of quality include the staff to child ratio, formal training of caregivers, group size and staff turnover (Webb & Lowther, 1990). The National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook et al., 1989) cites that staff wages, formal education, and ratios are also predictors. Children that attended centers with lower quality and higher staff turnover were found to be less competent in language and social development.

Studies indicate that higher standards are important for children and are also indicators of the working conditions of the program (Russell, 1989). Kontos and Stremmel (1988) found that how child care workers experience their workplace effects their teaching and the quality of the programs that they provide. Levels of satisfaction with the workplace are accurate predictors of the effectiveness of the school (Jorde-Bloom, 1987). More attention is being paid to the needs of the child care workers to improve working conditions, thus contributing to the improvement of quality (Benham, Miller, & Kontos, 1989). Modigliani (1986) fears that the quality of available care for children is not as good as it should be. She believes that the most critical factor for quality care is the quality of caregivers. The shortage of caregivers threatens early childhood programs.

> Inferior childcare may not offer children what they need psychologically and socially. I am afraid that these children will think poorly of themselves because they were not treasured by the adults who drifted in and out of their lives during the years when they looked to those nearby to define their basic self-esteem. I fear that these children will do poorly in relationships and not care as much about other people because they learned not to trust people early in life. (p. 64)

Job Satisfaction and Commitment

Although Kontos and Stremmel (1988) found that there was little evidence to suggest that working conditions significantly contribute to job satisfaction and commitment, they still believe that these variables are related. Jorde-Bloom (1988b) has defined several factors influencing job satisfaction and she believes that job satisfaction is central to attracting and retaining quality teachers in the work force.

Job Satisfaction

The concept of job satisfaction has been defined in many similar terms. The Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey (ECJSS) developed by Jorde-Bloom ((1988b) is used to assess satisfaction with five facets of child care work: co-worker relations; supervisor relations; the nature of child care work itself; pay and opportunities for promotion; and general working conditions. Another widely used instrument has been the Job Descriptive Index developed by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin in 1985 as cited by Jorde-Bloom (1986b). This instrument also focuses on five facets of job satisfaction: type of work; pay; opportunities for promotion; supervision; and relationship with coworkers (Jorde-Bloom, 1986b; Jorde-Bloom, 1988b; Webb & Lowther, 1990). Staff-child ratios, hours of direct

contact with children, break and substitute p cies, mechanisms for input, and flexibility of center policies have also been found to be factors in staff perceptions of job satisfaction (Jorde-Bloom, 1986b).

The "person-environment fit" used by organizational theorists as an explanatory paradigm, describes the degree of congruence between one's personality and the work environment. One's individual attitudes, values, and expectations can have considerable impact on satisfaction in the work environment. If the work environment can personally and professionally satisfy one's need for affiliation, security, influence, achievement, and job satisfaction, the person-environment fit will be good (Jorde-Bloom, 1986b). If a program administrator understands this concept and has the ability to recognize a potential misfit, perhaps adjustments can be made to the environment to promote an appropriate fit between the worker and the environment. The adjustment may be to the physical setting, organizational structure, assignment of roles and responsibilities or the interpersonal relations among staff (Jorde-Bloom, 1986b). In general, job satisfaction occurs when there is little discrepancy between existing conditions and the ideal conditions of the worker. However, some argue that it is the perceived discrepancy that is important, not the actual discrepancy (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b). How one perceives the relationship between what one wants from one's job and what one actually gets, is fundamental to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b).

In general, job satisfaction is defined by the degree to which the employee has a positive affective orientation toward the organization. How the individual evaluates the existing conditions of the job and how the conditions meet the individual's needs and expectations measures the degree of job satisfaction. Satisfaction exists by looking at the composite of the attitudes, evaluations, or emotional responses that an individual has about the particular job (Jorde-Bloom 1986b; Jorde-Bloom, 1987; Reyes & Keller, 1986).

Signs of dissatisfaction may include increased tardiness and absenteeism without prior notification, lack of attention to details regarding children, defensive responses to peers, coworkers, parents, or supervisors, changes in productivity levels, lack of follow through in typical routines, and disorganized classrooms (Albrecht, 1989).

