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# Job Retention of Childcare Workers in a Military Child Development Center

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Janet Marie Hooten

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2019

Abstract

Job Retention of Childcare Workers in a Military Child Development Center

by

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MA, Central Michigan University, 2007

BS, Park University, 2005

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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August 2019

## Abstract

This study explored the low retention rates of childcare workers at a military child development center in the northeast United States. The purpose of this case study was to explore the work experiences of childcare employees during their first year of employment at a child development center to discover the factors that influenced their decision to resign. The conceptual framework that guided this study was a 2-factor approach of motivator and hygiene factors associated with experiences and perceptions. Transcripts from interviews with 15 current and prior childcare workers and management team members were coded, triangulated, and thematically analyzed. The themes developed from the interview data revealed key factors that contributed to childcare workers' positive and negative work experiences, such as pay and benefits, professional development and training requirements, and lack of support for novice childcare workers. The results of this study led to a position paper recommending that stakeholders implement a 3-day mentoring program to address the issue of resignation among first-year childcare workers. The mentoring program could lead to social change by increasing positive work experiences, knowledge base of first-year childcare workers, and worker retention rates at military child development centers.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my husband and our daughters who supported me on this journey and understood the time it took away from our family time together. I could not have accomplished this journey without them.

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I may like to extend a special acknowledgment to the program managers of the organization who allowed me to utilize the childcare program for my study. I may also like to thank my work organization for their support and encouragement during my doctoral journey, and to my chair and committee members who provided me encouragement and guidance during the final years of completing the doctoral process. Thank you to all of my family and friends who encouraged me along the way, and especially to my husband for his continuous support.

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## Section 1: The Problem

Children of military service members work and sacrifice alongside their parents. These children are often in attendance at military child development centers for extended hours, while their parents perform their jobs (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013; Holmes, Rauch, & Cozza, 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013). When there is a problem with military childcare services, parents who serve in the military are unable to fully focus on their mission (Blackburn, 2016). There is a need to provide care for the children of military families while their parents perform their daily military assignments or while their parents are away on deployment. The United States government provides childcare services and regulates childcare facilities for the children of military service members. Researchers indicated that directors in childcare facilities in the United States are struggling to retain childcare workers who are in their first year of employment (Henning-Smith & Kozhimannil, 2016). Failure to retain childcare workers results in understaffing, which reduces the services and quality of services provided to children (Edie, 2007; Henning-Smith & Kozhimannil, 2016). Reduced services could include a decrease in child supervision, a lack of continuity of care, and the absence of developmentally appropriate activities (Floyd & Phillips, 2013; Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013).

Leadership from the Department of Defense and Navy developed specific guidelines for military child development centers. The Department of Defense (2014) instruction included the regulations regarding child-to-staff ratios required in military child development centers; ratios vary depending on the ages of the children. A minimum

of 4 children to 1 childcare worker is the ratio set for infants. For pre-toddlers, one childcare worker is responsible for one group of five children. Toddlers require 1 childcare worker per 7 children, and preschool age children require 1 childcare worker per 12 children. Butrymowicz and Mader (2016) reported that approximately 95% of the 800 centers of the Department of Defense, in and out of the U.S., have accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Children of military personnel are receiving high-quality childcare (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2016). The Department of Defense (2014) created a requirement that all new teachers/childcare workers must complete training, which includes 40 hours during their first 3 months of employment (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2016). The Department of Defense is one of the largest employer-sponsored childcare systems in the United States (Civic Impulse, 2017).

The Department of Defense established childcare workers' pay in a similar manner to the pay scales of other individuals with similar levels of education. These pay scales resulted in a 76% increase in base pay at the time of employment (MacClay, 2015). The Department of Defense (2014) requires background checks on all childcare workers to ensure the quality and safety of military children. Baldwin (2015) noted that the military provides childcare of outstanding quality.

### **Definition of the Problem**

The focus of the problem in this project study was the low retention rate of childcare workers at a military child development center located in the Northeast United States. According to the director of the center participating in this study, the large number of childcare workers who leave the military child development program within the first

year of employment is an indicator that the problem exists. In this study, I addressed the perceptions and experiences of first-year childcare workers, which served to retain these workers or influence them to leave their employment at the military childcare center.

The director of the center participating in this study stated in 2016 that the military childcare center had a 25% turnover rate of first-year childcare workers. The director of the center also stated the number of childcare providers resigning from their positions at this particular center continues to be an issue, with a 32% turnover rate of childcare workers in 2013. In 2016, the center director hired 54 new childcare workers, bringing the total number of childcare workers to 120. Of this number, 51 childcare workers resigned in 2016, and 13 resigned during their first months of employment. According to the director, the center operates below full capacity because of being understaffed. The child development center managers cope with this staffing problem by placing inexperienced and underqualified childcare workers into classrooms. Rural child development centers have similar difficulties in appointing and retaining appropriately trained staff (Henning-Smith & Kozhimannil, 2016). Although the appointment of inexperienced staff makes it possible for center managers to abide by the child-to-teacher/childcare worker ratio of the Department of Defense and the Department of the Navy, it is not an effective long-term solution. Inexperienced childcare workers lack the skills required to manage a classroom, and poor classroom management skills lead to emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion often leads to job dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction leads to resignation (Carson, Baumgartner, Ota, Kuhn, & Durr, 2016).

## **Rationale**

Despite regulations on childcare, such as the childcare worker-to-child ratio, educational requirements of the childcare worker, and improved payment structure including military benefits, recruitment and retention of childcare workers in the military has been challenging. According to the director of the center participating in this study, in a series of personal communications pertaining to the difficulties associated with retaining childcare workers in the military, no break-even point occurred from 2013 to 2016. Military childcare regulations stipulate the childcare worker-to-child ratio for different age groups. In an effort to follow these requirements, the director of the center appointed untrained and inexperienced staff. These appointments proved unsatisfactory as most of the employees left the program within their first year of appointment. The 2013 turnover rate of childcare workers was 32% and rose to 94% in the fourth quarter of 2016. During this period, the director stated that 25% of the untrained and inexperienced staff members resigned within their first year of employment. Moreover, in agreement with Henning-Smith and Kozhimannil (2016), the director found that most resignations came from individuals who lacked degrees or appropriate training.

High turnover rates of teachers in early childhood education (ECE) are associated with the quality of education they receive (Zepeda, 2015). Zepeda found that the annual turnover rate of teachers is between 25% and 40%, which is unhealthy for maintaining and improving teaching standards. In California, the turnover rate for childcare workers was 26% in 2006 (Zepeda, 2015). The current study was conducted to explore the reasons

for the high turnover rates to prevent young children's education, social-emotional, and language development from suffering due to frequent staff turnover.

Induction training is available for military childcare workers at the time they begin their employment with the center; however, no formal mentoring program is available. According to the director of the center in which the participants of this study worked, a 2014 survey indicated that there was not enough data to assist the center administrators in understanding the source of employees' lack of satisfaction. Navy leaders in child and youth programs had concerns about the low retention rate of childcare workers not only at the child development center in this study but also at other child development centers throughout the Navy. The Navy Child and Youth Programs made attempts to obtain feedback from staff through the use of an annual survey and through unannounced inspections of military child development centers. The center director's review of surveys from 2014 childcare workers produced results that indicated that 20% of the staff in the center were dissatisfied with both their job and their supervisors. A limitation of the survey was that it did not elicit data to help center administrators understand the sources of this lack of satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to explore the work experiences of childcare employees during their first year of employment at a military child development center to discover the factors that influence childcare workers' decision to resign.

### **Evidence of the Problem from Professional Literature**

A review of professional literature provided insight into some factors that contribute to low retention rates of childcare workers. Low retention of childcare workers

is a complex problem with no single answer (Zepeda, 2015). Accredited childcare programs tend to suffer fewer cases of teacher attrition than programs without accreditation status. The reasons for this phenomenon warrant further research. Early childhood teacher attrition is a complex problem, and addressing the problem requires the use of multiple perspectives to determine possible combinations of contributing factors (Zepeda, 2015). Scholars conducted studies to address the issue of recruiting and retaining childcare workers in the civilian population; however, little research has been done on childcare workers in military child development centers (Bianchi, 2011; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Masten, 2013).

Working with children in the classroom presents challenges that require the workers to adjust their perceptions (VFA Learning, 2017). According to the United States Department of Labor (2016), childcare workers generally have only a high school diploma, have no work-related experience, and have short-term on-the-job training. The intent of this study was to examine the reasons for the lack of satisfaction among military childcare workers.

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

The following is a list of terms as defined in the study:

*Childcare workers*: Individuals who provide care for children's basic needs when parents or other family members are unavailable to care for them (U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

*Hygiene factors:* Negative factors such as policy, work conditions, relationships with supervisors and subordinates, and salary that can create negative work experiences and dissatisfaction with a person's job (Schwab & Heneman, 1970).

*Job satisfaction:* The level of an individual's work-related contentment, which affects the individual's work performance (Herzberg, 1966).

*Motivation:* Internal and external factors that inspire the desire and drive for a person to be interested and dedicated to a job, or to work persistently toward achieving a goal. Motivation refers to individuals' resilience to persist in an activity and to use their own resources, including time, drive, and skill, in the completion of a chosen task (Lekka, Brinia, & Chatzipanagiotou, 2016).

*Motivator:* A factor such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, or the work itself; motivators lead to increased employee satisfaction because of positive work-related experiences (Schwab & Heneman, 1970).

*Professional development:* The process of enhancing professional skills and knowledge through education, training, mentoring, and interactive activities (Lanigan, 2011).

*Turnover rate:* The number of persons leaving the company divided by the total staff complement. Turnover rate is a ratio expressed and calculated each year. Should a company of 50 have five persons leave, the turnover rate is five divided by 50, or 10% (Reh, 2017).

### **Significance**

This study was significant because it provided information regarding the factors that result in job satisfaction among childcare workers in a military child development center during their first year of employment, and provided information needed for retaining these workers. Administrators in a military child development center in the Northeast United States were experiencing difficulty retaining childcare workers, particularly workers during their first year of employment. The center administrators were struggling to meet staff and child ratio requirements and had to resort to hiring workers who were unskilled. The findings from this study may assist the administrators in the center in creating organizational change based on the expressed needs of first-year employees regarding provision of training and education. In addition, findings from this study may provide the data needed to raise the level of job satisfaction among local childcare workers and childcare workers in the general population. The findings from this study may also contribute knowledge regarding what is necessary to end the high turnover rate of childcare workers. Childcare workers may benefit because their needs may be understood by administrators, allowing them to make changes that could improve retention of childcare workers. Through improved understanding of the training and educational needs of first-year childcare workers and the identification of factors influencing their level of job satisfaction, it may be possible for center administrators, program administrators, and leadership at the local and the Navy level to understand how to improve first-year childcare workers' retention rates. Other stakeholders, including parents and children, may benefit from this study because the increase in knowledge and

work skills of childcare workers could lead to the assurance that the children of military personnel are receiving the highest quality childcare. This may allow parents to focus more fully on their military objectives and missions.

### **Guiding Research Questions**

A military childcare center in the Northeast United States is experiencing difficulty in retaining their childcare workers, particularly during the workers' first year of employment. The purpose of this study was to explore the work experiences of childcare workers during their first year of employment at the military child development center to understand the factors that could influence the workers' decision to resign. The following research questions (RQs) guided this case study to examine the high turnover rate of childcare workers and what could be done to retain them:

RQ1: How do childcare workers describe their work experiences during their first year of employment at a military childcare center?

RQ2: What positive work experiences perceived by childcare workers influenced their retention at the military child development center during their first year of employment?

RQ3: What negative work experiences perceived by childcare workers may influence their decision to resign from the military child development center during their first year of employment?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I used Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory for this case study to explore the perspectives of participants regarding the motivator and hygiene factors associated with

their experiences and perceptions of their professional development during their first year of employment with the local military child development center. Herzberg contributed to understanding employee satisfaction within the field of business management. Herzberg proposed that people could be swayed to perform their job duties by experiencing certain motivators and hygiene factors. Motivators, also known as satisfiers, are factors that enhance employee performance by increasing satisfaction (Herzberg, 1966). Examples of motivators include advancement, recognition, responsibility, personal growth, achievement, and the work itself (Herzberg, 1966).

Hygiene includes maintenance factors that characterize the context or environment of a person's employment (Herzberg, 1966). Hygiene factors do not enhance motivation; however, motivation and satisfaction decrease if these factors are not available to employees (Herzberg, 1966). Examples of hygiene factors include salary, health benefits, work environment, and vacation time. Motivators and hygiene factors are crucial to the two-factor theory in understanding what factors prompt employees to remain with their organizations and what decreases their morale. For this study, I used information obtained in the literature when analyzing data from interviews with childcare workers at the military child development center.

Zepeda (2015) found that childcare workers “were 1.6 times more likely to stay at sites” (p. 8) in which the classroom organizational and emotional support scores were high. The unique work situation of childcare workers could possibly result in the need for different support structures. Barnes (2013) collected narratives and artifacts of teachers, including himself, in his quest to find out what sustained fulfillment in the lives of

teachers. Several instances of life-work balance emerged along with examples of support systems the teachers found from people around them or activities they engaged in to sustain them during difficult times (Barnes, 2013). Epstein and Willhite (2015) found that preschool teachers who received mentoring from experienced teachers displayed higher self-efficacy.

Ritblatt, Garrity, Longstreth, Hokoda, and Potter (2013) reported that childcare staff members' education highly influenced the rates of retention as well as opportunities for training and education. On average, childcare workers who received support from experienced colleagues had a higher level of job satisfaction and remained longer on their jobs (Ritblatt et al., 2013). A combination of different factors could lead to teachers' job satisfaction and turnover (Zepeda, 2015). Therefore, I conducted the current study to explore childcare workers' job satisfaction and turnover intent to answer the research questions.

