Teachers' Perceptions of Childcare and Preschool Expulsion

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Previous research outlines the correlates of childcare expulsion in the USA, yet researchers know little about how these correlates produce expulsion. This in-depth qualitative analysis of 30 childcare providers' accounts of expulsion finds a patterned process to expulsion: Teachers search for causes and solutions to challenging behaviours. When interventions fail, overwhelmed teachers shift their focus from 'struggling' children to 'bad families'. Once the explanation of behaviour changes from within to outside of the child, expulsion is imminent. Interventions in teachers' understandings, not only in children's behaviours, are discussed as a possible way to reduce expulsion. © 2017 John Wiley & Sons Ltd and National Children's Bureau

Introduction

The growing recognition that early childhood represents a critical moment in development has led to an increased focus on the role that early educational experiences play in shaping children's trajectories. High-quality early childhood care and education promote school readiness and enhance socio-emotional development (Bowman and others, 2001; Campbell and others, 2001; Campbell and others, 2002). Thus, expanding access to high-quality early education has been an important public policy initiative in the United States (USA). However, high rates of preschool expulsion in the USA challenge this goal, placing children at risk for continued educational difficulties in primary and secondary school and potentially disrupting their socio-emotional and cognitive development (American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health, 2003).

While we know much about K-12 expulsion (American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on School Health, 2003; American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008; Arcia, 2007; Bowditch, 1993; Losen and Martinez, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2014; Wallace and others, 2008), knowledge of childcare and preschool expulsion is less developed with a handful of studies describing the general parameters of preschool expulsion. In the largest study of state-funded pre-K programmes of three- and four-year olds, Gilliam found that 6.7 preschoolers were expelled per 1000, a rate three times higher than K-12 expulsion (Gilliam, 2005). Additionally, 27.4 children per 1000 were expelled from childcare in Massachusetts as compared with 0.1–0.3 kindergarteners per 1000 (Gilliam and Shahar, 2006). These rates only include children permanently removed because of challenging behaviour and not children removed due to special education needs.

Some children are expelled more than others. Perry and others (2010) in an analysis of the case files of children expelled from preschool found children with 'mental or developmental health needs or challenges' and 'complicated family situations' as at risk for expulsion. Demographic characteristics are also highly correlated with expulsion. Gilliam (2005) found 'older' children (five versus three) were more likely to be expelled. Boys were expelled

4.5 times more than girls, and African-American children were twice as likely as Latinos and Whites to be expelled and five times more likely than Asian-American children (Gilliam, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education (2014) reported that while Black children represent 18 per cent of public school preschoolers, they represent 42 per cent of preschool children who were expelled. This racial disproportionality and implicit bias in disciplinary practices are consistently found in K-12 education (Skiba and others, 2002). Implicit bias may be part of the mechanism in preschool as well. In an experimental study, preschool teachers primed to expect challenging behaviours focused their attention on African-American boys when assessing children in a mixed race and sex group (Gilliam and others, 2016).

Research says little about the actual behaviours of children that lead to expulsion. Many young children exhibit behaviour problems (Campbell, 1995; Campbell and others, 2000). For many children, these behaviours are developmentally appropriate, not indications of social, emotional or intellectual issues. Developmental psychologists suggest half of pre-school children with aggression and impulsivity problems no longer have them at school entry indicating a normative decline in these behaviours with development (Campbell and others, 2000; Choe and others, 2013). Despite this, we know little about when challenging behaviours are viewed as typical and when they put children at risk for expulsion.

Characteristics of preschools and teachers are also correlated with preschool expulsion. Gilliam found that public and Head Start preschool programmes expelled less often than for-profit childcare and faith-based childcare (Gilliam, 2005). Within programmes, higher proportions of younger children in classes with older children (more three-year olds with four-year olds) and larger group sizes were positively related to expulsion (Gilliam and Shahar, 2006). Perry, Holland, Darling-Kuria, and Nadiv (2011) also identified larger child–teacher ratios and an unstructured, physical environment conducive to noise and 'chaos' as increasing expulsion.