Several studies and interviews with child care workers have concluded that pay and benefits, adequacy of staffing, managerial skills and leadership style of the center director, opportunities for professional development and relations with children and parents are central to job satisfaction (Strober et al., 1989). Bell (1988) found that poor working conditions, wages, and benefits were the leading factors of job dissatisfaction. Jorde-Bloom (1988b) found that pay, benefits, and opportunities for promotion were the second strongest source of job frustration.

Interestingly enough, high job satisfaction does exist despite the dissatisfaction over salaries and benefits. Research has shown that employee dissatisfaction over these factors is offset by the immense satisfaction that child care workers gain from working with

children and their parents (LaGrange & Read, 1990; Modigliani, 1985; Modigliani, 1986; Stremmel, 1991). For example, Modigliani (1986) found that 95% of child care workers liked their jobs. High levels of satisfaction are unusual in survey research of this nature primarily because so few workers are satisfied with their salaries, benefits, or opportunities for promotion. This begins to explain that most studies of teacher job satisfaction reveal that intrinsic rewards from teaching and the pleasure of working with children outweigh the extrinsic rewards of the job (Jorde-Bloom, 1986b). Most teachers accept the low wages in exchange for gratifying work with children. In the past, these teachers were often women who were willing to be financially dependent on their husbands. Today, more women need to seek higher-paying jobs, thus they cannot remain in child care. This is a major factor in the teacher shortage (Modigliani, 1988).

Even though work with children has been reported as a major source of job satisfaction, a significant number of child care workers report that dealing with children is a major frustration in their jobs. The nature of the work itself was indicated as both the greatest source of satisfaction and the greatest source of frustration (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b; Kontos & Stremmel, 1988). Relationships with parents were also mentioned as both a source of satisfaction and a source of frustration (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b).

Many studies have also found a strong correlation between the leadership style of the supervisor, director, or administrator of a center and the level of job satisfaction of the child care workers. The managerial skill and leadership style of the director are critical to child

care workers' job satisfaction (Strober et al., 1989). When asked to make recommendations for improving their jobs, almost one-fourth of workers surveyed by Kontos and Stremmel (1988) mentioned the need for better administrators. The quality of interpersonal relationships between teachers and administrators is important in contributing to levels of job satisfaction (Jorde-Bloom, 1986b). Satisfied workers have good relationships with their directors and are appreciative of the supportive and professional environment that directors facilitate. Workers that are dissatisfied report that the style and policies implemented by the director are a cause of the dissatisfaction (Strober et al., 1989). Jorde-Bloom (1986b) suggests that directors place more emphasis on the environment for the workers.

> .... schools need to be thought of as environments that not only inspire the learning and socialization of young children but also encourage the optimum development of adults. School administrators who respect the teacher's need for a work environment that provides clarity and harmony in roles and expectations, rather than conflict and ambiguity, go a long way in promoting confidence, competence, and overall commitment to pedagogical tasks. An analysis of the intertwining variables that influence work attitudes is a good beginning. We have seen, however, that the job satisfaction riddle defies simple solutions. Being satisfied with one's work is a complex multidimensional phenomenon that must be viewed with the individual teacher in mind. Future research exploring the important interplay of variables in the person-environment fit may be a step in the right direction to supporting teacher competence and satisfaction. (p. 180)

Job Commitment

Webb and Lowther (1990) define predictors of job commitment by the variables of job satisfaction, perception of job characteristics, caregiver age, and caregiver educational attainment, citing job satisfaction as the most powerful predictor. According to Jorde-

Bloom (1988b), one's job satisfaction is strongly related to one's level of commitment. How the current conditions of the work environment match one's ideal is an important predictor of commitment. Commitment is also characterized by a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization; and a strong desire to maintain membership in the organization (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b; Stremmel, 1991). In general, many researchers define organizational commitment as the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in the organization reflecting one's attitudes and moral involvement (Reyes & Keller, 1986; Webb & Lowther, 1990).