### **Review of Current Literature Related to the Problem**

The literature reviewed in this study included information about Herzberg's (1966) theory of job satisfaction, and the literature also included information and reviews from a wide range of sources in this area of inquiry. Key search terms used in this review were *job satisfaction*, *childcare workers*, *military childcare*, *motivation*, *training*, and *education*. The search engines used were ERIC, DeepDive, and ProQuest. I also used the Google Scholar search engine. I gave preference to literature published between 2013 and 2017, although I included seminal works published before these dates. Little research was

available on childcare workers in the military sector; therefore, I had to consult older works.

### **Hygiene Factors Related to Compensation and Benefits**

Employee job satisfaction is often related to compensation and benefits. Herzberg (1966) formulated his theory in the business world, and many researchers used Herzberg's two-factor theory in various business sectors to identify the motivator and hygiene factors at play in employee satisfaction or turnover. Davis (2013) explored the perceptions and experiences of customer service agents regarding employee turnover. Davis identified employee compensation as an important determinant of employee satisfaction and retention. Employee compensation referred to salary, benefits, and other incentives (Davis, 2013). A limitation of this study, however, was the small number of participants.

**Low wages.** Studies on job satisfaction of teachers and preschool teachers indicated that dissatisfaction with the salary and promotional opportunities could lead to increased turnover (Gil-Flores, 2017; Grayson & Alvarez, 2008; Klassen & Anderson, 2009). This issue, confirmed in an article on childcare worker turnover, occurred in five counties in Southwest Colorado, and the results indicated that burnout and low pay were reasons for turnover (Grayson et al., 2009). The wage increase of childcare workers since 1977 was approximately 1%, which means that wage barely kept up with increased costs (Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014). The lack of wage increase stands in stark contrast with parent fees for childcare during the same period, which rose from \$94 to \$179 per week (Whitebook et al., 2014). Since 1989, childcare workers who care for U.S. children

during their most vulnerable stage of life have earned less than animal care workers (Whitebook et al., 2014). Childcare workers earn approximately 66% of preschool teachers' salaries, which places childcare workers slightly above the poverty level for a family of three (Whitebook et al., 2014). Although some childcare workers have bachelor's degrees, they still earn much less than their peers in school-sponsored, pre-Kindergarten classes (Whitebook et al., 2014). Employees in the early care and childhood education field experienced economic insecurity, and they left this sector in search of better wages (Whitebook et al., 2014). Turnover among childcare workers, as indicated by the reviewed literature, is affected by low salaries and lack of benefits and other incentives.

Kashen, Potter, and Stettner (2016) of the Century Foundation stated that childcare workers earned substandard wages, with average pay in 2015 of approximately \$10.72 per hour. Similar findings were reported by Brown (2014) and Zillman (2015) who stated that childcare workers' average pay was equal to or less than employees in the fast food industry in terms of needing state assistance. Based on a National Survey of Early Care and Education, Kashen et al. asserted that individuals who had a college degree earned approximately \$1.00 per hour more than individuals without a college degree. Turnover costs are high for most organizations and relate to recruitment as well as training, resulting in not only monetary costs but time costs for the organization (Missouri Business Development Program, 2014).

**Economic role of childcare workers.** Gould (2015) of the Economic Policy Institute asserted that childcare workers played an important role in the economy of the

United States as they are instrumental in allowing parents of young children to participate in the economy (Gould, 2015). Although childcare workers provide a safe haven and essential stimulation for young children, childcare workers are not acknowledged fully in terms of wages and benefits (Gould, 2015). Childcare employees are among the lowest paid employees in the country (Gould, 2015; Wells, 2015; Zepeda, 2015). On average, childcare workers earned 39.9% less than the median wage of workers in similar occupations; childcare workers earn \$10.31 per hour versus \$17.00 per hour.

Zepeda (2015) pointed out that childcare workers left their jobs in favor of higher paid and more stable positions. Childcare workers seldom had job benefits such as medical coverage or retirement benefits, as only 9.6% childcare workers had a pension plan compared to the 39% employees in other occupations (Gould, 2015; Wells, 2015). Wells (2015) noted that apart from a lack of medical benefits, the teachers also experienced difficulties when there were personal or family issues that demanded their attention. Gould (2015) reported that the group data from a population survey indicated that childcare workers included 1.2 million workers in day centers, preschool facilities, or nanny positions. Females constitutes the largest percentage of this group of workers, and 2.3% of all female employees are childcare workers (Gould, 2015).

**Negative influence of turnover on early childcare.** Wells (2015) discussed the instructional program Head Start and pointed out that teacher turnover had a negative influence on the success of the program, a finding that Totenhagen et al. (2016) reiterated. According to Wells, teacher turnover interrupted the teacher-child relationship and bonding, which resulted in poor language development, vocabulary development,

and emotional stability. When teacher retention was stable, the opposite was true (Wells, 2015). Children's language and math skills, in general, were better, and children exhibited better self-concept (Wells, 2015). With an attrition rate of 20-25% in the early care and education field, the influence on young children's lives was significant (Wells, 2015).

The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) indicated that the average hourly pay of \$10.33 puts childcare workers in a group with parking lot attendants, meaning these groups of workers are among some of the lowest wage earners in the U.S. According to the Moore and Gertseva (2015), the Washington State 2014 Child Care Survey indicated that teacher assistants were less likely to leave their childcare positions than teachers who received a higher level of pay. Childcare workers earned approximately \$10.67 per hour (DEL Connect, 2015). The report on childcare in Maryland showed that the number of childcare programs was increasing, while the number of providers of childcare was decreasing (State of Maryland, 2015). The serious disconnect between education and resident labor policies in California must be addressed before there is any negative influence on California's children (Welsh-Loveman, 2015).

Wage increases in different sectors of Oakland were the most prominent, with a 36% increase in March 2015 (Welsh-Loveman, 2015). Welsh-Loveman (2015) reported that great benefits could result in child development centers if staff members received higher wages and benefits. Early childhood teachers are in need of additional financial stability, and attention to their emotional and physical health is necessary (Welsh-Loveman, 2015). This additional attention is necessary not only for U.S. teachers but for

preschool teachers internationally (Hall-Kenyon, Bullough, MacKay, & Marshall, 2013). Patton (2016) reported that the situation was similar in the state of Ohio, with workers in childcare being paid very low wages and the result being a high turnover rate. While childcare workers receive approximately the same hourly wages as fast-food workers, childcare costs increase dramatically and result in a high rate of turnover because these workers do not make enough to survive without seeking assistance from social programs, such as food stamps (Patton, 2016).

### **Hygiene Factors Related to Professional Development**

Providing professional development opportunities assists in reducing employee turnover rates (Missouri Business Development Program, 2014). Gomez, Kagan, and Fox (2015) conducted an overview of professional development opportunities in preschool teaching and found that the training requirements for teachers in this field are rather low because there are many different views on what role preschool teachers and childcare workers must perform. Confirming the need for professional development of childcare workers, Welsh-Loveman (2015) asserted that assistant childcare workers needed to be provided opportunities for professional development to curb the turnover rates. Early childhood education performs an essential function in young children's lives because it influences a range of developmental and educational issues such as language development, physical and perceptual skills, social interaction, emotional development, literacy skills, and mathematical precursors; therefore, a holistic approach to early training is needed (Cunningham, Etter, Platas, Wheeler, & Campbell, 2015; Thomason & La Paro, 2013).

Roberts et al. (2015) examined quality teacher-child interactions and found that children benefit from positive interaction in terms of their learning and interpersonal skills. Therefore, professional development offerings are focusing on improving the ways preschool teachers relate to the children in their care (Roberts et al., 2015). For childcare workers, professional development is a key element in providing quality care to the preschool child (Edie, 2007). Following the recommendations of the Missouri Business Development Program (2014), further training programs may be used to retain the childcare workers in the services they provide. Early childcare education is a wide field; therefore, there are various areas in which professional development is a major need. One such area is the behavioral issues of young children (Roberts et al., 2015).

**Behavioral issues of children.** Young children have not developed impulse control and social/behavioral skills; they could, therefore, be disruptive in class and exhibit attention-seeking behaviors (Yoshikawa et al., 2015). Developing appropriate socioemotional skills is essential for the school readiness of children and the way they adapt to society; socioemotional skills are also critical to the child's success in school (Yoshikawa et al., 2015). Therefore, it is the task of the childcare worker to focus on self-regulation of emotional reactions, aggression, and disruptive behavior to ensure that the child benefits from schooling (Yoshikawa et al., 2015).

Holtz, Fox, and Meurer (2015) focused more on behavioral issues than on other issues in young children because they realized that behavioral issues in young children are more prevalent than initially thought and these issues persist in later life. Preschool teachers have the responsibility to teach children socially acceptable behavior, while

coping with an individual child's behavioral problems, which may be the result of parenting practices and the family environment (Holtz et al., 2015). When preschool teachers know that they have to address behavioral difficulties in children and receive support from management, the preschool teachers cope effectively and do not leave the profession (Wells, 2015).

Holtz et al. (2015) studied the adverse behavior of preschool children living in poverty and found that African-American children had a higher number of behavior problems compared to their Hispanic and White counterparts. Families living in poverty place their children at a high risk of developing behavioral problems because of the families' vulnerability to stressors at work or in the home (Holtz et al., 2015). Stressors include issues such as poor childcare supervision, lack of medical supervision, and hazardous neighborhoods (Holtz et al., 2015). These factors negatively influence parents' educational practices that could lead to increased possibility of behavior problems among the young children. Holtz et al. called for early screening for behavioral problems of children and timely intervention.

Another factor that could give rise to behavioral issues in young children is work hours that are out of the ordinary (Li et al., 2014). Li et al. (2014) studied several categories of development through a literature review, and externalized or internalized difficulties, intellectual development, and the children's body mass index. Li et al. found that irregular hours disrupted the children, which could lead to behavioral problems. Children whose parents are in military service often have to cope with their parents' irregular work hours, especially when parents are deployed.

**Military childcare situation.** The military is one of the largest childcare employers in the United States (Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013). These researchers reported on the welfare of military children, stating that in 2012 more than 730,000 military children were between the ages of newborn to 5 years. These children were most vulnerable when they were left with other caregivers when their parents worked irregular hours or were deployed. Osofsky and Chartrand pointed out that after 9/11, military deployments became more frequent and were likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. Deployment puts young children who are most dependent on their parents in a vulnerable position of being maltreated or emotionally neglected (Osofsky & Chartrand, 2013). Even if only one parent deploys, the stress of the situation negatively influences the remaining parent, which could translate into the development of emotional or behavioral problems in children between 3 and 5 years old (Barker & Berry, 2009; Chartrand, Frank, White, & Shope, 2008; Osofsky & Chartland, 2013).

Apart from deployment, which is unique, military families share other potentially disruptive situations that could influence young children's behavior. Military families tend to move frequently, and while this is not unique to the military only, it is nonetheless stressful on military children (Masten, 2013). Other stressful circumstances that military families share with civilians include having insufficient income and disciplining their children under emotionally difficult situations. Military families, and some civilian families, are exposed to unique job dangers that could lead to injuries, loss, and other kinds of suffering (Masten, 2013). Such job dangers influence the emotional and behavioral development of the children (Masten, 2013).

A unique situation that military families find themselves in is one that often leads to increased stress and depression among parents. Parents with children having to stay temporarily with other family members or live in care centers experience a situation that is particularly stressful to young children who may not understand what is happening (Masten, 2013). Skillful ways to address such situations are needed to develop a higher level of resiliency in the children and help them to manage their behavioral changes that resulted from having to endure stressful circumstances (Masten, 2013; Osofsky & Chartland, 2013). Fitzsimons and Krause-Parello (2009) indicated that school nurses could support these school-age children. School nurses often come in contact with children from military families because of the nature of their work. Childcare workers who are involved primarily with the preschool children require professional development training to assist them in addressing the needs of the young children who are undergoing these crippling circumstances (Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009).

### **Hygiene Factors Related to Organizational Factors**

Williams and Glisson (2013) reported that in studies examining the relationship between employee turnover and the organization, rates of turnover among employees could be linked to negative outcomes for the organization. These scholars also found that moderators such as the culture of the organization and performance influence the strength of relationship (Williams & Glisson, 2013).

**Organizational factors.** Issues with interpersonal relationships influence teachers' job satisfaction (Wells, 2015). Some of these issues include communication between teachers and management, participation in decision-making, autonomy, and

friction between teachers (Gil-Flores; 2017; Wells, 2015). Issues may be outside of classroom instruction and include a lack of support from the administrative staff, concern with policy, evaluation of teachers, and the low status of teaching (Gil-Flores, 2017; Renzulli, Parrot, & Beattie, 2011; Wells, 2015). These findings indicated that school leadership could exert a strong influence on teachers' decision to remain at a school or leave (Renzulli et al., 2011).

In their study on motivating and hygiene factors in childcare workers, Totenhagen et al. (2016) reported that the low retention rate of childcare workers presented an ongoing challenge linked to negative outcomes. Totenhagen et al. identified seven general correlates or forecasters for retaining childcare workers: (a) salaries and benefits; (b) job satisfaction; (c) organizational factors; (d) existing opportunities for alternative employment; (e) demographic factors, such as age and marital status; (f) job-related characteristics; and (g) teachers' level of education and professional development/training. Totenhagen et al. (2016) stated that preschool teachers employed at a state institution or nonprofit organization meeting the accreditation standards remain in their jobs and were satisfied. The organizational culture clearly has an influence on childcare workers leaving their jobs (Totenhagen et al., 2016). The organizational culture fails to support the professional development of all of its childcare workers. Some scholars questioned whether the organizational climate of military child development centers differs from civilian centers (Totenhagen et al., 2016).

