

We're teachers. We're psychologists. We're sociologists. We're nutritionists. We're dieticians. The role of early care and education settings in addressing food insecurity

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Overview

- Rationale
- Purpose
- Methods
- Results
- Key Findings

About Us



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- Website:
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- Founded in 1973, the Center is a national nonprofit research institute, based in Omaha, providing expertise in public health nutrition. The Center's primary focus is measurement and evaluation across the content areas of healthy eating/active living, food insecurity, health equity, and policy advocacy.



Rationale

- Over 2 million households with children ages zero to five in the United States (US) experience food insecurity
- Early care and education (ECE) programs are an opportune setting to address food insecurity
- The main federal food assistance program in ECE settings is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)
- Beyond CACFP participation, little is known about other efforts employed by ECE directors and teachers, to address food insecurity in their environment



Purpose

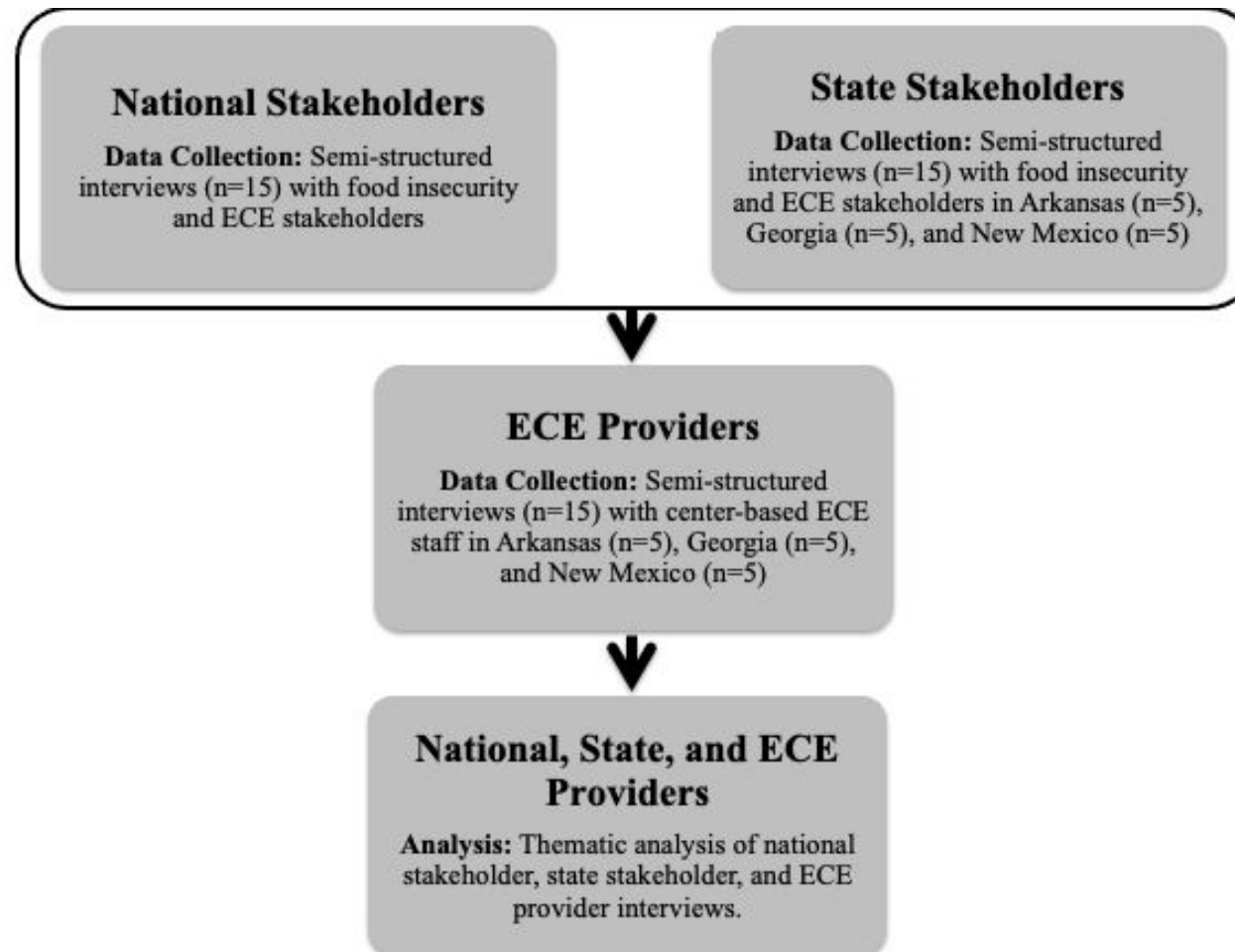
- To explore efforts to address food insecurity in low-income center-based ECE programs
- To explore the extent to which food insecurity is considered a priority issue in by ECE providers, state, and national organizations
- To explore ongoing efforts and recommendations for promoting food security in ECE settings