Center policies must value child care workers and provide the opportunities for individuals to feel important to the organization. People have a need to feel accepted by others. The individual must be concerned with the objectives of the organization and feel that the goals are appropriate ((Jones, 1980). Suggested management practices include: encouraging employees to be involved in setting policy and taking responsibility; providing open communication; being flexible; providing personal support; and keeping staff members informed of what is going on in the organization (Modigliani, 1985).

Several studies have shown that an employee's expressed intention to leave a job is a better predictor of turnover than job satisfaction (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b). Job commitment more accurately relates to expressed intention to leave work and the actual leaving among employees than job satisfaction (Webb & Lowther, 1990). Research indicates that center

directors must know what can be done to enhance commitment in order to increase retention of staff (Stremmel, 1991). Simply increasing wages may not necessarily result in less staff turnover and increased commitment (Webb & Lowther, 1990).

The research on the association between salaries and commitment is mixed. Jorde-Bloom (1988b) found that salary was strongly related to one's commitment to the organization. Although salary and working conditions were primary factors in low levels of dissatisfaction, Stremmel (1991) found rather high commitment among child care workers. Eighty percent of those interviewed felt committed to their centers, but 31% said they would quit if they could. Modigliani (1985) also found high levels of commitment even if related items such as salary and opportunities for promotion were low. LaGrange and Read (1990) found that 83% of child care workers interviewed viewed their work as a long-term career. Webb and Lowther (1990) found that commitment increases as positive perceptions increase. The work is perceived as meaningful when the workers view the work as important within their own value system. They also found a significant relationship between commitment and age. As age increases, one's commitment to the organization also increases. A relationship was also found between level of education and commitment, but it was a negative relationship. However, the National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook et al., 1989) found that workers with specialized early childhood training were more likely to view their jobs as long-term careers.

Although Webb and Lowther (1990) hypothesized that lower quality centers may employ staff with lower levels of job commitment, their findings indicate that center quality does not influence commitment. Predictors of quality such as group size, ratio of staff to children, staff stability, and staff training were found to have a greater impact on the educational process and the children than they did on the people who work in these organizations.

Center Size

Over the past decade, the need for child care in the United States has grown, and child care centers have been increasing in size and complexity (Zeece, 1992). Researchers in environmental psychology have emphasized that physical surroundings can have a powerful influence on one's psychological and physiological state, as well as one's social behavior (Jorde-Bloom, 1986b). Other studies suggest that early childhood work environments must nurture adults as well as children. Quality of work life for child care workers can promote high quality environments for children (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b).

Strickland (1991) believes that large versus small centers can be a reliable predictor of quality. Talacchi (1960) suggests that there is a relationship between the size of an organization and the quality of employee relations. He believes that the organization's size also affects the level of employee job satisfaction. Therefore, further study is suggested in this area.

Small centers are defined as centers with a licensed capacity of 60 or fewer children. Large centers are defined as centers with a licensed capacity of more than 60 children.

Small Centers

Talacchi (1960) suggests that smaller organizations have employees with higher levels of job satisfaction. One possible explanation for the relationship between employee morale and organization size is that individuals with higher morale may prefer to go to smaller organizations while individuals with lower morale may go to larger organizations. Small organizations with more opportunity for face-to-face interactions between staff are found to be more satisfying from a human relations point of view.

A small child care center can be a safe place for children. Many educators believe a small center has greater potential for providing a higher quality learning environment for young children. A well-run small program has fewer risks than a large program. For example, there are less staff members to deal with. The risks are also more controllable because there are less variables to deal with (Strickland, 1991). In a survey conducted by Child Care Information Exchange (Neugebauer, 1990), some panel members felt that supervisory practices were more consistent and of better quality in small centers, and that staff can be trained easier and create more of a family atmosphere in a smaller center. One director expressed the opinion that team spirit can be easily achieved and that staff will have a greater sense of ownership in center goals. A teacher's contact with a parent may represent 20% of the adult contact that the teacher has during the day, so when a conflict

arises, the teacher may act quickly to resolve the interaction problem. It is important for teachers to be able to resolve problem situations, which may suggest that the quality of relationships between parents and teachers is better in a small center (Strickland, 1991).