**Military Childcare Act.** Given the importance of childcare and the nature of military employment, the Department of Defense established childcare standards in 1989

in the Military Childcare Act, requiring that all the programs offered to the children be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Blackburn, 2016). The U.S. Military Child Care System offers a standard for addressing issues of quality care (De Vita & Montilla, 2003). According to military standards for childcare, the quality of childcare facilities should not only meet but exceed the standards set by the local licensing authority (Blackburn, 2016). To achieve the high standards set by the Department of Defense, the following measures were put in place for child development and afterschool settings: (a) providing training provisions to childcare workers, (b) linking wages with level of training, (c) keeping the childcare costs affordable by subsidizing parents, (d) setting standards for licensing and accreditation, and (e) establishing inspection services to promote accountability (De Vita & Montilla, 2003).

Floyd and Phillips (2013) investigated the childcare services in the Department of Defense and reported that the provision of military childcare services rests on four pillars to ensure ongoing compliance with military certification (Floyd & Phillips, 2013). These pillars were recognized national accreditation, hiring policy setting, acceptable education standards for employees, and a pay structure in line with the employees' qualifications, including benefits (Floyd & Phillips, 2013).

Blackburn (2016) reported that job satisfaction among military childcare workers was related to the stress of the job because of challenges and job expectations, including poor conditions at work, the absence of support, and being unable to cope with behavioral issues of children. Floyd and Philips's (2013) and Fitzsimons and Krause-Parello's (2009) findings confirmed that parental deployment, with its long periods of absence of

one or both parents, were influences in the child's stress levels and behavior. The repeating nature of absences due to deployment causes the children to live under long periods of stress, even if the parents come home for short periods. This arrangement creates problems relative to the child's emotional well-being (Fitzsimons & Krause-Parello, 2009).

Floyd and Philips (2013) found that parents returning from an operation may display post-traumatic stress disorder, which further influences the child's behavior. Childcare workers' view of job satisfaction undergoes a shift as their expectations and the reality of everyday experiences do not match; this mismatch could result in high turnover among childcare workers (Blackburn, 2016).

### **Hygiene Factors Related to Educational Attainment and Professional Support**

Childcare workers need the support and recognition of their supervisors as well as the professional and social communities in which they work (Torres, 2016). Torres stated that caregivers and teachers need to feel supported by the professional community of early childhood educators. Ritblatt et al. (2013) indicated that the educational levels of childcare staff affect the recruitment and retention rates, as well as ongoing education and training opportunities, because the educational and experience levels of these workers influence the quality of childcare. Thus, opportunities for professional development are necessary because less than half of early childhood primary teachers earned a college degree, not only in the U.S. but in other countries as well (Nolan & Rouse, 2013; Ritblatt et al., 2013; Vesay, 2008; Wagner et al., 2013).

Whitebook, Kipnis, Sakai, and Austin (2012) noted that 65% of management and leadership positions within early childhood education staff had bachelor of arts degrees or higher, as opposed to those who were working with young children. The different ethnic groups in the Whitebook et al. study reported high educational achievement; more than half of all the ethnic groups reported having completed a -year degree or higher. The findings indicated that non-Hispanic Whites and Pacific Islanders held the highest percentages of graduate and post-graduate degrees (Whitebook et al. 2012). The overall level of language competency, speaking, reading, and writing, was somewhat lower, with only 43% reporting that they were fluent in another language other than apart from English (Whitebook et al., 2012). Researchers placed an emphasis on the importance of professional development for childcare staff to maintain the quality of care provided to the children and families within early childhood and retention (Bridges, Fuller, Huang, & Hamre, 2011; Douglass, 2011; Sugarman, 2011; Weinstock et al., 2012; Whitebook et al., 2014).

College courses, in-service training, and on-the-job training, all provide professional development for early childhood educators (Douglass, 2011). Researchers also found that staff with educational and professional development backgrounds in early childhood education or related fields, are likely to remain in childcare if they can be retained for at least 5 years (Bridges et al., 2011; Douglass, 2011; Sugarman, 2011; Whitebook et al., 2014).

Floyd and Phillips (2013) reported that for employees at military child development centers, the minimum requirements are graduation from a high school or

GED, plus English language proficiency (speaking, reading, and writing), and all employees get a background check. Another basic requirement of staff who work with military parents and children is basic training in “child development, child responses to trauma, and protective factors for children and families” (Masten, 2013, p. 208). New childcare workers have 18 months to complete the 15 online military courses used by the Department of Defense centers (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2016). Salaries are linked to the level of training as well as ongoing training received, either from the Department of Defense or from other accredited institutions. With the prescribed level of education and experience, employees receive \$15 per hour compared to the \$9.73 hourly rate of their civilian peers (Floyd & Phillips, 2013). As is the case with other military personnel, childcare workers receive annual inflationary adjustments, benefit packages, and other military privileges (Floyd & Phillips, 2013). Notwithstanding the improved wages and benefit packages, there is still a high turnover of military childcare workers has brought scholarly attention to the cause of this attrition (Floyd & Phillips, 2013). Professional development opportunities serve to increase the education of the childcare worker. Professional development opportunities include training on-the-job, in-service training, and support for childcare workers to obtain college degrees (Floyd & Phillips, 2013). These opportunities serve to retain childcare workers and increase their motivation to remain in the industry (Floyd & Phillips, 2013).

### **Hygiene Factors Related to Social Status and Morale**

Different hygiene factors, such as social status and decreased morale among childcare workers, affect professional development (Bridges et al., 2011). Social status or

the respect and acknowledgment of the role of early childcare workers may influence the retention rate of childcare and early childhood workers (Bridges et al., 2011; Hall-Kenyon et al., 2014). Garvis, Lemon, Pendergast, and Yim (2013) studied the training needs and curriculum of preschool teachers in Australia. These researchers reported that Austrians do not perceive preschool teachers as having high professional status. The morale of childcare workers decreased because they were not viewed as professionals, but as babysitters, who could not achieve a higher career option because they did not have a degree or because they worked in unaccredited programs (Bridges et al., 2011).

A lack of personal and professional rewards for staff has a negative influence on retention. The lack of higher education negatively influences retention (Bridges et al., 2011). Bridges et al. reported that 64% of preschool teachers completed a secondary education, with only 23% having completed a degree in higher education (Bridges et al., 2011). Bridges et al. found that only two fifths of the participants completed between only a few classes or completed an associate of arts degree, and 15% of preschool teachers and caregivers completed only high school. Bridges et al. suspected that professional development opportunities might improve the retention rates of childcare workers by preparing them for the job.

In addition to increasing employee motivation, professional training opportunities could provide employees with advanced skills to care for children of military families. The report on education, wages, and benefits of the Wisconsin's Child Care Workforce showed that only 38.1% of childcare workers in Wisconsin had any college education (Dresser, Rodriguez, & Meder, 2016). These results indicated that professional

development was necessary among childcare workers in the United States, including the military childcare setting as well as the general childcare setting (Dresser et al., 2016).

Professional recognition results from clear job or role definition and qualification standards. The Institute of Medicine and National Research Council (IMNRC, 2012; 2015) discussed efforts to produce an accurate definition for the role of teachers in early childhood education (ECE). The 2012 report of the IMNRC stated that only about 6% of the ECE workforce is licensed. This small percentage of licensed teachers in the workforce complicates the issue of professional recognition (IMNRC, 2012).

The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) predicted a rapid increase in demands for ECE teachers from 2016 to 2024 nationally; a growth of 14% to 17% in ECE jobs and preschool teachers is a prediction (Limardo, Sweeney, & Taylor, 2016). The projected population growth in the culturally and linguistically diverse population groups in the U.S., especially in states such as Illinois, indicated an increased need for a diverse ECE workforce to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of the children in ECE (Couse & Recchia, 2016; Heineke, Kennedy, & Lees, 2013; Nelson, Main, & Kushto-Hoban, 2012; Thorp & Sánchez, 2013).

In addition to the need for additional ECE teachers is an increased need for preparation programs for teachers in ECE (Couse & Recchia, 2016). Ongoing programs promoting bachelor's degrees, with a specialization in ECE, are being required for teachers (Barnett, Carolan, Squires, Clarke Brown, & Horowitz, 2015).

The provision of training prospects could reduce turnover (Rolfe, 2005). Moreover, researchers found that when there is increased staff retention in childcare

institutions, the quality of childcare increases (Barnett et al., 2015; Rolfe, 2005; Wright, 2011). Incentives that enable childcare workers to achieve higher levels of education in ECE may increase ECE teachers in the workforce, bring stability, and improve the quality of care provided to the children (Wright, 2011).

### **Hygiene Factors Related to Perceptions of Workplace Conditions**

Poor workplace conditions and work experiences can have a negative influence on retention rates and job satisfaction (Bridges et al., 2011; Happo, Maatta, & Uusiautti, 2013; Riojas-Cortez, Alanis, & Flores, 2013; Torres, 2012). Principals who make the needs of their employees a priority are also investing in the care of the children they serve (Torres, 2012). Key issues surrounding the retention of childcare workers and their workplace environment include the workload of teachers, perceptions of autonomy, and satisfaction with disciplinary measures (Torres, 2012).

Researchers have shown that personal perceptions of self-efficacy might provide indications of job satisfaction and low retention rates (Barnes, 2013; Gil-Flores, 2017; McLennan, McIlveen, & Perera, 2017). Lloyd and Sullivan (2012) found that teachers identified academic or professional situations that can influence their sense of self and influence burnout. Preschool teachers who suffered from burnout also reported low self-esteem and self-efficacy that led to turnover intent (Jeon, Buettner, & Grant, 2017).

Rentzou (2012) conducted a survey that investigated the difference between burnout of kindergarten teachers and burnout of childcare workers in Greece. The results indicated that kindergarten teachers experienced a higher level of emotional fatigue than

childcare workers; whereas, childcare workers experienced a higher perceptions levels of depersonalization than kindergarten teachers (Rentzou, 2012).

Shpancer et al. (2008) studied 49 childcare workers in daycare centers and concluded that demands placed upon childcare workers could contribute to employee burnout and turnover rate, even though the workers indicated that they enjoyed working with the children. Other factors such as organizational support, the level and type of supervision, and childcare workers' age and educational levels were found to contribute significantly to burnout in a study of 63 full-time childcare worker participants (Decker, Bailey, & Westergaard, 2002).

Conflicts arise when the beliefs of childcare workers are not aligned with developmentally appropriate practices (Elfer & Page, 2015). Work-related conflicts of any type can influence job satisfaction and retention rates. The environment of the workplace, as well as issues related to different beliefs of appropriate practices, result in high rates of turnover and employee burnout (Elfer & Page, 2015).

### **Hygiene Factors Related to Demographic Characteristics**

Hygiene factors describe negative factors such as policy, work conditions, relationships with supervisors and subordinates, and salary that can create negative work experiences and dissatisfaction within the work environment (Schwab & Heneman, 1970). Hygiene factors can include demographic characteristics as well. Three of the factors related to demographic characteristics include age, gender, and international perspective (Schwab & Heneman, 1970).

**Age.** Age can play an important role in overall satisfaction with being a childcare worker (Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn, & Downer, 2012). Researchers have shown that the majority of direct-care staff members were under 40 years of age, a factor that could indicate less experience and education than older childcare workers (Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, & Amsden, 2009; Sugarman, 2011; Whitebook et al., 2012). Holochwost et al. (2009) proposed that employees under the age of 30 contribute to high rates of employee turnover, and employees between the ages of 30 and 40 contribute to high rates of employee retention. Holochwost et al. (2009) also indicated that employees between 40 to 55 years old provide the best potential for retention in this field. Childcare workers who are younger and have less experience are more likely to leave their job than older and more experienced childcare workers (Holochwost et al., 2009).

**Gender.** Men are represented poorly in early childhood development classrooms, a fact that elicits attention from researchers (Cameron, 2013). Gender roles once were more specific for females than males in teaching young children (Cameron, 2013). Early childhood teaching was considered as a female role because of the perception that young children needed mothering (Seifert, 1974). Seifert found that the sex role expectations tended to prohibited men from entering the field, as they were expected to perform poorly with young children, and boards of directors often questioned men's commitment. Furthermore, being part of a minority group and needing peer support, men in childcare jobs experienced isolation that led to their decision to leave their job assignments (Browder & Knopf, 2014).

Gender influences the financial compensation childcare workers received (Rolfe, 2005). Rolfe (2005) found that financial compensation is a key factor related to the shortage of qualified male applicants. Coyne (2015) indicated that male childcare workers had little experience working with young children, as opposed to other careers options that influence employment opportunities. Coyne added that 15% of new teachers in the ECE field leave during the first year, while 50% leave after 5 years. A higher attrition rate for men exists possibly because of inadequate compensation and benefits (Coyne, 2015). Apple (2013) cited that men make up only 5% of childcare workers in the United States, with a little over 2% being preschool and kindergarten teachers. Other countries have a higher percentage of male childcare workers (Apple, 2013). Factors that may contribute to lower numbers of male childcare providers in the United States are stigma, gender stereotyping, low wages, lack of appreciation, and the predominance of females in the childcare industry (Apple, 2013). These factors indicate a possible relationship between gender, social status, age, and wages, suggesting that each factor affects the others, and all factors affect the retention rate of childcare workers (Apple, 2013).

