



Early Childhood Educators Role in Early Identification and Intervention for Neurodevelopmental Disabilities

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Introduction

- Early intervention and support for children with Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (NDDs)- and thus early identification, are associated with improved outcomes and developmental trajectories (Cioni et al., 2016; Hadders-Algra, 2021).
- Early childhood (EC) education settings serve as vital developmental contexts and are many children's introduction to being in a group, following routines and interacting with peers during the sensitive birth to five window (Negussie et al., 2019).
- These settings can provide opportunities to identify children with or at risk for developing NDDs, connect families to resources and align support (Dereau et al., 2012).
- Unfortunately there is variability in resources available to providers and provider knowledge of NDDs, eligibility, services and comfort levels with screening, expressing concern to caregivers and providing support (Kiing et al., 2019; Mohammed et al., 2020).

Objectives

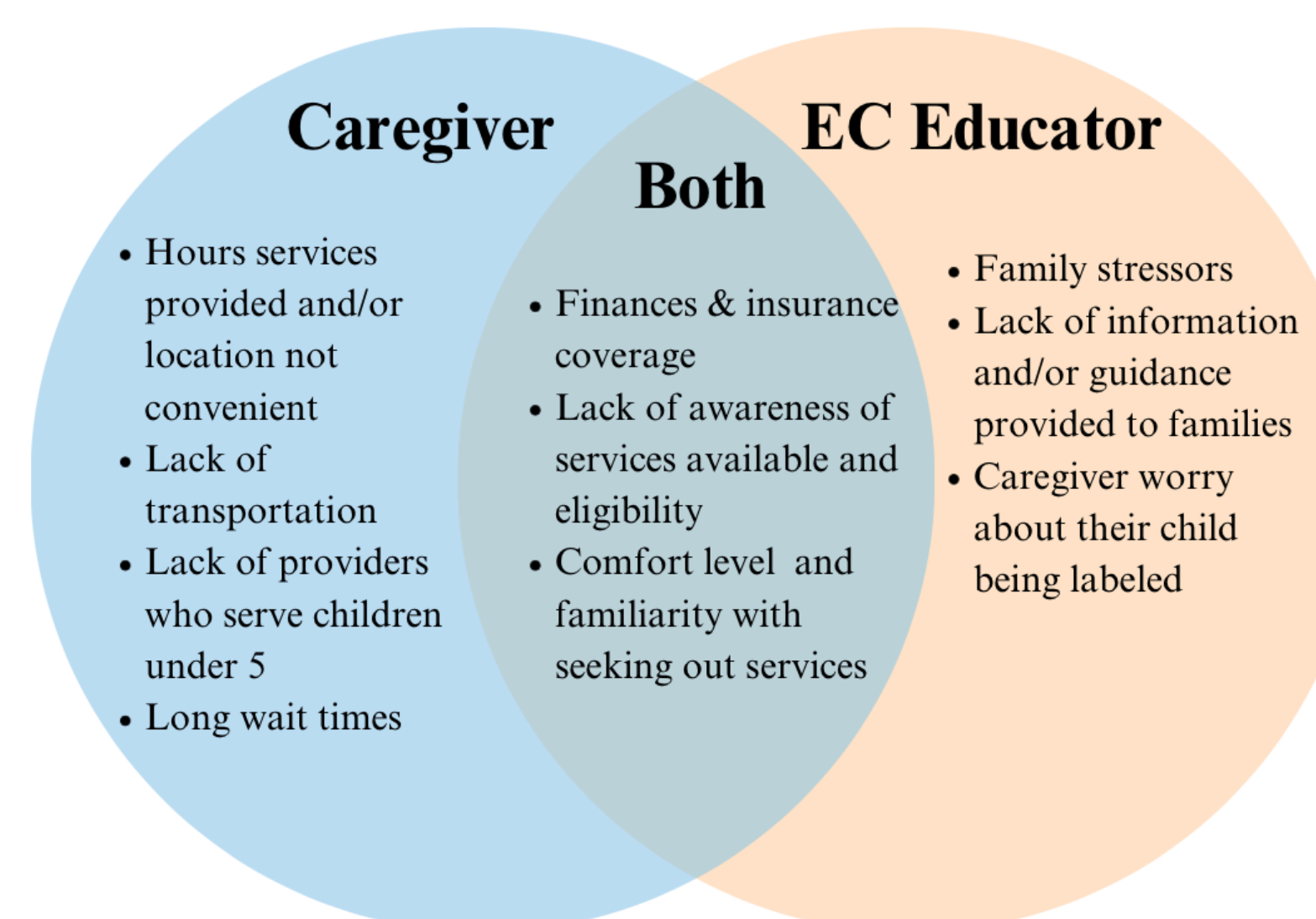
- To better understand the role of EC educators in early identification of and support for children with NDDs
- To better understand educator and caregiver perceptions of barriers to accessing services in their community and how to address these barriers
- To apply findings to create a resource for educators and families who are concerned about a child's development

Methods

- Online surveys completed spring 2022 in Lynchburg, VA and surrounding communities
 - 59 families with a child 0-5 & 119 EC educators (public, private, Head Start programs)
 - Subset of each sample interviewed
- Descriptive analyses completed for survey items
- Transcripts and open-ended survey items coded inductively using a consensus coding process

Results

- 53% of EC educators had referred a child for evaluation or intervention and 60% had connected families to resources
- Their comfort level with screening, expressing concerns, providing information, connecting families to services and aligning classroom support varied and program type mattered
- Increasing awareness, training, access to MH and behavior support professionals, coordinating/communication across systems and integrating services into programs were suggested to remove barriers to service access (see figure below for reported barriers).



Note. Similarities and differences in caregiver and early childhood educator perceptions of the top five barriers to service access for children 0-5. Services are defined as assessment, evaluation and intervention (e.g., therapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy, applied behavior analysis) through birth to three, school system or private providers.

Conclusions

- EC educators spend extended time with the children in their care, build relationships with families and have knowledge of child development (Negussie et al., 2019).
- They report playing an active role in early identification and support for children with NDDs
- However, many providers, especially those from private programs, want additional training and resources
- Increasing awareness and providing information regarding child development, NDDs, eligibility and services to both families and educators is essential (see quotes from families and educators below).

"I would make services more accessible to families and offer tips and instruction to those parents who need assistance. There are too many hoops to jump through."

"I think if I had known, in the preschool, maybe, if maybe there was something a little flyer or a postcard-something, 'if you have concerns about your child' that came home to everyone, not just kids that the teachers might think...if the parents are concerned, they can seek out that help."

"Information- both digital or in-person is vital."

Scan QR code below for handout:



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