There are also restraints to working in a small center. Small centers typically have smaller budgets, so financial compensation and rewards are more likely to be limited. Management problems may become an issue because the income from tuition is not adequate to support staff. In addition, one's career may be less secure due to the small size of the center. Small centers may also be fragile in other ways. For example, when a problem such as a divorce or death in the family occurs to a person working in a small center, the whole program may be affected; one's low morale may affect other workers (Strickland, 1991).

Large Centers

The number of large centers is increasing. Kraus (1980) believes that there are a variety of implications when an organization increases in size. Increased size increases the complexity of communication within the organization; it separates people at the same level from one another. Direct communication with supervisors may decrease or even disappear. A person's organizational fate is determined by people who are at an increasing distance from the person. Talacchi (1960) believes that in larger organizations, employees' attitudes and behaviors are also affected. There is increased potential for conflict which may lead to

lower levels of job satisfaction. Undesirable behavior such as absenteeism, turnover, and poor work performance may also occur (Talacchi, 1960).

Communication is vital in all centers, but in larger programs the complexity of the communication network may result in problems (Strickland, 1991). A director's loss of daily contact with staff may be jeopardized. The director must understand what people do in a program and how they feel about their work for the center to prosper. If the director is unapproachable, everyone may suffer (Zeece, 1992). Relations between coworkers may also be in jeopardy. The larger the number of employees, the greater chance there will be that some employees won't get along with everyone else (Strickland, 1991).

Although nonmaterial rewards associated with interpersonal relations may decrease, increased size doe not suggest a reduction in material rewards such as pay and benefits (Talacchi, 1960). A panel member surveyed by Child Care Information Exchange (Neugebauer, 1990) believes that larger centers generate money that can be put towa increased quality, better compensation, staff training, and more. Another panel member stated that larger centers can offer more services for children and their families. Large centers also have the advantage of being more resilient than small centers. When a staff person is having a personal problem, for example, it probably will not affect the overall quality of the program (Strickland, 1991).

Research on Center Size

In a study assessing the effect of center size on program quality, Prescott and Jones (as cited in Greenman, 1984) concluded that center size was a dependable predictor of program quality. In centers serving over sixty children, teachers appeared distant and less sensitive. In smaller centers, opportunities for pleasure, wonder, and delight were significantly higher. Reddy conducted a similar study in 1980 and found similar findings as cited in Greenman (1984). She found that centers caring for 60 to 99 children were of poorer quality, as indicated by on-task behavior and the length of time that children had to wait to move from one activity to another. However, centers caring for over 100 children were of better quality. The very large centers had smaller self-contained units which seemed to overcome the problem of size. Although large centers may have better trained teachers and less crowding, children have been observed to be less interested and enthusiastic in their involvement in the classroom (Greenman, 1984). Talacchi (1960) found a significant relationship between the size of the organization and the employees' level of job satisfaction. A negative relationship existed between level of satisfaction and size of the organization.

In their research, LaGrange and Read (1990) found few differences in center and staff quality based on center size. Size was not a key predictor of level of pay or working conditions. LaGrange and Read concluded that most center differences were attributed to program auspice. In her study of organizational climate, Jorde-Bloom (1987) failed to find

a significant relationship between the size of the organization and ten dimensions of organizational climate. However, she did find that team spirit, cooperation, and group cohesiveness were rated lower by staff who worked in larger centers. Another study (Jorde-Bloom, 1988b) that focused on job satisfaction and organizational commitment also failed to demonstrate a significant relationship with center size.

Summary

Recent studies have emphasized the importance of job satisfaction and organizational commitment for child care workers. These studies support the proposition that there is a correlation between quality for workers and quality for children. Although salaries, benefits, and working conditions are the issues at the center of the current child care crisis, researchers have begun to look beyond these factors.

