Early Care and Education Research Scholars: Child Care Dissertation Grants 2021

Saima Hasnin

Project Title: Can Family Child Care Home Providers' Preparation and Serving Practices Influence Children's Vegetable Consumption?
Mentor: Dr. Dipti A. Dev
Project Funding Years: 2021-2023
University Affiliation: University of Nebraska–Lincoln
Project Abstract:

Early childhood obesity is a major public health problem in the United States, afflicting children from low-income and minority families in rural communities disproportionately with an increased risk for long-term health disparities. Therefore, improving children's dietary intake—a modifiable risk factor for childhood obesity—has been a major focus of national policies, such as USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). Yet, among food groups, children's vegetable consumption has been consistently lower than the recommendation. Specifically, although CACFP has been successful in increasing availability of vegetables to the children at child care, >80% of children are not meeting recommendations. Additionally, 44%–63% of served vegetables at child care become plate waste, which indicates that CACFP policy implementation and reimbursement have been successful to improve the availability of vegetables but not children's consumption of vegetables. Child care providers have reported concerns that children do not like the taste of vegetables. Preparation of vegetables is an effective method to improve taste acceptance for vegetables. As family child care home (FCCH) providers have direct control over meal preparation, they may offer a promising but untapped opportunity to improve children's vegetable consumption. Additionally, FCCH providers are more likely than center providers to report children's taste acceptance and vegetable accessibility as barriers. Lastly, although CACFP provides nutritious yet appealing recipes for preparing vegetable, to our knowledge, no research has investigated providers' vegetable preparation and serving practices. The goal of this proposed study is to understand FCCH providers' preparation and serving practices of vegetables and their influence on children's vegetable consumption, while also assessing an effective and convenient method to measure children's vegetable consumption at FCCHs. Specifically, this research is guided by the following aims: Aim 1. Determine facilitators and barriers of FCCH providers' adherence to best practices for serving vegetables to children in FCCH. Aim 2a. Identify FCCH providers' vegetable preparation practices and determine their relationship with children's vegetable consumption. Aim 2b. Explore FCCH providers' theory-based constructs regarding using a variety of vegetable preparation and serving practices for children. Aim 3. Determine relationship between Veggie Meter® reading in 3 to 5 years old children and children's vegetable consumption in FCCH. Study participants will include 32 CACFP participating FCCH providers and 64 children (3 to 5 years old) in these FCCH settings, recruited from rural communities in Nebraska. Data collection methods in the current study will involve quantitative surveys, child level-data collection for vegetable consumption and skin carotenoid readings, and qualitative interviews of FCCH providers.

The proposed study will further the science for improving children's vegetable consumption in child care—a target niche for federal early childhood obesity prevention policy. Moreover, the study focuses on low-income children and FCCH providers, who are in greater need of research and policy emphases, because of their vulnerability toward higher food insecurity and obesity. Finally, the study findings will lead to development of an online lesson module to address FCCH providers' barriers (e.g., cost, time, and lack of availability) and facilitators mentioned during the qualitative interviews for preparing and serving vegetables.

Erin Tebben

Project Title: Interrogating Anti-Blackness in Early Childhood Expulsions: A Mixed Methods Investigation of Expulsion Prevention Referrals
Mentor: Dr. Susan Yoon
Project Funding Years: 2021-2022
University Affiliation: Ohio State University
Project Abstract:

Early childhood expulsions limit children's access to high quality early care and education (ECE) experiences and disproportionately impact Black children compared to White children, further reducing their already limited access. While there have been a number of calls at the federal, state, and local levels to reduce early childhood expulsions and racial disparities in expulsion rates, the process by which expulsions occur and the contributing structural and individual characteristics are still poorly understood. In order to reduce the prevalence of early childhood expulsions, we must first understand how exactly these decisions are being made and the factors that influence them. Further, in order to reduce the racial disproportionality in expulsion rates, we must understand the process of decision-making and influential factors for Black children in particular. The expected outcome of this research is information that policymakers and program administrators in Ohio can use to make decisions that will effectively reduce the incidence of early childhood expulsions for all children *and* to eliminate racial disparities in expulsion rates for Black children specifically.

To reach this outcome, I am proposing a three-phase mixed methods study using and linking secondary data between the following data sources: 1. Referrals to a statewide expulsion prevention program—the Ohio Preschool Expulsion Prevention Partnership (OPEPP); 2. Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Licensing Database; 3. American Community Survey. First, I will use the linked ODJFS—OPEPP—ACS data to identify the program and community characteristics that predict referrals to the OPEPP program. Second, I will use the qualitative data contained within OPEPP referrals to deeply examine the ways in which referral sources describe the children at risk for expulsions and their behaviors, with a particular focus on differences (if any) in descriptions associated with Black and non-Black children. Third, I will transform a subset of the qualitative data into quantitative variables and use these along with variables associated with child and program factors in an analysis of the differential effectiveness of expulsion prevention efforts by race. Finally, I will integrate the results of the three phases into a cohesive structure that advances our understanding of how race is influential in the process of early childhood expulsions. All of the proposed work will be carried out in collaboration with the coordinator of the OPEPP program, state-level CCDF agency administrators, and with the support of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (funder of the OPEPP initiative) to ensure the proposed work is relevant to their needs. The specific aims of the study are to: (1) identify the characteristics of programs and communities where children are likely to be referred to a statewide expulsion prevention program; (2) identify the ways in which referral sources describe children at risk for expulsion and their behaviors; (3) examine the intersection of anti-Blackness and the risk of completed expulsions for children referred for OPEPP support.

Impact: By deeply exploring the structural, programmatic, and individual factors associated with referrals to an expulsion prevention program and the ultimate success of the OPEPP program at preventing expulsions, this project has the potential to inform future expulsion prevention efforts both in Ohio and nationwide, effectively *increasing access to high quality early care and education for this population of childre*n.