Early childhood education and care in the USA is low paid work, poorly regulated and its workforce varies tremendously in education and skill. Characteristics of teachers' and their jobs are associated with expulsion. While teachers' level of training does not to predict expulsion, teachers' higher job stress and lower job satisfaction are significantly correlated with expulsion (Gilliam and Shahar, 2006). Still, the direction of causality in the role of job stress and satisfaction is unclear. However, teachers with access to mental health consultation support were less likely to expel children (Gilliam, 2005).

Thus, the extant research offers the basic correlates of childcare expulsion, yet we still know little about *how* expulsions happen in early childhood education. In particular, accounts that examine the on-the-ground experience of these processes are needed. This study analyses in-depth interviews with childcare providers to identify how expulsions occur. Our analysis finds that childcare expulsion is not a single, one-time event but a patterned, overtime process shaped by adult practices.

Methods

The data for this study come from in-depth interviews with 30 childcare providers in one state that is routinely rated in the middle of the 50 USA states on childcare quality (Child Care Aware, 2016). Teachers' accounts from qualitative interviews about everyday processes can shed light on how the correlates identified by quantitative data work on-the-ground and thus suggest possible interventions. A long tradition of sociological work uses such interviews to examine how 'informal practices — are effectively negotiated' (Brodkin, 2012). In-depth interviews in which teachers are able to reflect on their world-view through their common practices and actions represent an effective strategy for understanding the relationship between what teachers think and what teachers do (Charmaz, 2006).

We recruited participants who had 'asked a child to leave in the past three years' through listserv postings, conferences and professional contacts with preschool teachers and social workers. We had a low response rate from those outside our professional contacts, likely because of the stigmatisation surrounding expulsion. Our professional contacts introduced us to teachers whom they thought had asked a child to leave. The research team then followed up via email and phone and invited their participation. All but three of those whom we contacted and who met the study criteria ultimately participated. We neared saturation around the 25th interview but decided to continue until our goal of 30 interviews.

The centres where interviewees worked varied along several (not mutually exclusive) dimensions. None worked in public school or HeadStart programmes; three were faith-based, and nine were NAEYC accredited. Eight worked in centres where the children were not predominantly White (three centres were predominantly non-White). About a third of the study participants worked in centres that primarily served at-risk children and/or low-income families.

Childcare providers ranged in age from 24 to 64 (M = 44). All but one were women. Twenty-three were White. They had an average of 16.8 years of experience in childcare and had worked at their current job for six years. Eighteen had a college degree.

The children who were expelled ranged in age from 2 to 5. Three-quarters were boys. We do not have complete data on the race/ethnicity of those expelled because participants' believed sharing this information would risk revealing a child's identity.

We designed and conducted in-depth interviews as a team using previous research about qualitative interviewing and our collective experience with teachers, preschools and child welfare workers. The period of no longer than three years since the expulsion was selected to ensure that teachers were able to recall events during the interview. After rapport building, following a framework devised by Weiss (1995), we asked each teacher to walk us through their most recent expulsion. Teachers recounted how the child arrived in their care and how they came to ask the child to leave. We asked follow-up questions throughout interviews. Two-thirds of the interviewees recounted two or more expulsion stories at length. We also asked interviewees to describe a child with similar challenges who was *not* asked to leave. A comparison of narratives of expulsion and non-expulsion allowed us to identify how specific factors facilitated eventual expulsion. Interviews were conducted at the centres in a quiet room and lasted 45 min to 2 h. They were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a transcriptionist.