**International perspective.** In Europe, employment in the ECE field is perceived as not suitable or typical for male employees, which leads to less than one third of practitioners in this field being male (Pirard, Schoenmaeckers, & Camus, 2015). Pirard et al. (2015) reported the belief that the field is still perceived as needing little professional skills because taking care of young children is an area that females often find themselves in because of their mothering role. According to Pirard et al., the respondents from the

Federation Wallonia-Brussels indicated that there was no gender-based distinction in the tasks allocated to staff. Rather, the different specialization areas or a particular interest of teachers sparked different role allocations. This practice at the specific institution indicated that there has been progress in accepting and utilizing men as part of the ECE workforce (Pirard et al., 2015).

Another study in the German-speaking section of Switzerland reported that men found themselves in the predicament that they might be suspected of pedophile tendencies when reporting for duty at ECE institutions (Nentwich, Poppen, Schälin, & Vogt, 2013). Cameron (2013) also remarked on the notion that men working in the ECE field often are perceived as not normal; however, there has been a widespread acceptance of males in the European ECE field. Managers in the ECE field are appreciative of the different skills that men bring in working with young children. Although the authors studied male ECE workers' identity conflict, the results of their study indicated a tendency to allocate roles according to specialization and interest and not perceived sex roles, which supports the findings of Pirard et al. (2015).

Both Cameron (2013) and Nentwich et al. (2013) discussed the care versus education dichotomy that still divides the ECE approach today. Whereas, the care viewpoint seems to call for increased warmth and discipline, which might serve to keep males isolated from the core functions, the focus on education embraces all opportunities for learning. A higher number of men are working in the education-focused institutions in comparison to the care-focused institutions (Cameron, 2013; Nentwich et al., 2013).

Based on the literature reviewed, it seems that progress is being made in including and welcoming males in the predominantly female ECE profession (Cameron, 2013; Nentwich et al., 2013). Apart from low wages and limited promotion opportunities that are major obstacles to both sexes, it seems that there may still be gender stereotypes and isolation of the minority male group that may contribute to the small percentage of males in the ECE field internationally (Cameron, 2013; Nentwich et al., 2013). Researchers were unanimous in their views that the presence of males in ECE is beneficial and that steps should be taken to increase the number of males in the ECE profession Apple, 2013; Cameron, 2013; Nentwich et al., 2013; Pirard et al., 2015). None of the reviewed studies focused on male ECE workers in the military setting.

### **Implications**

The problem addressed in this study was the high turnover rates of childcare workers in the military setting, especially within the first year of employment. This situation was not unique to the military setting, as a review of the literature indicated that this situation is similar in civilian childcare organizations in the U.S. and internationally. In this study, however, the focus was on the military setting because childcare is essential to the nature of the parents' work in this setting. The problem was complicated by the fact that the administrator of the chosen childcare center indicated difficulties in recruiting trained staff, with the result that inexperienced staff had to be hired and many staff members resigned within the first year of their appointment. This unsatisfactory situation compromised the quality of care provided to the children served in the center.

Although poor wages and benefits were cited as the reason childcare workers had such a high turnover rate, this argument also held true for the military, in which childcare workers received competitive pay but received no benefit packages. The questions that required answers included understanding why many of the childcare workers in the military resigned within the first year of employment and why it was difficult to recruit new staff. The answer to these questions rested in a complex combination of hygiene factors discussed in the literature.

The results of this study offered knowledge that may benefit stakeholders, including childcare workers, military parents, and the children under the care of the childcare workers. The aim of this research study was to establish a practical program that addressed the needs identified in the literature review. One need was to provide support training and education for childcare workers because so many workers had no college training to prepare them to provide service in ECE. Related to this need, the project for this study was based on the literature and included a position paper outlining the need for a formal mentoring program for first-year childcare workers in military child development centers.

Based on the review of literature, various factors emerged that could influence the retention rate of childcare workers. The same factors could influence, in whole or in part, childcare workers' job satisfaction and their decision to resign from the military child development center. The findings from this project study could serve to encourage the directors of the military child development center to review and strengthen the retention rates by adding components that addressed the needs of first-year childcare workers. In

addition to local implications, the results from this study have the potential to bring about policy recommendations or a mentoring program for new childcare workers in military child development programs. These actions from military leadership may assist with low retention rates of childcare workers. The data gained from this study provided information to aid the directors of the child development center and the leaders of the Navy in addressing the cycle of attrition by implementing programs for first-year childcare workers to assist with retention rates.

The position paper includes the result of this study and outlines the need to create a mentoring program for new childcare workers. My purpose in describing the need for creating a mentoring program was to support and enhance new childcare workers' experiences under the supervision of a trained mentor in order to support childcare workers during their first year of employment. The suggested mentoring program included elements from Herzberg's two-factor theory regarding job satisfaction (Schwab & Heneman, 1970). A mentoring program may benefit first-year childcare workers, who may be able to practice their child development knowledge and the skills they have learned during new-hire training, while being supported and supervised by a trained mentor, based on the childcare workers' individual needs. In order for a mentoring program to be effective, a training program was included for the mentors of the childcare workers.

As part of the mentoring program, a training program for the mentors may ensure the mentors are knowledgeable and competent in their ability to interact, model, and provide techniques to new childcare workers' during their first year of employment. For

effectiveness, the mentor may be a trained childcare worker, with vast experience in the childcare field. Thus, mentors may be able to understand the challenges associated with being a childcare worker. Developing a mentoring program for new childcare workers and for the mentors of childcare workers may provide a program with the potential of being implemented throughout the Navy.

With the possibility of developing a mentoring program for new childcare workers and for mentors of childcare workers, I will collaborate with Navy leadership and present the findings from my project study to Navy leadership personnel in a position paper or administrative brief format to educate representatives regarding factors that influence childcare workers to resign from the child development center and how the mentoring program may benefit other Navy programs. My purpose for collaborating with Navy leadership are may to enhance current policies for first-year childcare workers and to implement a mentoring program as a way of addressing the low retention rates of childcare workers and increasing job satisfaction.

### **Summary**

In this section, I focused on the problem of high turnover rates in military childcare workers within their first-year of employment. The fact that quality childcare is essential in military services makes this problem significant. Furthermore, the military constitutes the largest employer of employer-supported childcare workers in the U.S. (Civic Impulse, 2017). The theoretical framework that guided this research was the two-factor theory of Herzberg (1966), who proposed the existence of motivating and hygiene factors at work in employment. These factors contribute to job satisfaction and turnover

intent. The answers to the research questions that were asked concerning the participants' experiences at the military childcare center provided insight about childcare workers' positive and negative work experiences. I interpreted and integrated the outcomes of information-gathering with what emerged from the literature to form a comprehensive idea of why military childcare workers leave the employment at such high rates.

The literature reviewed for this study indicated that various influences may affect job satisfaction of workers in the military childcare center, including factors such as education, training, wages, social status, organizational culture, and behavioral issues of children in the childcare center (Apple, 2013; Browder & Knopf, 2014; Cameron, 2013; Elfer & Page, 2015; Nentwich et al., 2013; Pirard et al., 2015). In summary, the researchers featured in the literature review examined hygiene factors related to compensation and benefits, professional development, workplace conditions, organizational culture, and wages and compensation, all of which demonstrated an influence on job satisfaction and retention of childcare workers. The results of this study provided insights relative to the high turnover rate of childcare workers at the military child development center.

In the following section of this study, I presented the study methodology and described the participants in terms of the population and sample, along with the procedures of the research. The data collection and analysis process will be discussed, and I will also include other salient aspects of the methodology, as necessary.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Qualitative Research Design**

The methodology for this project study was a case qualitative study design. A qualitative case study is an inquiry that focuses on the study of a person, group, or organization to provide insight into a particular issue (Merriam, 2002, 2009; Stake, 1995). In a qualitative case study, the researcher focuses on a single phenomenon, bounded system, entity, or case presented from the participants' perspectives (Creswell, 2012; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). The case for this project study was the work experiences of childcare workers during their first year of employment at a military child development center. I interviewed childcare workers to understand the factors that influenced their decision to resign.

Creswell (2012) proposed that a case study is one of the best options when a researcher works with a smaller group of participants or a bounded system to provide insight into a particular issue. A bounded system is one in which the participants are all within the boundaries of the context of the study. In the present study, the boundary was employment as a childcare worker at a specific military childcare center.

Other research designs may have been less effective for this study. For example, a quantitative study may have produced insufficient data for understanding the perceptions and views of childcare workers. Although a quantitative study could have produced results to suggest what the issues for childcare workers might be, only a qualitative study could ensure that their perspectives were understood fully.

## Participants

### Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of the management team and childcare workers who worked for 1 year or less at a military child development center located in the Northeast United States. I used purposive sampling to select the participants and studied three groups of participants: (a) childcare workers who resigned during their first year of employment; (b) childcare workers in their first year of employment; and (c) the management team consisting of the director, assistant director, and a training and curriculum specialist. With those participants in mind, I used five indicators as the inclusion criteria to identify participants:

1. employed in the first year of service at the military childcare center,
2. previously employed at the military childcare center but resigned within the first year of employment,
3. employed as part of the management team at the military childcare center,
4. older than 18 years and younger than 60 years, and
5. included among employees who gave consent for the interview to be audio recorded.

In addition to the interview data, I also collected the following demographic details:

1. age group,
2. prior experience at a registered childcare center,
3. highest education attained,

4. early childhood education qualifications or professional development activities,
5. marital status,
6. gender, and
7. English proficiency.

Eight of the 12 participants were beginners, having less than 1 year of experience as a childcare worker. Six of the 12 participants were childcare workers who had no educational training beyond high school. There were no males represented among the participants in this study. Table 1 presents the demographics of the participants in this qualitative case study.

Table 1

*Demographics of the 15 Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Education	Profession	Employment	Pay or Benefit
Participant 1	18	Female	H.S. Diploma	Current	10 Months	Flex
Participant 2	25	Female	H.S. Diploma	Current	7 Months	Flex
Participant 3	27	Female	Bachelor's	Current	12 Months	Benefits
Participant 4	54	Female	H.S. Diploma	Current	12 Months	Flex
Participant 5	41	Female	H.S. Diploma	Current	10 Months	Flex
Participant 6	38	Female	Bachelor's	Current	1 Months	Flex
Participant 7	38	Female	H.S. Diploma	Current	3 Months	Flex
Participant 8	20	Female	Bachelor's	Current	4 Months	Flex
Participant 9	19	Female	Bachelor's	Current	13 Months	Flex
Participant 10	34	Female	Master's	Prior	13 Months	N/A
Participant 11	21	Female	Bachelor's	Prior	6 Months	N/A
Participant 12	23	Female	H.S. Diploma	Prior	11 Months	N/A
Participant 13	50	Female	Bachelor's	Management	21 Years	Benefits
Participant 14	29	Female	Bachelor's	Management	3 Years	Benefits
Participant 15	45	Female	Bachelor's	Management	10 Years	Benefits

*Note:* H.S. = high school, N/A = not applicable.

### **Justification for the Sample Size**

I anticipated the response rate for this qualitative case study may be 30-50% for mailed surveys, which is standard, and a lower rate for telephone interviews or surveys (see Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtler, 2010). The desired response rate anticipated for this study was (a) three individuals from management, (b) eight to 10 current employees from a convenience sampling of the 120 childcare workers employed at the childcare center, and (c) eight to 10 prior employees who are no longer at the child development center. According to Creswell (2012) and Merriam (2009), saturation is typically sought in

qualitative research to determine sampling sufficiency. However, for this study there were some issues with gaining access to the participants that were not anticipated at the beginning of the study. Nevertheless, saturation was achieved based on the responses from the 12 childcare workers and three management participants to the research questions. Researchers may be faced with unforeseen issues or constraints that need to be considered when conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2012, Lodico et al., 2010, Merriam, 2009). In my study, the unforeseen issues and constraints included not being able to contact participants directly, which resulted in minimal responses from both current and prior childcare workers at the center. Due to new military legal restraints, I was only able to have a notice posted on the employee bulletin board requesting voluntary participation in the study. However, I was fortunate that current childcare workers provided the notice to prior childcare workers, and I received responses from all three intended groups including nine current childcare workers, three prior childcare workers, and three managers. Face-to-face contact was not feasible for this study due to the geographical location of the center. E-mail requests were followed up with a phone call, which was appropriate and likely increased the response rate.

### **Gaining Access to Participants**

Collecting the data for this study began with contacting the Navy Child and Youth Programs department head via e-mail with a letter of cooperation requesting permission for childcare workers from one of their child development centers to participate in the study. In the letter, I addressed the purpose and nature of the study and the criteria for selecting the participants. Specifically, I requested access to the contact information for

childcare workers employed for the child development center for one year or less at the time of the study.

Once approval was granted from Walden University's institutional review board (IRB Number 11-0117-0296657), I contacted the Navy Child and Youth Programs department head to request a list of names and contact information of current and prior childcare workers; however, due to some recent changes within the Navy's process with requesting personal contact information, I was unable to receive current and prior childcare workers' contact information. I was able to have a notice placed on the employee bulletin board regarding my research and contact information for employees to use to contact me directly if they were interested in voluntarily participating in my study.

I was contacted by nine current childcare workers who were in their first year of employment, three prior childcare workers who had resigned during their first year of employment, and three managers. I e-mailed an invitation to participate and the letter of consent to all 12 childcare workers and the three managers at the military child development center. I provided additional instructions in the e-mail about the study and explained the purpose for selecting current and prior childcare workers and members of the management team to participate in this study to ensure the participants understood their participation was voluntary and that they could end their participation at any time.