The structure of the organization, program auspice, location, and size also appear to be possible predictors of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. While there is limited empirical evidence to support the contention that the size of a child care center is an accurate predictor of quality for both workers and children, studies suggest that size may indeed be a contributing factor. Research has shown that size does influence employee relations and communication, which in turn may contribute to higher levels of job satisfaction and commitment.

As the need for more child care continues to grow, the issue of quality must be examined from multiple perspectives. High quality programs cannot exist without high

quality staff. Therefore, efforts must continue to explore factors that may contribute to employees' level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in the workplace.

CHAPTER III

THE STUDY

Introduction

The child care staffing crisis has had a negative effect on the quality of care for young children. Although part of the problem may be attributed to the low pay child care workers receive, other workplace variables need to be examined to understand the complex set of factors that impact turnover. The purpose of this study was to find out if there is a relationship between program size and the level of job commitment and job satisfaction of child care workers. Three questions guided this research:

1. Is there a relationship between program size and an individual's level of organizational commitment?
2. Is there a relationship between program size and an individual's level of job satisfaction?
3. If workers could do it all over again, would they choose a career in early childhood education and why?

This study assessed workers' level of job commitment and job satisfaction and related those levels to two measures of center size, the program and the total number of employees working at the center.

Methodology

Sample

The participants in this study were 128 child care workers who work full-time in nonprofit child care centers in the metropolitan Chicago area. Five participants were

male (4%) and 123 were female (96%). Sixty-three of the participants (58%) had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Thirty-two of the participants (25%) were teacher's aides or assistants and 94 of the participants (75%) were classroom teachers or head teachers. Table 1 summarizes the data regarding the background characteristics of the sample.

Table 2 provides background information on the sample regarding their years of experience in the field and their years of experience in their current positions. The mean number of years of experience in the field for the participants was 6.38, ranging from 1 to 18 years. The mean number of years of experience in their current positions was 3.61, ranging from 1 to 15 years.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to collect data was a self-report questionnaire (see Appendix A). It included the job commitment subscale of the Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey (ECJSS) developed by Jorde-Bloom (1988b). Level of job commitment was assessed by respondents' answers to ten statements. The possible range of scores was 0 (low commitment) to 10 (high commitment). Level of job satisfaction was assessed by asking individuals to indicate how their current position resembled their ideal position in five areas: the possible range of scores was 1 (not like my ideal) to 5 (my ideal). The questionnaire also included a section that requested background information about the center's licensed capacity and the number of full-time and part-time staff employed.

Table 1

Background Characteristics of Sample,
Gender, Educational Level, and Role (N = 128)*

Background Variable	f	%
Gender		
male	5	4
female	123	96
Educational Level		
High School Diploma	5	4
Some college	25	20
Associate Degree	24	19
Bachelor's Degree	46	36
Some graduate work	19	15
Master's Degree	9	7
Role		
Aide/Assistant Teacher	32	25
Teacher/Head Teacher	94	75

* Actual count ranged from 126-128 dependng on missing data

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Table 2

Experience in the Field and
Experience in Current Position (N = 128)

Experience	M	S.D.	Range
Years Experience in the Field	6.38	4.09	1-18
Years Experience in Current Position	3.61	2.99	1-15

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher distributed the surveys at professional workshops and conferences between April, 1993 and February, 1994. The surveys were made available to child care workers at or near the registration area at the conferences. After completing the survey, each participant was asked to place it in a sealed envelope and put it in a designated collection box. For those respondents who desired to complete the survey at a later time, a self-addressed envelope was attached to each survey. In addition, the researcher also distributed surveys to staff at five child care centers in the Chicago area.

Date Analysis

Correlational statistics were used to determine the relationship between center size and level of worker's job commitment and job satisfaction. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data. Tables and graphs were used to report the results.

Findings and Interpretations

This section will first provide some background information on center size and program sponsorship. It will then summarize the data as it pertains to each of the research questions.

Table 3 looks at the background characteristics of centers from which the sample was drawn. The mean licensed capacity of centers was 122, ranging in size from 12 to 900 students. The mean number of staff employed at the centers (a second measure of size) was 27, ranging from 2 to 100 staff. The sponsorship of the nonprofit centers included in this study is summarized in Table 4.