Methods: Overview

- Three geographical areas selected
 - Arkansas
 - New Mexico
 - Georgia
- Three subsets of participants
 - National stakeholders
 - State stakeholders
 - Center-based ECE staff
- Timeframe: 2/2020 to 2/2021

Methods: Study Design





Methods: Data Collection

- National and state stakeholders
 - Semi-structured interviews
- Center-based ECEs
 - Provider recruitment survey
 - Semi-structured interviews



Methods: Data Analysis

- Codebook developed using a Grounded Theory Approach
- Two independent coders
- Codes were conceptually grouped into emergent themes through frequency of coding



Results: Overview

- Five emergent themes:
 - Prevalence of food insecurity in ECE centers
 - Extent to which food insecurity is considered a priority in ECE centers
 - Role of ECE centers in addressing food insecurity
 - Role of providers in addressing food insecurity in ECE centers, and strategies to address food insecurity in ECE centers.



Results: Prevalence of Food Insecurity in ECE Centers

- Food insecurity and hunger is prevalent among the families and has increased due to COVID
- Cited behaviors
 - Children being extra hungry on Monday mornings
 - Telling staff they did not eat at home
 - Sneaking food to take home
 - Rummaging through trash cans
 - Asking for additional helpings
 - Acting fussy until fed



Results: Extent to Which Food Insecurity is Considered a Priority in ECE centers

- Level of priority for addressing food insecurity in ECE settings resembled a pyramid, with providers expressing the highest priority and engagement
- Limited organizational capacity among national stakeholders to address another issue
- Efforts by state stakeholders were in fruition
- Opportunity to pair with obesity prevention efforts (e.g., Go NAP SACC)

Results: Role of ECE Centers in Addressing Food Insecurity

- ECE settings are a community hub and parents trust teaches
- Head Start programs are well positioned due to wrap-around services
- A gap exists in addressing food insecurity in ECE as compared to K-12 settings

“The connections and the relationships that are built with the people who are providing childcare - it’s just astounding to me. Families and how intimately involved they are in those relationships and the dynamics of the family. To me, there’s no better place for that to happen.”

Results: Role of Providers in Addressing Food Insecurity in ECE Centers

- Providers valued approaching food insecurity holistically in supporting overall child well-being (e.g., supporting the family unit)
- Providers perceive it as an integral part of their job

“I mean we wear so many hats... Children are coming in and saying the boyfriend hit my mom or we had to sleep in the car last night.

Or I haven't eaten all weekend because my mom didn't have any money for food. Education has taken a back seat to the basic needs of the child's life. And this childcare center is like a haven for them.”



Results: Strategies to Address Food Insecurity in ECE Centers

- Relationship Building Between Providers and Families
- Provision of Resources to Families
- Provision of Additional Food to Children During and Outside of Mealtimes
- Farm to ECE
- On-Site Food Pantries
- Backpack Programs
- Participation in CACFP



Results: Strategies to Address Food Insecurity in ECE Centers

- **Relationship Building Between Providers and Families**
 - Providers have established relationships
 - Providers can related having been there, especially when pride gets in the way
- **Provision of resources**
 - Occurred on a continuum with regards to level of engagement of providers



Results: Strategies to Address Food Insecurity in ECE Centers

- **Provision of Additional Food to Children During and Outside of Mealtimes**
 - If a child expresses hunger, they do not want to deny food
 - Keep extra food on hand, often at the provider's expense
- **Farm to ECE**
 - Highly adaptable
 - Recommendation to partner with school districts



Results: Strategies to Address Food Insecurity in ECE Centers

- **On-Site Food Pantries**
 - ECEs are a strategic settings
 - Drawbacks of food pantry models
- **Backpack Programs**
 - May have less stigma than in K-12
 - Cited barriers: heavy backpacks and types of food sent home
 - Need more funding opportunities for the zero to five age group



Results: Strategies to Address Food Insecurity in ECE Centers

- Participation in CACFP
 - Child receives a meal whether or not ECE program is reimbursed
 - Helps ECEs serve more nutritious food



Key Findings

- Prioritize strategies that incorporate healthy food when feasible to address both food insecurity and nutritional adequacy
- Many ECE staff are food insecure and staff need support
- Partnerships with K-12 settings may increase bandwidth and sustainability of some food insecurity efforts

Questions