### **Measures for Protection**

Walden University IRB permission was granted prior to any research being conducted, which helped to ensure the research plan was appropriate and the benefits of the research were greater than any risk to the participants (see Creswell, 2012). The IRB

approval of Walden University helped me to ensure that my behavior was appropriate, professional, and ethical (see Creswell, 2012). It is the responsibility of a researcher to explain the ethical standards to the participants and adhere to these rules during a study. The letter of consent included an explanation of participants' privacy and a confidentiality agreement, and a copy of the letter of consent was provided to each participant to keep for their reference. I also verbally reiterated that their identities may be kept confidential by assigning numbers randomly to ensure confidentiality and that all responses may be recorded with the participant's number only, as participants' trust and confidentiality should be protected as much as possible. I informed the participants, both verbally and in writing, that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. All participants were between 18 and 60 years of age, as all childcare workers must be at least 18 years of age to be considered for employment. Protection of the participants from emotional and physical harm was of the utmost importance. I minimized any potential risks to the participants by following a strict set of ethical and institutional guidelines set forth by Walden's IRB, and ensured compliance with these guidelines throughout this study.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection was qualitative in the form of a case study using telephone interviews with the participants. An interview protocol served as a guide to introduce the purpose and method of the study. I asked semistructured interview questions that provided participants with the opportunity to describe their work experiences and perceptions. When conducting the phone interviews, I addressed each question with each

participant and covered the established topics while remaining neutral. I asked probing and clarifying questions as needed to maximize understanding. Examples of clarifying questions that were asked were “Can you tell me more about that topic?” or “How did you feel about...?” (Ritchie et al., 2013).

I chose to conduct the interviews by telephone with participants because they were not local individuals. A negative aspect of using telephone interviews was telephone interviews did not allow for nonverbal cues to be viewed; however, I wrote field notes and kept a journal of the interviews to aid with interpretation and triangulation of results (see Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). I conducted all telephone interviews from my private home office. Interviews took approximately 1 hour per participant. I recorded the telephone interviews using an iPhone application. As necessary, I asked follow-up questions to clarify information provided in response to a particular question. At the end of the interview, I asked whether the participant may like to add any additional information. Digital recordings from the interviews were transcribed. After transcribing the interviews, I e-mailed participants a copy of their interviews and asked each participant to review her transcribed responses, clarify any information, and add insights as needed for accuracy of the findings. The transcript review provided the participants with an opportunity to correct any errors made during the interview or transcription process. I stored the collected data using an electronic and hard copy grouping system, and saved the interview transcriptions and digital recordings onto a password-protected computer. I also locked hard copies of the data in a filing cabinet to which only I have access.

Each participant has an assigned folder in electronic and hard copy form. I secured all interviews, themes, coding, transcriptions, and any other data from the participants, and assigned the participants numerical identifiers for confidentiality purposes. After 5 years, I will permanently delete the files from my computer and destroy any remaining data from this study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role in this research project was to serve as the instrument for data collection and to analyze the data collected as Creswell (2012), Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) and Merriam (2002) described and directed. As a researcher, it was my responsibility to interview participants and interpret the data collected to explain the participants' perceptions and views (see Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). I also maintained awareness of my personal biases and experiences, which could have influenced the outcome of the study. I achieved this by keeping field notes and writing in a reflective journal (see Heppner, Wampold, & Kivlighan, 2008).

I have worked in the childcare field for over 25 years. Most of that time I worked for the Marine Corps. My last position with the Marine Corps included an assignment to oversee the Children, Youth, and Teen Programs; the Exceptional Family Members Program; and the School Liaison Program. I then began my career with the Navy in their Child and Youth Programs as a specialist assigned to inspect Navy Child and Youth Programs worldwide. At the time of this study, I was the regional child and youth program manager with the Navy. I provide oversight for the Navy Child and Youth

Programs for Navy Region Southwest and ensure compliance with all applicable regulations and policies.

I have also been a director of a military child development center during my career, and I have had personal experience trying to maintain child-to-adult ratios due to issues with low retention rates of childcare workers in a child development center. As a Child and Youth Programs administrator, I have also witnessed the struggle program managers and center administrators encounter as they attempt to maintain child-to-adult ratio requirements and regulations that govern child development programs in the military setting. Although my experience in the field of childcare assisted me in reviewing the data, the potential for personal biases existed. I had recently joined the Navy as a regional child and youth program manager in 2016. However, I did not work for the center where the study took place, and I did not have any oversight of their organization. I did not personally know any of the participants in this study. Additional possible biases included my previous knowledge and experience with the required professional development and the low retention rates of childcare workers in military child development centers as an inspector with the Navy and as a branch head with the Marine Corps. It was important to acknowledge my personal biases during the interview process and to follow my interview guidelines and protocols to avoid influencing the participants' responses.

It is important to establish a positive researcher-participant working relationship (Creswell, 2012; Lodico et al., 2010). Researchers should have patience, good communication skills, and be sensitive to the needs of participants (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Researchers also need to have active listening skills to ensure an accurate understanding of participants' statements (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).

### **Methods of Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship**

Researchers should establish a compassionate and ethical researcher-participant relationship by establishing professional boundaries and compassion. A researcher can demonstrate compassion by collaborating with research participants and identifying their value to the study (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Establishing rapport with participants via telephone interviews is more challenging than face-to-face interviews because of a lack of nonverbal cues through the observation of body language. I established a researcher-participant relationship by first creating a professional relationship with all participants, ensuring that they fully understood that their participation in this study was voluntary, and that they were able to decline to participate in the study at any time. I also ensured that the participants understood their rights, my responsibility as a researcher, and that I may ensure their privacy and confidentiality. The consent form assisted me with the establishment of professional boundaries throughout the presentation of the research study and provided additional information concerning confidentiality and processes used in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

I utilized a qualitative case study design for this study. I also used thematic analysis to review the data from the three groups of participants. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis used utilized with qualitative data (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012). Themes are defined as specific patterns that are determined

across data sets (Guest et al., 2012). Themes are established through coding, and these themes are crucial for describing the data and developing the categories used for the analysis (Guest et al., 2012).

Data analysis procedures for this case study included: completing transcriptions, identifying descriptive ideas that emerged from the data collected, organizing descriptive ideas into themes, and triangulating responses from three groups of participants. I began analysis of the data through journaling and reflecting. I reviewed each interview transcript line-by-line to gain an understanding of what the participants' experienced during their first year of employment as a military childcare worker. Case study data analysis is an interactive activity in which the data are scrutinized and examined during the research process (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). I sought patterns and themes that emerged from participants' transcribed interviews and then categorized the participants' responses into major, minor, and subthemes by using an open and axial coding processes (Ritchie et al., 2013). I used the participants' responses to the interview questions to guide the flow of categories and to establish themes that were supported by the review of literature on childcare workers and categorized as major, minor, and subthemes (Ritchie et al., 2013). Determining major themes in a qualitative case study depends upon the data collected and the interpretation of the researcher conducting the study (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009; Ritchie et al., 2013; Yin, 2009). For this study, I determined that the top two themes that emerged were referenced more frequently by the participants over any other themes, and I designated these as the major themes for each research question. Themes that emerged less often, or received fewer references from the

participants than the top two themes, were the minor themes as they provided additional findings for the study. Subthemes were also identified to expound further on the major and minor themes.

Qualitative studies utilize coding procedures and methodical organization that can be achieved best in phases (Ritchie et al., 2013). Creswell (2012) recommended three phases for coding. The first phase consists of open coding and labeled data (Creswell, 2012). During the second phase, I completed axial coding to re-examine the initial open coding and further develop categories (Creswell, 2012). For phase three, I took the developed categories and developed additional themes (Creswell, 2012). Major, minor, and subthemes emerged from these coding phases, and I organized the themes into a narrative that interpreted important information regarding the participants' work experiences and perceptions.

Although there are computer software programs available for qualitative research, I did not use any computer software. I analyzed all the data by hand. As themes emerged from the interview questions, I annotated the themes within the margins of the interview transcripts. I then combined similar themes and qualitative coding throughout the analysis process and transferred each coded transcript into a separate file so that I could compare new information to the themes and codes I had already used. As part of member checking, I shared the results of the coding process with participants and received their input regarding the themes identified and the groups formed to insure my accuracy in interpreting their responses. I made changes as needed after the discussion with each participant.

I selected a qualitative approach for this study as the research problem did not require any comparison or measurement with another quantity or variable as required in a quantitative approach. The case study approach was chosen as it affords an in-depth exploration of a particular place, group, or site in which the phenomenon studied is taking place (Creswell, 2012; Ritchie et al., 2012). I selected telephone interviews as the option for the study site to explore the perceptions and personal work experiences of childcare workers because of my geographical location from the center. An analysis of the data gathered, using a qualitative approach with open-ended interview questions allowed for a deeper understanding of the problem that may not have been possible with a quantitative study.

### **Data Analysis Results**

This section contains the results from the thematic analysis of the 15 interview transcripts from three groups of participants: current childcare workers, prior childcare workers, and management team members. I used the interview data supported by the review of literature on childcare workers to answer the research questions of the study.

#### **Research Question 1**

The first research question focused on how the childcare workers described their work experiences during their first year of employment at a military childcare center. From the thematic analysis of the interview responses, two major themes emerged for this research question. Seven of the participants from the two groups of childcare workers described their work experiences as lacking personal and professional growth opportunities, and seven of the participants from all three groups reported having a

passion to serve and care for the military families. Among the seven participants who indicated that their work experiences lacked growth opportunities were three former employees and four current employees. The group of seven participants reporting a passion to serve and care for military families was composed of one former employee, three current employees, and three management team members. These participants shared both the positive and negative aspects of working at the military childcare center with one minor theme. Participants believed opportunities could increase over time. This minor theme was reflective of responses from three current employees and two management team members. Table 2 contains the themes that addressed the first research question of the study.

Table 2

*Work Experiences Themes Addressing RQ1*

Theme	Major/Minor Theme Designation	Subthemes	Number of Participants References	Percentage of Participant References
Lacking personal and professional growth opportunities	Major 1	Needing more pay or other benefits Needing mentors for guidance and support Needing hands-on opportunities to apply their knowledge Needing promotion opportunities Needing more work hours Needing management support	7	47
Childcare workers' passion to serve and care for the military families	Major 2		7	47
Believing the opportunities will increase in the long run	Minor 1		5	33

*Note:* RQ1 = Research Question 1.

### **Major Theme 1 to RQ1: Lacking personal and professional growth**

**opportunities.** The first major theme of the study was the perception that there was a lack of personal and professional growth opportunities for childcare workers at this military childcare center. Seven of the 15 participants, a group that included four current childcare workers and three prior childcare workers, identified negative aspects of working at the center and reported the need for the following: (a) higher pay or other

benefits, (b) mentors for guidance and support, (c) hands-on opportunities to apply their knowledge, (c) promotion opportunities, (d) increased work hours, and (e) management support. The four participants from the current childcare workers group and the three participants from the prior childcare workers group revealed their jobs and responsibilities may have been more satisfactory with the presence of personal and professional opportunities. The management team group believed that opportunities were available, but the individual childcare worker had to meet the requirements to achieve any advancement or growth potential within the center.

***Subtheme 1: Needing higher pay or other benefits.*** The first subtheme that emerged was the need for an increased in pay as well as other benefits. The current and prior childcare worker participants expressed their disappointment with the absences of pay increases as well as the slow progress and development of their careers at the center. Participant 1 was an employee of the center for almost 1 year and noted how she was still not receiving benefits for her hard work and dedication. She added how the pay raises were not high enough to maintain the increase in cost of living within the area, saying:

I have not been here one year yet. I am still not receiving any benefits. Although there are a couple of pay raises, it still is not enough for the cost of living in this area. I am also still part-time and had hoped to be working more hours by now.

Participant 2 echoed Participant 1's realization and said, "I didn't realize it may be so difficult to get promoted or how long it may take to be able to receive benefits." Participant 2 explained that she did not expect the lack of development and progress as a

childcare worker. Aside from the lack of promotion, other health and medical benefits also were not available.

Participant 3, who was also hired as a flex worker, complained of the lack of benefits and the lack of mentors to assist childcare workers as they learn about their responsibilities. As a flex worker, the benefits could help in motivating childcare workers to perform at a higher level in fulfilling their duties. The availability of mentors was also another factor that could aid in improving the competencies of the childcare worker, which could also increase the morale in the workplace. Participant 3 added:

Benefits may be helpful for workers who are hired as flex. Having someone who knows how to mentor first-year childcare workers could help, but also teaching how to become a mentor could help also because there are correct and incorrect ways to do things.

Participant 8 strongly remarked about how the lack of benefits affected her overall work satisfaction, saying, “No, I can’t afford to continue to work here without benefits. I didn’t realize I might never get any benefits.” Participant 8 showed her disappointment with the lack of rewards and benefits, despite her hard work and effort. She commented on how she is unable to continue being a childcare worker in this kind of situation.

Further, Participant 10 shared a statement about the lack of benefits and proper financial compensation. This participant expressed her desire to acquire benefits and an overall better compensation as she also indicated a need to support and feed her family. Participant 10 stated, “I needed benefits to make the lower pay worth it for me and my

family. I also wanted to grow professionally and have promotion opportunities but did not see that as a possibility in the near future.”

Participant 11 also believed the employer needed to increase the pay of the childcare workers. She then shared her frustration about the lack of opportunities to excel as well as lack of opportunity to receive sufficient compensation for their work.

Participant 11 explained: “Yes, pay should be higher, and we should be able to get benefits after the first 6 months or so, but that doesn’t happen.”