Is There a Relationship Between Center Size and an Individual's Level of Organizational Commitment?

On a ten point scale, the average level of job commitment for this sample was 6.39. Table 5 provides an item analysis to the individual statements comprising the job commitment subscale. In examining this table, the researcher found that 103 of the participants (80%) take pride in their centers, and 83 of the participants (65%) feel very

Table 3

Background Characteristics of Centers

Characteristics	M	S.D.	Range
Licensed Capacity	121.76	99.60	12 - 900
Total Staff	26.80	17.90	2 - 100

Table 4

Nonprofit Sponsorship of Centers (N = 119)*

Nonprofit Status	f	%
Independent	56	47
Part of a larger agency	15	13
Church affiliated	12	10
Public school affiliated	2	1
hospital affiliated	13	11
park district	8	7
other	13	11

* 9 individuals did not indicate the sponsorship of their center

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Table 5

Item Analysis of Respondents' Level of Commitment (N = 128)

Item	f	%
I intend to work at my center at least two more years	63	49
I often think of quitting	15	12
I'm just putting in time	4	3
I take pride in my center	103	80
I feel very committed to my center	83	65
I put a lot of extra effort into my work	98	77
I don't really care what happens to my center after I leave	6	5
It would be difficult for me to find another job as good as this one	57	45
It's hard to feel committed to my center	7	5
I sometimes feel trapped in my job	24	19

committed to their centers. Ninety-eight of the participants (77%) put a lot of extra effort into their work. Only six of the participants (5%) don't really care what happens to their centers after they leave and only seven of the participants (5%) find it hard to feel committed to their centers.

A correlational analysis was conducted to determine the strength of the relationship between child care workers' job commitment and two different measures of center size. The correlation between total commitment and size as measured by licensed capacity of the center was r = .01. The correlation between total commitment and size as measured by total number of staff in the center was r = .13. The results of the correlational analysis indicate a very weak relationship between commitment and center size. The larger the size of the center does not appear to have an effect on workers' level of job commitment. Child care workers appear to be very committed to their program whether they work in large or small centers.

This supports previous research conducted by Jorde-Bloom (1988b) that focused on the relationship between job satisfaction and organizational commitment. That study also failed to demonstrate a significant relationship between these two variables.

Is There a Relationship Between Center Size and an Individual's Level of Job Satisfaction?

The respondents rated the five facets of job satisfaction on a five point scale. The two facets that received the highest scores were the relationship with co-workers (M = 3.50) and the nature of the work itself (M = 3.97). These findings indicate that the nature of the work

Table 6

Means, Standard Deviations, and Facets of
Job Satisfaction and Total Job Satisfaction (N = 128)

	M	S.D.
Job Satisfaction		
relationship with co-workers	3.81	1.09
relationship with supervisor	3.76	1.27
the work itself	3.98	.98
working conditions	3.73	1.17
pay and promotion opportunities	2.71	1.30
Total Job Satisfaction	18.36	4.31

itself has a great impact on one's level of job satisfaction. It appears that the work itself is tied to child care workers putting extra effort into their work and feeling committed to their center even though other variables may have an adverse effect. This supports the research of Jorde-Bloom (1986), LaGrange and Read (1990), and Modigliani (1985, 1986) that there are high levels of job satisfaction in the field of early childhood education despite workers' dissatisfaction with salaries, benefits and opportunities for promotion.

Although previous studies have noted that workers' relationships with their co-workers and supervisors can often have a negative impact on levels of job satisfaction in

large centers (Talacchi, 1960), this study did not support these findings. Several of the respondents in this study commented that working with children and parents were the most satisfying things about their jobs and that their work was very meaningful and socially significant.