Data analysis proceeded using a rigorous content analysis strategy (Krippendorff, 2004). Transcripts were coded using an open-coding strategy (Emerson and others, 1995). Ahuvia (2001) argued that interpretive content analysis is strongest as a collaborative process among multiple researchers with theoretical sensitivity to the topic. Thus, after the first author's initial open-coding, the entire research team refined the codes through memoing and discussion to arrive at the final set of themes. This consensus building led to the identification of the core themes for analysis. The first author then produced integrative memos that built the core themes into a preliminary analysis connecting the themes with each other (Emerson and others, 1995). She then discussed and revised these with the group and transformed them into the larger pattern of results presented below. All names are pseudonyms.

Results: the path to expulsion

Data analysis revealed patterned regularities in the path to expulsion where providers move from seeing a child as 'struggling' to seeing a family as 'bad' and then expelling the child. Below we examine the process outlined in Figure 1 in detail.
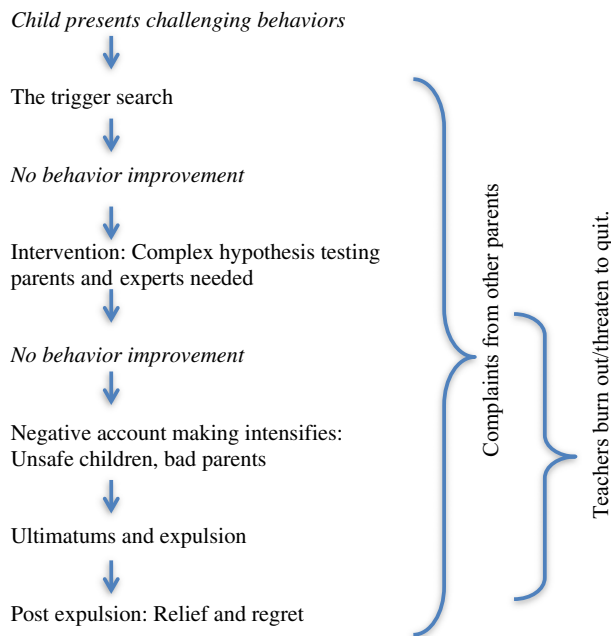
Child presents challenging behaviors

↓

The trigger search

↓

No behavior improvement

↓

Intervention: Complex hypothesis testing
parents and experts needed

↓

No behavior improvement

↓

Negative account making intensifies:
Unsafe children, bad parents

↓

Ultimatums and expulsion

↓

Post expulsion: Relief and regret

Complaints from other parents

Teachers burn out/threaten to quit.

Figure 1. Teachers' understanding of the process of childcare expulsion.

Challenging behaviour and the search for triggers

Teachers in early childhood settings reported managing a lot of challenging behaviours with children (expelled or not) exhibiting difficult behaviours, especially biting, hitting, scratching, throwing things, tantrums, screaming, running away from adults and not listening. Teachers said their job was to 'deal with it', and 'we expect a certain percentage of that to happen here, it's par for the course'. Thus, providers were prepared with 'tools' (e.g. timeouts, using words, distraction, guidance) for managing behaviours.

   Sometimes providers found these tools did not work. In such cases, they tried to identify the cause of the challenging behaviour or 'what makes this kid tick?' Was the child having difficulty with transitions? Did he need to bite when he was hungry? Asking these questions revealed what teachers called a 'trigger'. Hunger triggered biting. Poor fine motor control triggered frustration with zipping a coat. Teachers who were able to identify triggers and to intervene were often able to correct the behaviour and take the child off the path to expulsion.

   In contrast, the triggers of challenging behaviours for children who were headed towards expulsion were difficult to identify. Providers began with hypotheses about what the trigger was. For example, 'Transitions cause the tantrums'. Then, they tried interventions such as preparing the child for a transition or personalised guidance through the transition. For children on the path to expulsion, the interventions did not work: tantrums continued. Failed interventions often led to more teacher observation. Through a variety of methods (formal or informal, paper charts or video), teachers worked to find patterns underlying a child's difficult behaviour. They then constructed new hypotheses and tested them. For children on the road to expulsion, these hypotheses were not accurate either.