Finally, Participant 12 reiterated, “Maybe if benefits were offered, and I could have gotten full-time status, I may consider continuing as a childcare worker. There should be a better support system for new staff.” As a flex worker, Participant 12 shared the same sentiments as the first seven participants. Beside the lack of benefits, the lack of support became another significant factor that represented the negative experience identified by Participant 12.

Participant 14, from the management team, supported the need for all staff to receive benefits and additional support for new childcare workers to assist workers with the training that is required by the Navy child development programs.

***Subtheme 2: Needing mentors for guidance and support.*** The second subtheme was the need for mentors to provide guidance and support. The participants believed the presence of mentors could equip them with the ability to develop and become best suited for their jobs as childcare workers. Participant 1 shared a concern about the lack of feedback and evaluation tools. She then indicated the need for mentors to guide childcare workers as they apply their learning on a daily basis. According to Participant 1,

I didn't really get any feedback except only if I did something wrong. I think if we had someone that we worked with on a daily basis to mentor us, then it may make it easier to implement what we learned.

Participant 2 was a childcare worker for 6 months and admitted her lack of knowledge and skills about the job. This participant expressed a desire for mentors who could share their experiences with the new hires to learn as they perform their duties.

Participant 2 narrated:

There is too much information that the childcare worker is expected to learn and be able to implement, with little to no mentoring... Having a mentor may be very helpful. We all do not have the skills needed, so having someone mentor us may be great and could make the learning more hands-on.

Further, Participant 3 wanted to spread awareness about the lack of benefits and compensation the flex workers received. She added that it may also be helpful to provide mentors to the new hires in order to guide them and oversee their performance as they adjust to the responsibilities as childcare workers. Participant 3 shared,

Benefits may be helpful for those workers who are hired as flex. Having someone who knows how to mentor first-year childcare workers could help, but also teaching workers how to become a mentor may be helpful as there are right procedures and processes and wrong procedures and processes.

Participant 10 also believed in the effectiveness of having mentors for the new hires. She believed her adjustment could have developed more smoothly if a mentor was

present to guide and assist her in fulfilling her responsibilities. The participant shared her personal experience, saying,

If I had a mentor right after my initial training, that may have been a huge help as I was trying to implement what I had been taught. It may have been great to have someone that knew the position inside and out that I could have to get answers to questions that I had.

Similarly, Participant 11 reported on the lack of assistance and guidance from the trainers and the management. Participant 11 explained,

We also don't have anyone to help us on a day-to-day basis because the trainers are always busy, and some of the other staff don't want to take the time to show us or help us; so if we had someone that we could go to and ask questions outside of the trainer, that may have helped. If we could have a mentor assigned to us during our initial training, then that may have helped a lot. We may have had someone that we could ask questions to and not have to rely on the trainer. It may have helped us feel like we were an important part of the team and they wanted us to be successful. It felt like they were more focused on checking a box on the training than on helping us.

Participant 11 also indicated that some staff members were difficult to approach and that made it uncomfortable to ask questions and could hinder new hires from performing their tasks. The participant also mentioned how a mentor may have changed her overall experience and made their first months easier and more productive.

*Subtheme 3: Needing hands-on opportunities to apply their knowledge.* The third subtheme that followed was the need for hands-on opportunities for childcare workers to apply their knowledge. Four of the participants, three current and one a prior childcare worker, reported the lack of hands-on opportunities that could have been applied to their knowledge. In comments by the management team members regarding hands-on opportunities for employees, team members indicated they provided hands-on opportunities. They agreed that an increased number of hands-on training activities may be added to the training that was provided. Participant 1 indicated how childcare workers are unable to apply their knowledge and skills from training because of the lack of assistance and opportunities to utilize their learning experiences. Participant 1 said, “We didn’t get the opportunity to practice what we learned, and there was no one to help us or to observe us.”

Participant 2 echoed Participant 1 and remarked, “There needs to be something the trainers can do to assist new hires in how to implement what they have learned.” Participant 2 suggested for trainers to assist the new hires as well as the other health workers who may need assistance. A proper application of the lessons learned by the workers may help in improving their capabilities further.

Meanwhile, Participant 8 explained the need for the management to look closely and manage the knowledge and capabilities of their workers better. Further, she suggested the need for a mentoring program for new hires. The participant stated, “Management needs to learn how to use staff members who have educational backgrounds and experiences. Having a mentoring program may help new hires as they

are learning new strategies and classroom management along with behavioral issues with the children.”

Finally, Participant 11 also described the difficulty of fulfilling duties without enough hands-on or actual experiences. She gave an example saying, “As a flex, you aren’t always assigned to a classroom at first and you are mostly filling in and giving other childcare workers breaks and stuff, so it is difficult to know how to manage a classroom.” The participant then shared how flex workers do not receive many opportunities to practice their knowledge and skills with hands-on learning opportunities.

***Subtheme 4: Needing promotion opportunities.*** The fourth subtheme was the need for promotion opportunities. Three of the seven participants, from the current childcare workers’ group and the prior childcare workers’ group, shared that there was a need for promotion opportunities at the center. Participant 2 expressed her frustration with the lack of progress and changes in her workplace. She believed a promotion has been long overdue as well as other benefits or rewards. The participant stated, “I didn’t realize it may be so difficult to get promoted or how long to be able to receive benefits.”

Participant 10 also commented on how the likelihood of receiving opportunities at the center is fading. She shared how she needs the low pay to be worth her time and effort for the organization, but other benefits are not offered as well. The participant expressed, “I needed benefits to make the lower pay worth it for me and my family. I also wanted to grow professionally and have promotion opportunities but did not see that as a possibility in the near future.”

Participant 12 emphasized the need for better and improved professional development opportunities for newly hired childcare workers. The participant commented, “Maybe if benefits were offered, and I could have gotten full-time status. There should be a better support system for new staff.” Participant 12’s comments are vital in emphasizing the childcare workers’ desire to learn and excel in their profession but are hindered by the lack of training for growth opportunities from management.

***Subtheme 5: Needing more work hours.*** The fifth subtheme that emerged was the need for more work hours. Several participants who were current and prior childcare workers indicated their hope to be given more work hours but were limited as a flex employee. Participant 1 stated that after almost a year; she was still a part-time worker. Then Participant 1 expressed her frustrations in the following statement,

I have not been here one year yet, and I am still not receiving any benefits.

Although there are a couple of pay raises, it still isn’t enough for the cost of living in this area. I am also still part-time and had hoped to be working more hours by now.

Participants from all three groups, the management team and the two groups of childcare workers, indicated that more work hours were preferred, but full-time hours were not authorized for flex employees. More hours may provide new hires with opportunities to improve their skills while childcare workers earn higher pay.

***Subtheme 6: Needing management support.*** The final subtheme was the need for management support, which was shared by seven of the childcare worker participants.

One management team member countered this view and felt that staff received support from management. As an example, Participant 10 commented,

I didn't feel we were valued or treated with respect by management. Not having any benefits impacted my decision to leave as well. It appeared that if management liked you, then you had a chance to be promoted, but if they did not then you either stayed in the same position or found another one. There also wasn't any real support offered by the trainers to help you become successful in the classroom once the training was conducted.

Participant 12 indicated that management seemed to favor certain staff members over others and did not feel that management was supportive. Several of the participants felt the lack of support from management who seemed to have their choices and favorites among the new hires. Lack of support made it more difficult for childcare workers to excel and perform at their best.

**Major Theme 2 to RQ1: Childcare workers' passion to serve and care for the military families.** The second major theme of the study was the childcare workers' passion to serve and care for the military families. Seven of the 15 participants, a group including three current childcare workers, one prior childcare worker, and three management team members, believed that although the benefits and opportunities were lacking, being able to serve the military families was rewarding. Whereas, the remaining participants from the childcare worker groups did express that their work was enjoyable but did not express a passion to serve. Participant 4 was happy to provide care for the military children. She expressed her happiness and contentment in serving the military

families. The participant stated, “I heard the organization was great to work for, and I may be providing care for our military children.”

Participant 5 also expressed her love and passion for her job. Similar to Participant 4, she stated the joy in serving the military families and the children. Participant 4 commented, “I love what I do, working with military families and children.” Meanwhile, Participant 6 echoed her love for children as well as her desire to give back and work for the military community. “I love working with children, and this is a way to give back to the military community.” Participant 13 from the management team group became more motivated to work based on the belief that they are doing service to the military families. She stated,

I see the positive changes with the program, and I want to continue to keep the program moving forward and help the staff and program to continue to learn and grow while improving our services. I like what I do with helping other military families.

Participant 14 from the management team group also shared the different factors on why she continued to stay and work at the center. This participant highlighted the gratifying feeling of being able to make a difference and help the military children to the best of their ability. Participant 14 said,

I have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of military children by ensuring that staff are trained and follow policies. The training is a lot, but I like what I do. Plus, there is professional growth potential with this organization, but I can also transfer to other locations to include overseas.

Participant 15, a management team member, expressed her personal connection with the military families as a military spouse. This background and experience made her value her work even more. She then explained how she has been applying her experiences to relate with and help more and more families at the center. Participant 15 said,

I like what I do with helping other military families in the same situation that I am in as a military spouse. I can relate to the families and their circumstances with military life, numerous moves, and being away from support systems like family and friends. The pay and benefits are good compared to the outside community.

Participant 15's response highlighted the personal connection that childcare workers form with the military families and their children. As time goes by, the workers build relationships and care for the military families and other military community employees whom they encounter at the center.

The first minor theme of the study was participants believing that opportunities at the center may increase in the long run. Three of the current childcare workers and two management team members believed that if employees stayed long enough, promotion and advancement opportunities may become available. Participant 2 believed, "There seems to be advancement opportunities if I stay with the program." Participants 6 and 8 also believed that if they worked hard and stayed with the program they could advance to a lead position, or even management one day. Participants 13 and 15, from the management team group, felt there were opportunities at the center for staff if they put in

their time and worked hard. Whereas the majority of prior childcare workers believed opportunities were limited.

For Research Question 1, regarding how the childcare workers describe their work experiences during their first year of employment at a military childcare center, there were two major themes and one minor theme. Participants from all three groups expressed their connection and passion to serve military families. However, the majority of the responses regarding the lack of personal and professional growth and the subthemes that emerged from the interviews were mainly from current and prior childcare workers. All three groups of participants provided insight into the work experiences of childcare workers during their first year of employment at the study site.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question asked about the positive work experiences perceived by the childcare workers that influenced their retention at the military child development center during their first year of employment. The thematic analysis of the 15 interview transcripts led to the development of two major themes answering the second research question. All 15 of the participants stated the most positive work experience was enjoying and appreciating the nature of their profession. The interviewed participants then highlighted the positive feelings they developed from providing a service and assistance to military families. The themes addressing Research Question 2 are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

*Positive Work Experiences Themes Addressing RQ2*

Theme	Major/Minor Theme Designation	Subthemes	Number of Participants References	Percentage of Participant References
Enjoying the nature of their profession	Major 1	Working with military families and children Interacting with peers and co-workers Having flexible work hours Being provided with mentors or partners for assistance Having a good work location Making a difference in the military community	15	100
Receiving various types of benefits	Major 2	Receiving various types of benefits Having training for development opportunities Receiving pay increase upon module completion Having the permission to use the military facilities	14	93

*Note:* RQ2 = Research Question 2.

**Major Theme 1 to RQ2: Enjoying the nature of their profession.** The third major theme of the study was the positive experience of enjoying the nature and environment of their profession. All 15 participants identified how working with military families and children, interacting with peers and co-workers, having flexible work hours, being provided with mentors or partners for assistance, having a good work location, and making a difference in the military community allowed and helped them to enjoy and continue to stay at the center. These subthemes are explored further below.

*Subtheme 1: Working with military families and children.* The first subtheme was working with military families and children. All 15 participants from all three groups enjoyed the nature of the profession. Ten of the 15 participants from the three groups found childcare work interesting and at the same time fulfilling to interact with the military families. Two of the former childcare workers, nine of the current childcare workers, and three members of the management team held this point of view. Participant 2 stated, “I like the people I work with and the military families and children.” The participant shared her joy and contentment in serving the military families.

Participant 3 added the positive influence of working with children as well as creating a change within the military community. The participant shared how she also developed positive relationships with the families and her co-workers. Participant 3 commented, “I love working with children and making a difference within the military community. I like my co-workers and those individuals whom I have become close to during my time here.” Participant 4 echoed the first two participants’ statements and responded, “I like my job and love working with the children.” This participant expressed her love and fulfillment in serving the military children.

Participant 5 stated that the positive working environment with the presence of the military families was an enjoyable experience. “I like the people I work with, and I like working with military families and children.” Participant 6 revealed how the work atmosphere has become lighter with the presence of her co-workers and the military children they assist. In addition, the training also helps her develop her skills to provide service to the families and their children. This participant stated, “So far, I like the people

I work with and enjoy the children. The organization provides the training.” Participant 8 explained that the two factors that made her work more bearable and manageable. This participant stated, “I love making a difference and working with children and military families.” Several of the participants expressed having a positive feeling based on being able to assist military families. Participant 12 from the prior childcare worker group and Participant 14 from the management team group felt they made a difference in the lives of the military families by working at the center.

***Subtheme 2: Interacting with peers and co-workers.*** The second subtheme that emerged was the ability to interact with peers and co-workers. Nine of the 15 participants from all three groups discussed their interactions with peers and co-workers as being positive. This group of nine interviewees consisted of two former workers, five current workers, and two management team members. These participants believed their work relationships, friendships built, and daily interactions allowed them to appreciate their work. These positive work interactions added to the participants’ reasons to work at the center.