The results of the correlational analysis indicated that two facets, working conditions and pay and promotion opportunities, appear to be positively related to the center size as measured by total staff employed. As well, workers' total level of job satisfaction appears to have a significant positive relationship with center size. The results of the correlational analysis are summarized in Table 7. These results should be interpreted with caution, however, because even though these correlations reached a level of statistical significance, the actual coefficients are low to moderate in strength. Moreover, the results should also not be interpreted as meaning that center size causes greater job satisfaction, but rather that there is only an association between these two variables.

The results of the data analysis contradicts Talacchi's (1960) assertion that small organizations provide greater opportunities for face-to-face interactions between staff and are thus more satisfying. The findings of this study also contradict Strickland's (1991) caution that the complexity of communication in larger programs results in problems that may affect job satisfaction. The results of these findings suggest that there is not a negative relationship between center size and job satisfaction.

Table 7

Results of the Correlational Analysis Between Two Measures of Center Size and Job Satisfaction (N = 128)

Facet	Licensed Capacity r	Total Staff r
Job Satisfaction		
satisfaction with co-workers	.04	.10
satisfaction with supervisor	.05	.09
the work itself	.17	.20
working conditions	.17	.33*
pay and promotion opportunities	.20	.26*
Total Job Satisfaction	.17	.27*

* $p < .01$

This research supports Strickland's findings, however, that small centers typically have smaller budgets so financial compensation and rewards are limited (1991). Strickland notes that one's career in a small center may not be as secure because small centers may not be as fiscally viable as larger centers. Although Talacchi (1960) believes that larger organizations have employees with lower levels of job satisfaction, he found that increased size does not necessarily mean a reduction in material rewards such as pay and benefits. Neugebauer (1990) agrees. He states that larger centers tend to generate more money that can be put toward better compensation and training. LaGrange and Read (1990) found that size, however, was not a key predictor of level of pay; a finding that contradicts the results of this study.

The results of this study support the conclusions of LaGrange and Read (1990) and Jorde-Bloom (1988b) that size does not have a significant relationship with program quality and job satisfaction. Although Jorde-Bloom found that team spirit, cooperation, and group cohesiveness were rated lower by staff that worked in larger centers, the present study found a positive correlation between relationships with co-workers and large centers.

If Workers Could do it All Over Again,

Would they Choose a Career in Early Childhood Education and Why?

When the respondents in this study were asked if they would select a career in early childhood education if they were to make a career decision again, fully 103 of the participants (88%) said they would. This supports Jorde-Bloom's research (1988b) where

83% of the respondents also said that they would choose a career in early childhood education again. These results are very encouraging for the profession, and the results also support what was found previously regarding job commitment.

Six of the participants answered both yes and no to this question. Low pay and lack of respect for early childhood professionals were the most frequent responses for participants who said they would not choose a career in early childhood education again. For those participants who stated they would choose a career in early childhood education again, their work with children, their co-workers, and parents were the most frequently cited responses.

This research suggests that the majority of child care workers are committed to the field of early childhood education and to their workplaces and that they have high levels of job satisfaction. Overall, it appears that the work itself is a key factor in job commitment and satisfaction. Working with children is both valued and enjoyed by child care workers. It appears that this factor overshadows the negative aspect of low pay and poor working conditions. As one of the respondents stated, "The rewards outnumber the drawbacks."

However, the issue of turnover cannot be ignored. If the majority of this sample seems to be committed to the profession and to their current positions, why does turnover continue to be so high? Many of the respondents appear to be committed and satisfied in their current positions. They are gratified and feel that their work is important. Further research is needed to assess if these feelings change as their personal needs change.

Although low pay is a troubling problem, it did not seem to have an adverse effect on job commitment for this sample. It would be informative to know if the respondents in this study were the sole earners in their households and how many dependents they had.