   Herein lies the first step on the path to expulsion. One of the first hurdles that children who are expelled from childcare cannot clear is that their caregivers cannot determine the cause of their difficult behaviour and therefore cannot intervene. Importantly, these children

made their providers feel inadequate and incapable. Amanda's story about Joey (age 2) who 'had a tendency to hurt the other children, just kind of *randomly*' exemplifies this process:

> By Christmas it was very hard...and *there didn't seem to be a rhyme or reason to [his hurting other children]*, and then I would come and confer with [my director]. "What do we do, what's the next step? These are the things that we've been trying to do working one-on-one with him. Trying to make a chart of things — when is this happening, what time of the day is this?" And it was just *pretty random, there didn't seem to be a rhyme or reason to it.*

When providers were frustrated at not being able to determine a child's triggers, they then turned to parents and outside experts for help and assistance.

Bringing in parents: 'it's usually not the kids that are difficult; it's the parents'

Most teachers regularly reported to parents about their children's days. However, the specificity with which providers reported difficult behaviour varied tremendously. Teachers, uneasy about parents' reactions to difficult news about their children, often spoke in code in initial conversations. They sometimes told parents their child had 'a rough day', but not the extent of the difficult behaviour nor the extent of their frustration. Yet, implicit in these exchanges was an expectation that the parent would express concern or follow-up. Eventually, parents were brought in for more conversation:

> We would have daily verbal communication, of course, with the family...Toward the end we had weekly meetings with them; formal meetings where we would sit down and talk about what was happening in the classroom, what his behaviors were and how it was impacting everything else.

Teachers used these conversations to share information with parents 'about what we are seeing', to gather information about what might be happening in the child's family life, and to ask whether the parent 'was seeing the behavior at home'.

Whether this meeting was a step towards or away from expulsion depended on the parents' response. The more providers perceived the parents to be collaborative, the better the chance that expulsion would be prevented. For example, Laura described collaboration with Michael's parents as essential to him staying in preschool. Michael's behaviour had been challenging, and he had run away from the group during a field trip. After intense observation the teachers decided that Michael's fine motor skills were delayed.

> But we talked about some of the behavior issues that we're seeing and what that meant to us. Together we came up with a plan. [Describes a 7 day a week behavior chart.] And that meeting was two weeks ago and... if everyone's on the same page on you know it. I saw significant drastic improvement two days later in his behavior. [...]And again, not to bemoan the point but when all the adults are on the same page then expulsion is never something that's even considered.

Providers did not describe the parents of children who were expelled as Laura described Michael's. Parents of expelled children were constructed as 'uncooperative', 'dismissive', 'don't really want to take the time to talk', 'in a hurry, I'm a drop my kid and go', 'in denial', 'very distant', 'angry', 'don't say no to the child', 'not on the same page', 'overwhelmed', 'resistant and says "the way I rear my child is ok, deal with it!"' or 'aren't pulling their weight'. Teachers depicted them as not believing teachers' descriptions of the problems, nor agreeing to use their recommended interventions. For example, Susan said:

> Mom, though, was very on the defense about it. It was almost like she didn't want us to help him. And we were in contact with the therapist a lot, and she was almost angry that we were in contact with the therapist, like why...you know, like we're all in it together against him. [...]She just didn't like us.

Shortly after these comments, Susan contrasted this child with another child with similar behaviours: '[The] parents are so on board. Mom is so in tune to what's going on that you know she's helping us as well'. When children had parents who teachers perceived as cooperative, they got off the path to expulsion, even when their behaviours remained challenging. Parents perceived as *uncooperative* accelerated a child's pace towards expulsion.

Expert evaluations: 'I don't have any degrees…but you just know'

Teachers sought a variety of evaluations of children from social workers, paediatricians, therapists and the public special education service programmes. Outside evaluations functioned either as another step towards expulsion or as a mechanism to interrupt it. Teachers most frequently recommended speech and hearing evaluations. Parents most readily agreed to these evaluations. However, parents, teachers said, were more likely to resist more comprehensive evaluations. Teachers described parents as 'not wanting to label' their child or 'in denial' about the seriousness of their child's difficulties.