As for Participant 3, she recalled how the time spent with the children as well as the families allowed her to appreciate her profession more highly than she did other work experiences. This participant stated, “I love working with children and making a difference within the military community. I like my co-workers and those individuals to whom I have become close to during my time here.”

Participant 5 shared her desire to continue to work at the center with these positive experiences. “Yes, I plan on continuing to work at the Center. I love the Location

of workplace, I bond with peers, and I appreciate the support of managers.” The participant indicated the location, people, and the overall management are the key factors that helped her to decide to stay at the center despite the lack of pay and benefits.

Participant 7 also expressed how the trainers have been approachable and helpful to the needs of the new hires, explaining, “The trainers are always providing guidance. I feel I can ask other childcare workers if I have any questions, and I have felt like part of a family.” Having supportive mentors then made her appreciate her job as she also developed other skills in the process. Participant 10 shared how she has also built a good working relationship with the trainers and managers at the center, “I got along with my peers, trainers, and managers for the most part.”

Participant 13 from the management team group noted the following positive experiences, including the ability to bond with peers at work. “The job is not difficult, encourages personal and professional development with tuition assistance, pay, bond with peers.” The participants believed their relationships with both the military children and their co-workers played a big role in their decision to remain at the center despite the difficulties and issues they had mentioned.

***Subtheme 3: Having flexible work hours.*** The third subtheme that followed was the ability to have flexible work hours, shared by five of the 15 participants. These participants liked the fact that they could maximize their hours before and after work. Participant 4 shared, “My flexible work hours have allowed me to pick up my grandchildren from school on a daily basis.”

Participant 10 emphasized how her schedule permitted her to complete other personal tasks and responsibilities. This participant also stated, “Work schedule, once assigned to a classroom, was good and allowed me to make adjustments to my family responsibilities.”

Participant 12 echoed Participants 4’s and Participant 10’s statements, saying, “My work hours were convenient for me because I worked part-time.” Participant 15, from the management team group, stated the different positive and encouraging factors for the childcare workers. This participant narrated, “Varied work schedule may work for some people to accommodate their families, and the job is easy. This is one of the factors that encourages personal and professional development, with tuition assistance, pay, and location close to home.” Participants described how they viewed the work schedule as a part-time or flex worker, as positive because it provided them with the time to accommodate other professional or family responsibilities.

***Subtheme 4: Being provided with mentors or partners for assistance.*** The fourth subtheme was the provision of mentors and partners to assist the newly-hired childcare workers. Participants 13, 14, and 15, all from the management team group, shared a similar positive experience regarding a mentor to assist them. Participant 13, from the management team, explained how novice childcare workers, during their first-year of employment are overwhelmed with the new environment, responsibilities, and workplace needs. In the statement that follows, Participant 13 indicated that the mentors and partners provided for new workers were helpful in guiding the new workers as they navigated their new positions.

First-year workers are overwhelmed with the size of the facility, and overwhelmed with so many different personalities. We try to pair them with a childcare worker during their observations, so they feel welcomed.

Participant 14, a management team member, explained how they do try their best to partner their new hires with experienced trainers to assist their smooth transition. This participant explained, “First-year childcare workers are provided training for free, and they have the support of the trainers, management team, and peers.”

Participant 15 stated, “They have support with our trainers, management team, and peers that they may not have in the community.” Although participants from the management team group felt novice childcare workers were supported with the training provided, participants from both childcare worker groups mentioned that having a mentor may be a positive experience giving workers the ability to learn from someone that has been in the childcare field to help them with their jobs at the center.

***Subtheme 5: Having a good work location.*** The fifth subtheme that followed was the good and convenient location of the center. The management representatives believed the center had a strategic location; making it more accessible for the childcare workers. Participant 13, from the management team group, found the workplace to be convenient as it was close to her home. The participant responded, “Work location is close to home.”

Participant 14, a management team member, felt the work location was convenient and shared, “Tuition assistance, professional development/training, on the job learning, location close to home, and pay” as the key factors that helped her to decide to stay with the center.

Participant 15, from the management team, echoed that the center was also “close to home.” Participants from the two childcare worker groups shared that having a good work location was another positive factor and found the center where they worked to be practical and accessible to where they lived.

***Subtheme 6: Making a difference in the military community.*** The sixth subtheme that followed was the ability to make a difference in the military community. The subtheme emerged from the analysis of the interviews with the three participant groups and their comments regarding their positive experience of working and serving the military families at the center. Participant 3 felt that her childcare profession was meaningful because of its mission to serve and help the military families. This participant stated, “I love working with children and making a difference within the military community.”

Participant 8 echoed, “I love making a difference and working with children and military families.” The participants’ genuine concern for the welfare and improvement of military families became the key deciding factors to stay and retain their jobs. Participants from all three groups believed they were making a difference in the military community and this was the reason they decided to work at the center.

**Major Theme 2 to RQ2: Receiving various types of benefits.** The fourth major theme of the study was the presence of various types of benefits for the first-year childcare workers. For 14 of the 15 participants, the availability of some benefits such as tuition assistance, training for development opportunities, pay increase upon module

completion, and access to military facilities were present in their employment agreement. These themes or benefits are further detailed below.

***Subtheme 1: Receiving tuition assistance.*** The first subtheme was the availability of tuition assistance for the childcare workers. Training and tuition assistance were two of the most referenced benefits by the interviewed participants. Participant 7 was grateful for the provision of tuition assistance, which aided her to develop her education further. This participant also mentioned how her pay increased as she completed the required modules. Participant 7 then shared, “Tuition assistance program was available to help me further my education, and pay increased as I completed my modules.”

Participant 9 had the same perception and experience as Participant 7, saying, “They provide us with training and I can further my education with the tuition assistance.”

Participant 10 was disappointed with the slow promotion opportunities despite her level of educational attainment, but still noted the availability of tuition assistance, stating, “I thought there were more promotion opportunities, but that wasn’t the case. There was tuition assistance available, but I already had a master’s degree.” Although participants from all three groups found the promotion opportunities at the center to be lacking, they did acknowledge the managers’ willingness to support their education through the availability of a tuition assistance program.

***Subtheme 2: Having training for development opportunities.*** The second subtheme was the availability of training development opportunities. The participants from all three groups believed training programs were present to assist them as they

adjusted to their new duties and tasks as childcare workers. Participant 1 discussed the advantage of having both training and tuition assistance for the newly hired workers:

“Training is provided. Tuition assistance is available.”

Participant 4 liked the availability of training but believed it was a bit too stressful and compelling for them. Participant 4 expressed, “Training is provided and there is a lot of it. I like the management team and staff I work with.” Participant 5 shared how on the job training allowed her to develop professionally and advance her knowledge and skills about her actual responsibilities at the center: She identified some of the benefits as “on-the-job training, professional development, and opportunity to advance and receive benefits.”

Participant 6 also indicated the same benefit as the first few participants with this comment, “Training is available and professional growth.”

Participants from the management team group elaborated on the type and kinds of training offered to the childcare workers. Participant 13, a management team member, emphasized the free training as well as the presence of trainers to assist them in their needs. She said, “They receive training for free with us, and they have the support of the trainers, management team, and peers.”

Participant 14, from the management team, shared the same benefits on training and the assistance from the management, adding, “First-year childcare workers are provided training for free, and they have the support of the trainers, management team, and peers.”

Participant 15, from the management team group, recalled the effectiveness of training for the new childcare workers, stating, “The training they receive with the military is better and what I believe motivates people to work for us. This motivates us to be better in the field of childcare.” Throughout the interviews, participants from all three groups expressed their desire to learn and improve their skills as childcare workers and although the amount of training was overwhelming at times it was helpful to them.

***Subtheme 3: Receiving pay increase upon module completion.*** The third subtheme was the benefit of a pay increase upon module completion. Five of the 15 participants from the three groups were happy to share the opportunity to receive a higher pay over time. Participant 7 stated how pay increases with the development of knowledge and skills through the modules. Again, Participant 7 shared, “Tuition assistance program to help me further my education, pay increase as I complete my modules.”

Participant 11 had the same perception as Participant 7 and indicated how the trainings pertain to higher pay in the long run, stating, “They had on-the-job training and you could get a pay raise once you completed module.”

Participant 13, from the management team group, believed the pay offered was good and the workers have the chance to receive more over time she said, “The pay is good, and they can get a pay increase as they complete their required training.”

Participants from all three groups also found the provision of a pay increase as they completed their modules and training program to be a benefit because flex workers do not receive any benefits.

*Subtheme 4: Having the permission to use the military facilities.* The fourth subtheme was the benefit of having ability to utilize the military facilities such as fitness centers, theaters, stores, and other recreational amenities. Only two of the 14 participants, both from management, stated they liked having access to military facilities and programs. Participants 13 and 15, management team members, both indicated the same benefits and services available, and identified “pay, benefits to include retirement, training, tuition assistance, benefits for civilians such as utilizing our military facilities (i.e. fitness centers, movie theater, food establishments, bowling, pools, military exchanges/stores, etc.). Other benefits included support of management, positive work environment, bond with peers. The participants explained that beside the financial and professional development opportunities, employees of the military childcare center are permitted to utilize and access various military facilities such as the fitness center.

For Research Question 2, regarding the positive work experiences perceived by childcare workers that influenced their retention at the military child development center during their first year of employment, there were two major themes. Participants from all three groups stated the most positive work experience was enjoying and appreciating the nature of their profession. They also found there were various benefits to working at the military center such as having a good work location, tuition assistance, training, pay increases with module completion, and using military facilities. Although participants from all three groups identified that there were benefits when working with military families and enjoying the nature of their profession, there were mixed feeling between the childcare worker groups and the management team group regarding support with the

training and mentors. The childcare workers indicated there was a need for additional support for all of the required training and that mentors may be helpful, however, the management team group indicated management provided support to staff although additional support may be helpful.

### **Research Question 3**

The third research question explored childcare workers' negative work experiences that could influence their decision to resign from the military child development center during their first year of employment. The majority of the participants complained about the excessive training they were required to undergo. Participants shared how the training information was overwhelming at the time. In addition, the presence of strict trainers added to the pressure of the said training sessions or programs. Other notable and significant experiences also uncovered from the thematic analysis included receiving little to no benefits as flex workers, fighting the presence of office politics at the center, feeling undervalued by the organization, challenging transportation services to and from the center, lacking the provision of mentors to guide and assist the workers, lacking management flexibility and support, lacking growth and professional development at the center, and challenging schedules. Table 4 contains the themes addressing the final research question of the study.

Table 4

*Negative Work Experiences Themes Addressing RQ3*

Theme	Major/Minor Theme Designation	Subthemes	Number of Participant References	Percentage of Participant References
Receiving too much or excessive training	Major 1	Feeling overwhelmed due to the heavy training load Lacking feedback from the trainer Having a difficult time using computers for training	13	87
Receiving little to no benefits as a flex	Major 2	Lacking medical, health, and other benefits Not enough pay or financial compensation	12	80
Fighting the presence of office politics at the center	Minor 1	Having staff members who are difficult to work with	9	60
Feeling undervalued by the organization	Minor 2		8	53
Challenging transportation services to and from the center	Minor 3		6	40
Lacking the provision of mentors to guide and assist the workers	Minor 4		6	40
Lacking management flexibility and support	Minor 5		7	47

*Note:* RQ3 = Research Question 3.

**Major Theme 1 to RQ3: Receiving too much or excessive training.** The fifth major theme of the study was the participants' belief they were receiving too much training, identified by 13 of the 15 participants from the three groups during the interview. Participants from all three groups felt overwhelmed due to the heavy training

load, however 11 of the participants were from the two childcare worker groups and indicated they lacked feedback from the trainer and had a difficult time using computers for training. An example was Participant 1's experience and her indication that she was discouraged with her job and standing as a childcare worker. The participant stated, "There is a lot of training requirements and some of it doesn't even apply to childcare worker. The training has been overwhelming and we are not provided the time to practice what we have learned." Participant 1 found the training requirements to be extensive with some content and aspects already beyond their responsibilities, and no benefits were available for flex workers.

***Subtheme 1: Feeling overwhelmed due to the heavy training load.*** The first subtheme was the issue on the heavy training load as well as information during the modules or sessions. Participant 2 complained of how the training load, as well as the high expectations of the trainers, pressured trainers to the point that trainers became ineffective and unproductive. Participant 2 commented, "The training is extensive, and the trainers expect the childcare workers to pick everything up and remember commit procedures and processes to memory."

Participant 5 called attention to the need for mentors to assist the new hires given the overwhelming requirements of the training sessions. Participant 5 stated,

There is a lot of information that childcare workers are expected to learn and know. Having a mentor may be very helpful. With so much information being provided, it is difficult to remember it all, or when in a real-life situation how to

respond. Having someone on hand to help us through the process may have helped me a lot.

Participant 6 described why it was difficult to complete the training, noting the issues of time and application of the lessons after the training. Participant 6 shared, “The training I have received is a bit overwhelming, and it keeps on coming with little time to let it sink in.”

Participant 7 had the same perception on the training sessions and requirements, “Just a lot of training during my first few months here, and it has been hard to keep up at times with being able to practice what I have learned.”

Participant 8 commented on why the training sessions are believed to be ineffective. Again, noting the lack of time and mentoring, she added, “The training does not prepare us for the classroom as it should. No. There is just too much information that we are expected to learn and be able to implement with little mentoring.

Participant 10 highlighted three issues of concern from being a childcare worker at the center, including the heavy requirements, lack of time, and use of computers for the older staff members. The participant shared, “The training requirements were many, and the majority of it was computer based. I felt sorry for the older staff members who were not very computer literate. There was so much training that it was difficult to remember everything.”