This study supports the notion that child care workers are emotionally satisfied with their work. The nature of the work itself seems to be a determining factor for sustaining high levels of job commitment. Even though many child care workers are highly satisfied with their work, society must not use this as an excuse to continue paying poor wages. The high turnover characteristic of early childhood clearly points out that the personal gratification of working with children is not enough keep people in the field. Satisfaction in relationships with co-workers and supervisors are important variables, but they may not be the deciding factors in decisions to stay in the field and to stay in the same workplace.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that there is a moderate relationship between center size as measured by total number of staff employed and the job satisfaction of child care workers. Further studies may want to investigate the impact of center size on teachers' relationships with young children. Perhaps future studies should also look at the total number of children per staff member as another indicator of size. Future research should also examine further the positive relationship found in this study between the total number of staff and pay and promotion opportunities of the center. Center size should also be looked at in relationship to program quality. Prescott and Jones (as cited by Greenman

1984), have suggested that size may be a dependable predictor of program quality.

Many child care workers believe that they do the most important work there is, which is caring for children. They know that children are the future of this country. We, as professionals in the field of early childhood education, must continue to advocate for ourselves and our children so that children can be involved in high quality programs with educated and consistent caregivers. Researching the factors that contribute to high turnover must continue to be a high priority for our profession.

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APPENDIX

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EARLY CHILDHOOD JOB COMMITMENT SURVEY

Dear Early Childhood Worker:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research on job commitment. This survey is designed to find out how you feel about your job within your particular organization. The questions included on the following pages provide you with an opportunity to express your feelings and opinions concerning various aspects of your work. The survey includes questions regarding co-worker and supervisor relations, general working conditions, and pay and promotion opportunities.

Please know that your answers to these questions are completely confidential. The success of this survey depends on your candid and honest responses. When you have completed the questionnaire, please place it in the attached plain envelope, seal it, and return it to the designated box.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

Mindi Schryer

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Background Information

Sex: _____ male _____ female Age: _____ years

What is the highest educational level you have completed:

_____ High school diploma
_____ Some college
_____ Associate Degree (AA)
_____ Bachelor's Degree (BA/BS)
_____ Some graduate work
_____ Master's Degree (MA/MS/M.Ed)
_____ Post Master's work
_____ Doctorate (Ed.D/Ph.D.)

How long have you worked in the field of early childhood? _____ years _____ months

How long have you worked for your present employer? _____ years _____ months

Check the job title that most nearly describes your role in your organization. If you have a dual role, what position do you spend more time doing?

_____ teacher's aide
_____ assistant teacher
_____ classroom teacher
_____ head teacher

What is the licensed capacity for children in your center? _____

How many staff work in your center? _____

Please check the category that best describes the nonprofit status of your center:

_____ independent nonprofit
_____ part of a larger nonprofit agency (e.g., YWCA, Hull House)
_____ church affiliated
_____ public school affiliated
_____ Head Start
_____ hospital affiliated
_____ park district
_____ other: _____

What are the hours your center is open? _____ a.m. to _____ p.m.

How many hours per week do you work? _____ hours

Job Commitment

Check all that describe how you feel about your child care center:

_____ I intend to work at my center at least two more years
_____ I often think of quitting
_____ I'm just putting in time
_____ I take pride in my center
_____ I feel very committed to my center
_____ I put a lot of extra effort into my work
_____ I don't really care what happens to my center after I leave
_____ It would be difficult for me to find another job as good as the one I have
_____ It's hard to feel committed to my center
_____ I sometimes feel trapped in my job

If you could design your ideal job, how close would your present position resemble your ideal job with respect to the following:

	not like my ideal		*somewhat resembles my ideal*		*is my ideal*
	1	2	3	4	5
relationship with co-workers	____	____	____	____	____
relationship with supervisor	____	____	____	____	____
the work itself	____	____	____	____	____
working conditions	____	____	____	____	____
pay and promotion opportunities	____	____	____	____	____

What are the two most satisfying things about your present job?

_____

_____

What are the two most frustrating things about your present job?

_____

_____

If you could do it all over again would you choose a career in early childhood education?
_____yes _____no
Why?_____

I want to thank you for your time and cooperation in completing this survey. If there are any additional comments, please feel free to add them below.

This survey has been adapted from the
Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey
developed by Paula Jorde Bloom, 1988.
Survey used with permission.

Return your completed survey to:

Mindi Schryer
6757 N. Drake
Lincolnwood, Illinois 60645

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