> I don't have degrees and I don't have like all the fancy language, but you just know when something's not right…And unfortunately a lot of our parents tend not to agree with us so that makes it that much harder… It's like, yeah they are autistic. (Laughter) You know, they are definitely autistic. Not severely, but they are. [Parents say,] "Nope they're fine." Or just, their behavior is so out of control. They just don't want to hear it. They don't see it. They don't want to hear it because that's their perfect little baby.

The referral of children to evaluative services was part of the search for a cause and intervention into the child's difficult behaviour. Outside support and evaluation could confirm or reject hypotheses about hearing problems, medical problems or suspected mental health problems.

There is only one case in the data of an outside evaluation reporting no problems. In this case, the provider accepted this assessment and changed her strategy in working with the child. Two providers found relief in diagnoses that removed the child from the class into a programme that provided special services. Six teachers found support in discussing the challenging child with an outside evaluator and learning new strategies.

However, some evaluations came back with complex practices for teachers to employ *within the care setting*. These evaluations could facilitate expulsions. While teachers initially welcomed specific interventions, they often found intensive interventions difficult to implement given their strapped time and care of multiple children.

> We did try a sticker chart for a little while that was recommended by the [evaluation]…That didn't work, partly because they wanted us to do… it was basically 70 stickers throughout the day, which is not reasonable at all […] and we're like; well we can try and do one sticker for each point, but three stickers or so every 15 min is not feasible! He's not the only child in this classroom.

Finally, teachers experienced outside evaluations that offered support for providers as much as for children as the most effective. Child mental health consultants gave providers, like Joyce, more tools and support:

> [The child mental health consultant] would come in and advise me and watch what was going on and see what he was acting like, and then advise me on what to do… She would just advise me on how to maybe help him interact with different projects or things like that. I mean she even told me once [use] hand lotion to calm him down, you know put some on.

When outside evaluations supported teachers and gave them concrete tools for addressing challenging behaviours in the classroom that were not too onerous, teachers described positive results.

Negative account making intensifies: unsafe children and bad parents

When a child's challenging behaviour persisted despite interventions, teachers became increasingly frustrated and exhausted. Camila, a centre director, said 'it was sad' because these cases made good teachers feel bad. 'She's like I feel bad that I've neglected the kids all school year teaching them the letters, numbers, names, things like that because we had to focus all our energy on that one child.... She feels like she dropped the ball with the other kids'. Similarly, Amanda said her work with Joey shook her confidence: 'I really questioned if I needed to stay in this profession or if I enjoy coming to work every day. It really took a toll on me'.

Caregivers' exhaustion pushed children further down the path of expulsion. Frustrated teachers complained to directors, were absent from work, and threatened to leave. At this point, the description of the problem changed. The same behaviour was no longer just challenging but 'unsafe' and 'dangerous'.

> And when you're starting to leave marks on the teacher and other children and you're, cutting people's heads open because you've thrown another toy at their head; you know, that type of stuff, that process needs to happen very quickly because it's the safety of the classroom over all is a big concern.

Children's behaviour towards the end of the expulsion narratives was increasingly defined as dangerous, especially to other children. Furthermore, as teachers clashed with parents over what was to be done, teachers' accounts suggested that they began to see the problem not residing in the child but in the 'home environment'. Teachers began to construct narratives about bad parenting and families. The children's challenging behaviours thus became redefined as unfixable, shifting blame from the child to the parent. Once providers saw the problem as one that extended beyond the domain of childcare, they understood it as a problem that was beyond their ability to intervene. This was true of centres that served low-income and/or minority children as well as those that served the middle class. Bethany, from a centre that served 'at-risk' children, said:

> . . . she let him stay up until 11 or midnight, and he would not go to bed without . . .sleeping in her bed. These are issues that obviously [the parent] didn't know about, that should have been nipped in the bud a long time ago. Also he was here at 8 am, so how much sleep do you think that 3-year-old was getting? He walked through the door after she gave him six of those little powdered doughnuts for breakfast; he was bouncing off the walls. You could not go near him.

