

Family Support Staff and Parent Relationships in Early Childhood Education Settings

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Introduction

- Strong parent-staff relationships can help encourage parents' involvement in their children's schooling and improve children's school readiness (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003).
- Family support staff (FSS) are often employed by early care and education (ECE) centers that serve low-income families to support families and build the home-school connection (e.g., Head Start and Early Head Start)
- FSS are often trained as social workers or family service providers who can connect families with resources that can help them thrive
- Research shows that FSS professionals are important for building strong family engagement in ECE settings, however there are few objective measures of quality of these relationships

Family and Provider/Teacher Relationships Quality Scale (FPTRQ)

- The FPTRQ is a new survey that assesses the relationship between staff and families in ECE settings (Kim et al., 2015)
- Parents and FSS each complete a short-form version of the survey
- The measure is comprised of 3 constructs that are further divided into several subscales (see Table 1):
 - Knowledge
 - Practices
 - Attitude
- The FSS survey measures specific knowledge that staff have about families, interactions with families, and beliefs that inform staff's work with families.
- The family survey measures how comfortable families are sharing information with their FSS, how FSS have supported families in establishing goals and strategies for their family, and families' perception of their FSS' demeanor and behavior.

Research Questions

1. What are the descriptive results for the FPTRQ in our sample?
2. What are the relations between FSS demographics and FPTRQ responses?
3. Is there an association between FSS case load and family responses on the FPTRQ?
4. What is the concordance between FSS and family responses on the FPTRQ?

Participants

- Data come from Spring 2018 from 21 high-quality research-based ECE schools in the United States serving low-income children and families ages 0-5
- Parent data represent 1,282 parents across the network.
 - 6% of mothers were teen moms
 - 14% did not complete high school, 40% completed some college, 12% completed college or more, the rest of parents had completed high school
- FSS data represent 79 employees across the network
 - 52% White, 32% African American, 34% Latinx, 6% Other; 92% Female
 - 29% speak another language in addition to English
 - Average caseload: 33 families, Average FSS per school: 3
 - Average time working in ECE: 11 years
- Due to data merging and connecting limitations, we were able to connect the data from 450 families to their FSS data
- FSS survey also included items related to workplace climate adapted from Early Head Start Survey Self-Administered Questionnaire for Staff (1999) and items from the Job Stress Inventory (Curbow, Spratt, Ungaretti, et al., 2000)

Analytic Plan

- Descriptive analyses (means and correlations) were analyzed in SPSS
- Regression analyses were conducted in Mplus to account for center-level nesting (using TYPE=COMPLEX)

Table 1. FPTRQ Constructs and Sub-Constructs

| Family Support Staff | Parent |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Knowledge | |
| Family-specific knowledge | Family-specific knowledge |
| Practices | |
| Collaboration | Collaboration |
| Responsiveness | Responsiveness |
| Communication | Communication |
| Connecting to services | |
| Family-focused concern | |
| Attitudes | |
| Commitment | Commitment |
| Respect | Respect |
| Openness to change | Understanding context |

Figure 1. Average FPTRQ Constructs for Parents and FSS

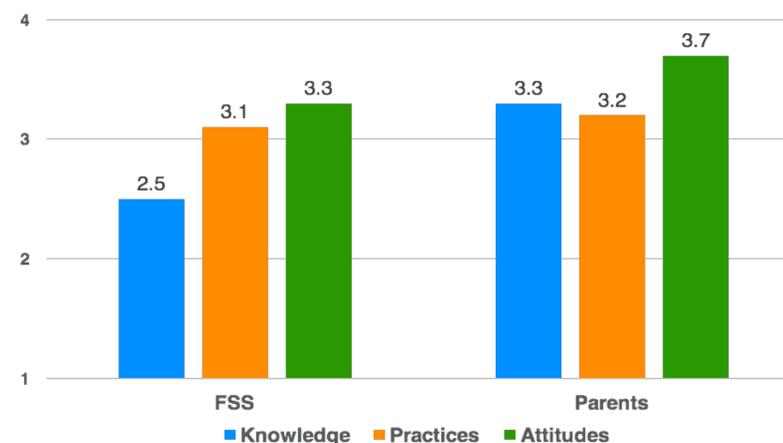


Table 2. Correlations between Parent and FSS FPTRQ Constructs

| | Parent Knowledge | Parent Practices | Parent Attitude |
|----------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| FSS Knowledge | .12* | .11* | .02 |
| FSS Practices | .06 | .02 | -.04 |
| FSS Attitude | .09 | .15* | .07 |

Note. * $p < .05$

Results

RQ#1.

Descriptive Results

- Averages for FSS and family responses on the FPTRQ is displayed in Figure 1.

Psychometrics - Parent Short Form

- Knowledge:
 - Family-Specific Knowledge (alpha = .95)
 - Practices:
 - Collaboration (alpha = .91)
 - Responsiveness (alpha = .93)
 - Communication (alpha = .71*)
 - Attitudes:
 - Commitment (alpha = .92)
 - Understanding Context (alpha = .97)
 - Respect (alpha = .86)
- *alpha used from short form manual, Early Head Start Centers.

RQ#2. FSS demographics and FPTRQ Responses

Correlation Results

- FSS with better attitudes toward the families they interact with tended to enjoy their workplace more ($r = .35, p < .01$)
- FSS who worked in family support for longer, tended to have a better attitude toward the families they interact with ($r = .23, p < .05$)
- FSS who felt like they had more control over their jobs, reported increased knowledge about the families in their caseload ($r = .23, p < .05$)
- FSS who had greater feelings of reward in their jobs ($r = .32, p < .01$) and who had greater salary satisfaction ($r = .24, p < .05$) tended to have better attitudes toward the families they interact with

Regression Results

- FSS who were more satisfied with their jobs overall tended to have better attitudes toward the parents in their caseload ($b = .15, p < .01$), even after controlling for gender, race, ethnicity, education, and years in family support, and accounting for center

Relating FSS responses and Parent responses

- RQ #3: Correlations between the constructs are presented in Table 2.
- RQ #4: FSS with higher caseloads tended to have parents who reported lower Knowledge ($b = -.02, p < .05$) and Practices ($b = -.01, p < .05$), even after controlling for FSS years of education and years in the workforce (and accounting for center)

Conclusions

- Families and FSS tend to rate their relationships highly, except for FSS knowledge
- Responses on the FPTRQ seem to be related to FSS characteristics, which supports the case for high-quality work environments for ECE employees (i.e. fair pay, collaborative colleagues, and strong leadership culture)
- Helping to maintain positive and effective work environments is key for success in creating family partnerships with staff in ECE programs
- Keeping caseloads low may help improve FSS relationships with parents.

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