We found that these constructions of 'bad families' were equally prevalent in centres that served middle class populations. For example, Deborah, said of a middle class mother:

> She was a nut. She had control, absolute 110% control over everything in his life, but yet she wasn't present all the time. He had a very controlled diet. A lot of the kid friendly foods that most kids eat, he wasn't allowed to eat, not that he couldn't eat it because of a medical reason, he just wasn't allowed to.

> *What did she want him to eat?*

> Twigs and seeds. (Laughter) [Describes his diet compared to other children]. He knows that he's being treated differently and so that was just one way she controlled him. She wanted to control everything he did, every activity, he wasn't allowed to do certain things and...we didn't tolerate it. We said no, this is daycare, this is what they do here. This is normal behavior.

Teachers' accounts of uncooperative parents simultaneously evaluated family 'environments', making challenging children products of bad families. Included in teacher accounts

of expelled children were descriptions of families that were comprised of 'single moms', 'a single dad' or were 'biracial', 'divorced', 'just out of jail', 'worked too much', or were 'young' or 'smoking', or 'only children'. These negative descriptions contained within them reasons for the child's 'bad behaviour'. Here we may be seeing the implicit bias that Meek and Gilliam (2016) found among teachers.

Ultimatums and expulsion

Expulsion, as the above suggests, is not a singular event but a process. However, a moment arrives when a caregiver decides that they will no longer care for a child. In these data, providers expelled not because of a particular incident, but because an ultimatum to the parents went unmet. After a series of meetings with parents, providers would offer a goal that had to be met, and if it was not, the family was told they would have to find some place that 'better serves his needs'. Improved behaviour within a short period of time was the line in the sand.

> We're making an effort to be a team; a united front on this, with this young man. We've got three weeks to see a major difference in his behavior and if we don't, then we're going to have to ask that you find another place to service him.

Sometime ultimatums resulted in the parent removing the child from care beforehand so it was 'not exactly an expulsion'.

> We requested specifically that the parent get some counseling for the child. Gave that parent an opportunity to do so, a certain length of time [...] she didn't even acknowledge the fact that we kept saying, "Unless he gets counseling, we're at our endpoint, we can't do anything more for him, we've done as much as we can at that point." And she chose not to and she left us.

We did not hear any stories where the ultimatum worked and an expulsion was prevented. Thus, ultimatums functioned solely as a tool to facilitate exits.

After expulsion: relief and regret

Teachers expressed relief and regret after an expulsion, often feeling like they wished they had done more. Sometimes teachers found that they had grown close to the difficult child despite the daily challenge of caring for them.

> I mean I fed him, I changed him, I worked with him through the toddler room. [...] it's really hard to draw that line between business and personal, even though it is just business, it becomes personal because you develop a relationship.

Despite these connections, providers suggested that they waited too long to expel and their narratives support this suggestion. We did not hear any accounts of children who were brought back from the edge of expulsion once it became clear that providers were out of tools, outside evaluations were not working, and especially when teachers began to view parents as uncooperative. Providers recounted 'keeping' children too long out of good intentions: either they did not want to create hardship for the child or because it was interactionally hard to ask a child to leave. All of these factors suggest that children were expelled primarily when things had been difficult for a long time.

Discussion & conclusion

Previous research outlines the characteristics associated with childcare expulsion in the USA, yet researchers know little about how these correlates come to produce expulsion. This study asked how childcare providers understand the process by which children are expelled.

Through a qualitative analysis of 30 in-depth interviews with providers, we found patterned regularities in providers' understandings of the process of childcare expulsion.

Analysis of our data suggests the path to expulsion has several regular steps. First, teachers attempt to identify triggers for challenging behaviours, but for children who are ultimately expelled they cannot find triggers, and this makes teachers' work difficult and frustrating. Second, expulsion is more likely when teachers and parents do not have a shared understanding of the challenging behaviours. In these cases, teachers experience parents as being uncooperative in working to address behavioural issues. Third, outside interventions recommended by specialists were sometimes helpful in changing challenging behaviours. However, if parents did not follow through or if recommendations for changes in the classroom were not feasible, expulsion was more likely. Fourth, childcare providers' work is exhausting. Teachers become discouraged when they cannot find ways to intervene in challenging behaviour, often leading them to connect lack of progress with a poor family environment. Implicit bias may play a role in these assessments. Fifth, programmes often impose an ultimatum that functions as a mechanism for removing the child and family in a short period of time. Ultimatums that require improved behaviour or an action on the part of the family in a specified time frame never led to the prevention of expulsion. Finally, while teachers reported feeling both a combination of relief and regret after expulsion, we found their self-efficacy was challenged, leaving them to feel demoralised.

While these findings were robust in these data, the study has several limitations. First, it is limited by its small sample from one USA state. Second, teachers provide only one window onto this phenomenon. Parents likely see a somewhat different (although likely intersecting) path to expulsion. Future research needs to examine parents' understandings of this process as well. Third, our data come from private childcare centres and preschools, processes may look different for children expelled from smaller settings (those licensed to care for 12 or fewer children) or from settings in public school systems.

Implicit in these accounts of the process of expulsion from childcare are the enormous structural constraints placed on childcare providers. The financial model of most USA childcare centres relies on paying a few providers little, charging parents as much as the market will bear, and maintaining full enrolment. This model has implications for expulsion that moves well beyond interventions to prevent expulsion at the teacher level. First, this model manages children as a group on a schedule dictated by the centre (Leavitt, 1994). Although providers try, children's individual needs are difficult to meet and interventions such as extra supervision are costly. Children who cannot fit into the routines of a centre are often 'asked to leave', even when the behaviour is developmentally typical. The cost to the centres in terms of extra teacher time and teacher burnout is high if such children are not expelled. Second, children who disrupt the classroom become problems as other parents threaten to leave with their 'easy' children, if a disruptive child is not removed. These structural and economic constraints facilitate expulsion and may help to explain, in part, the finding that for-profit and religious centres expel at higher rates (Gilliam and Shahar, 2006). Understanding the larger ecological context in which expulsions take place highlights the tradeoffs that centres must weigh when considering expulsion and suggests structural constraints that need to be addressed at the policy level.

Practice implications and interventions

These findings also suggest several interventions at the practice level as well that might reduce preschool expulsions. Research suggests Early Childhood Mental Health Consultations (ECMHC) are an evidence-based intervention for reducing expulsion (Gilliam and others, 2016) that should be expanded. ECMHC support teachers by providing information on

developmentally appropriate expectations, the role that trauma plays in challenging behaviour, non-punitive behavioural management and the effective engagement of parents (Duran and others, 2009; Carlson and others, 2012; Perry and others, 2010). In these multifaceted ways, consultants open the doors to new narratives about a child while also addressing the presenting issue. Moving beyond interventions that target challenging behaviours to interventions that challenge their meaning, creates new possibilities for prevention. The data presented here indicate that interventions designed to target the teacher–parent relationship may serve to reduce expulsions. Expulsion is an adult behaviour that can be changed (Meek and Gilliam, 2016). Understanding it as a process also highlights the risk for expulsion at multiple points and suggests that ECMHC are likely to be an effective intervention precisely because they target many points on the path to preschool expulsion.

In conclusion, the data from this study suggest that preschool and childcare expulsion is an adult action, informed by adults' biases, practices, and relationships and situated within an ecological context full of structural constraints. Furthermore, these data suggest that expulsion is *a process* that unfolds over time allowing for intervention at multiple points. Policy and practice should take these aspects of expulsion into account.

Acknowledgements

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