Participants from the management team group found the training requirements to be too numerous and overwhelming as well, and because the majority of the training was computer based, it was difficult for some of the older staff. The participants from the two

childcare worker groups believed that management should consider reducing the training workload as this takes time away from their daily tasks with the children and classroom responsibilities.

***Subtheme 2: Lacking feedback from the trainer.*** The second subtheme was the lack of feedback the trainees received from their trainers or the management team. This element was deemed to be an issue as the participants from the two childcare worker groups believed the feedback could be used for them to improve and develop their skills going forward. Participant 11 shared the limited feedback received by the flex employees that affected their hands-on performances. Participant 11 stated, “Flex employees don’t get a lot of feedback from the trainer. They get feedback only during classroom observations or they get feedback on the playground to correct them if they are doing something wrong. Feedback was related to my training that needed to get completed.”

Participant 13 was the only management team member to refer to the various issues childcare workers were having with the lack of feedback. One critical issue was the lack of support and feedback that can be employed by management to help workers correct their mistakes upon implementation of their training knowledge. Participant 13 then shared,

Lack of positive peer interactions or with management, too many rules and training requirements are overwhelming. Schedules are not flexible, and there is a lack of benefits, part-time hours, and a negative work environment. The childcare workers do not feel important, and the workers have no support after training to

help them with classroom management or to ensure they can implement what they have learned.

The participants believed that it may also be beneficial for them to receive proper feedback from their trainers. They feel they could use the feedback to improve their skills and help them eliminate any incorrect practices or methods when interacting with the children.

***Subtheme 3: Having a difficult time using computers for training.*** The third subtheme was the issue on the computer-based training; this was a concern shared by Participants 4 and 10. Participants from all three groups felt sorry for the older-aged childcare workers who were not well-trained in basic computer usage.

Participant 4 admitted that she is not very good with computers, and she commented, “There is a lot of training and most of it is computer-based. I am not very good with computers.”

Participant 10 expressed a concern that the advanced trainings may be inconvenient for some of the trainees. Participant 10 shared, “The training requirements were a plenty, and the majority of the training was computer-based. There was so much training that it was difficult to remember everything.” Participants felt that managers need to be considerate of all employees and their abilities and learning styles.

**Major Theme 2 to RQ3: Receiving little to no benefits as a flex.** The sixth major theme of the study was the little-to-no benefits as flex workers. Twelve of the 15 participants from all three groups reported the almost nonexistent benefits they receive as flex or part-time workers. Of these 12 participants, three were prior childcare workers,

seven were current childcare workers, and two were from the management team. These participants complained about the lack of medical, health, and other benefits as well as the inadequate pay or financial compensation.

Participant 1 shared how flex workers have little to no benefits.. Participant 1 commented, “There are no benefits as a flex.”

Participant 2 shared how childcare workers who were with the center for some time experienced the lack of benefits. Participant 2 stated, “People have been at the center for quite a while and still have not received any benefits and they remain flex.”

Participant 8 believed there needs to be better benefits even for the flex workers. She said, “Yes, staff members need to be given benefits and paid better for what they do.” Three of the participants from the management team group believed the lack of benefits for flex employees was a negative factor that impacted childcare workers decision to resign.

***Subtheme 1: Lacking medical, health, and other benefits.*** The first subtheme was the absence of medical, health and other benefits. Participant 1 and 2 shared that flex workers do not receive any benefits. Both participants commented, “Flex employees do not receive paid time off or medical benefits.” Participant 7 shared that there are flex employees at the center who have remained flex for 3 or 4 years.

Participant 11 stated that she would have stayed at the center if she had been able to receive benefits. All three participants from the management team felt that the lack of benefits influenced the workers’ decision to resign.

***Subtheme 2: Not enough pay or financial compensation.*** The second subtheme was the request for a higher or better pay for the childcare workers. Participant 9 stated, “I wish the pay was better.”

Participant 11 shared that, as a flex worker, she did not have benefits such as paid leave.. She added, “Being a flex I didn’t receive any benefits like paid time off.”

Participant 6 voiced that having no benefits should mean higher or better compensation for the worker. She added, “No benefits and the pay should be higher. I am not sure because I have only been on-board for one month, but I think that getting benefits may help.” The participants believed their hard work and efforts as childcare workers deserved higher pay or higher salary from management and leadership.

**Minor Theme 1: Fighting the presence of office politics at the center.** The first minor theme was the issue of the presence of office politics at the center as well as the negative attitude of some of the staff members the participants work with. Nine of the 15 participants from the two childcare worker groups believed unfairness and unequal treatment were practiced within the center. Participant 3 shared feelings about the difficulty of expressing her opinions and perceptions at the center. She believed, “There seems to be a lot of personality-driven decisions within the center, so it makes it challenging to share personal opinions or to receive respect even if a childcare worker a degree in education.”

Participant 12 also observed the presence of favorites and preferences at the center. Participant 12 believed,

Management team members had favorites, which made it a little difficult to voice personal concerns at times. A number of the participants from the two childcare worker groups communicated during the interview how they believed they had experienced unfair treatment from management. Some of the staff members were not friendly, and I didn't like to work with them.

Seven of the participants from the three groups expressed how some staff members were difficult to work with and were unwilling to assist the new hires. Two participants from the management team believed that some of the staff members were difficult to work with and did not willingly assist novice childcare workers.

Participant 8 described the difficulty of coming to work because of the aloofness of her work peers. She stated, "Some of the staff aren't very friendly either. There are little cliques amongst the staff and makes it hard to enjoy coming to work every day." Participants from the two childcare worker groups felt that some of the staff members were friendly or very welcoming to them during their first year of employment at the center.

**Minor Theme 2: Feeling undervalued by the organization.** The second minor theme was the negative experience of feeling undervalued by the organization. The minor theme, shared by eight of the 15 participants from all three groups, was an expression of their unhappiness over their lack of value and worth at the organization. Participant 1 stated this feeling and indicated, "I don't feel that I am valued, or that I am going to get anywhere in this organization."

Participant 2 explained that the reason why she believed her organization placed no importance on her and her service was,

I don't feel valued. I feel like if I did quit no one would care as they would just hire another flex. The training is too much, and it doesn't really prepare childcare workers for the job. I feel they train us and then throw you in the classroom and you have to sink or swim.

Participant 3 had reached the point of already seeking another job as she realized early on the lack of value and respect of the company for her. She stated, "No, I am looking for another job where I am appreciated, and I feel respected."

Participant 8 had the same sentiments and situation as Participant 3, in her response to the interview question, she said,

No, I am looking for another job where I can use my degree and I feel appreciated and respected. No benefits and I feel that I am not valued. Caring for young children is very much needed; however, it is not respected as a career.

Participant 14, from the management team group, stated that she also felt unappreciated for all the hard work she does at the center.

### **Minor Theme 3: Challenging transportation services to and from the center.**

The third minor theme was the negative experience of transportation services to and from the center. The minor theme was shared in interviews by six of the 15 participants from all three groups. Participants 3, 5, and 8, current childcare workers, stated that transportation was a challenge due to the location of the center.

Participant 8 elaborated by stating, “I have to leave my home early and take the metro to get to work on time.”

Participants 10 and 11, prior childcare workers, explained that one of the reasons they left the program was due to transportation issues to and from the center. They also commented on the lack of parking at the work site so taking public transportation was required.

Participant 13, from the management team, felt that transportation was a major issue with getting and keeping staff at the center. She commented that parking was extremely limited on the installation; therefore, employees were forced to take public transportation and then walk the rest of the way to work regardless of the weather.

**Minor Theme 4: Lacking the provisions of mentors to guide and assist the workers.** The fourth minor theme was the lack of mentors to guide and assist the childcare workers. Six of the 15 participants from all three groups shared the minor theme. Participants 2 and 7, current childcare workers, stated that they did not have a mentor to help them implement what that had learned during new hire orientation training in the classroom.

Participant 3, a current worker, responded by stating, “I didn’t have anyone to ask questions when I needed help.”

Participants 11 and 12, both former childcare workers, felt that not having a mentor to assist them could have influenced their decision to stay at the center. Having someone to support them could have made a difference as they were learning their role as a childcare worker.

Participant 15, from the management team, believed that implementing a formal mentoring program could help first-year childcare workers practice their skills as they learn their new roles. The remaining participants from the management team felt novice workers are paired with a more seasoned worker, although there was no formal mentoring program at the center.

**Minor Theme 5: Lacking management flexibility and support.** The fifth minor theme was the lack of management flexibility and support. Seven of the 15 participants from the two childcare worker groups shared the minor theme. Participants 1, 3, 6, and 9, current childcare workers, felt that management team members were not flexible when it came to classroom assignments or needing time off. They believed that management did not take into consideration their family obligations and the need for time off to take care of family issues. They mentioned that management placed them in age groups they were not experienced in working with and expected them to know what to do after only a few days of training.

Participants 10, 11, and 12, prior childcare workers, felt that management was not flexible or supportive when they needed to take time off for personal reasons. All three mentioned that the lack of flexibility and support influenced their reasons for resigning from the center.

For Research Question 3, regarding the negative work experiences perceived by childcare workers that influenced their retention at the military child development center during their first year of employment, there were two major themes and several minor themes. Participants from all three groups complained about the excessive training they

were required to undergo although they understood that some training was needed for their jobs. Participants from all three groups identified various concerns with the lack of benefits for flex employees and with pay. Current and prior childcare workers stated the lack of benefits for flex employees influenced their decisions when deciding to leave the program or their decisions to resign. Participants from the management team group felt that the lack of benefits for flex employees was a negative factor for the center's retention issues.

### **Discussion of Data Analysis**

All three research questions were addressed through the interview responses of the childcare workers in the three participant groups of current childcare workers, prior childcare workers, and the management team. It was revealed through the data analysis that participants had both positive and negative work experiences during their first year of employment at the military child development center. Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory of motivator and hygiene factors that contributed to the understanding of employee satisfaction within the field of business management was supported through the findings of this case study. The study examined the perceptions of participants regarding the motivator and hygiene factors associated with their work experiences and professional development during their first year of employment. Several of the current and prior childcare worker participants indicated that they experienced a lack of personal and professional growth opportunities and these factors contributed to their thinking about leaving or their decisions to leave their positions. This was supported in the literature by Cunningham et al. (2015). Welsh-Loveman (2015) and Thomason and La

Paro (2013) emphasized the need for educators to be trained to develop the required skills needed to teach young children. Participants also acknowledged they have developed a passion to serve and care for the military children.

In response to the second research question, the participants described their positive experience with enjoyment and fulfillment in being able to help and assist military children and families. Elfer and Page (2015) discussed the effects of workplace conditions on the perceptions of the workers toward their profession. The participants' positive feelings toward the nature of their work had a positive impact on their decision to stay on the job despite the number of negative issues present at the center.

In responding to interview questions related to the third research question, the participants viewed excessive training as a negative experience because they have other daily responsibilities and classroom duties. Other negative experiences under the major theme included feeling overwhelmed because of the heavy training load, lacking feedback from the trainer, and having a difficult time using the computers for training. Another important major theme was the lack of benefits and compensation for the workers. The negative experiences of the participants support the creation of a position paper to advocate for a mentoring program that may help the novice childcare worker adjust to their new role and responsibilities, with the help of experienced workers from the same center. Support for and the development of a mentoring program may address the low retention rates of military childcare workers.

### **Accuracy and Credibility**

To assist with the accuracy of the findings, I utilized member checking. Member checking provided the participants with the opportunity to add to or make corrections to their responses from the interview in order to ensure accuracy and credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Researchers use member checking when the data and interpretations from the study are tested or reviewed by the members from whom the information originally was obtained (Ritchie et al., 2013). I performed member checking in two phases: (a) initial participant checking for correctness of the transcriptions, and (b) participant checking for interpretation of their data at the completion of the coding and thematic analysis.

I also used triangulation to assist with accuracy and credibility of the study. Triangulation is the process of using multiple data sources in a study to form an understanding of the data, such as interview transcripts and field notes (Ritchie et al., 2013). I performed triangulation in this study through the comparison of the data collected from the three groups of participants, as well as the field notes and journal entries made during the data collection period.

### **Discrepant Cases**

Discrepant cases in research are cases that disagree with, contradict, or do not support patterns or explanations that are emerging from that data (Creswell, 2012). Once all the data were analyzed, I used any discrepant cases that did not align with or support the research questions or data to provide accuracy and credibility to this study. All data were rechecked to verify any inconsistent findings from the interviews and one discrepant

case emerged. In contradiction to what other participants expressed, Participant 13 stated that the center's management team tried to pair new childcare workers with another worker during their observations so they felt more welcomed. Participant 13 further stated that training was provided free of charge and childcare workers do have the support of the trainers, management team, and peers which did not align with the themes that emerged from the data. This discrepant case emerged from a member of the management team.

### **Research Limitations**

Problems with reliability exist because of the subjective interpretation and analysis of data collected through a qualitative design (Gravetter & Forezano, 2016) in that the data collected may not represent completely honest answers on the part of participants, or participants may be hesitant to report some information. Another limitation is represented by the generalizability of the study across a wider population of childcare workers. Although Navy child development centers are similar in nature, each geographic location differs, and the experiences and perceptions of those childcare workers vary, the results may limit generalizability to a wider population.

### **Research as a Deliverable Project**

A position paper was selected as the project for the outcome of this research on the factors that lead to the retention or resignation rates of childcare workers in a military child development center. Information from the literature review, interview questions, and data analysis answered the research questions by providing insight into the perceptions and personal experiences of childcare workers. In as much as the research

was designed to discover factors that lead to low retention rates of first year childcare workers in a military child development center, a position paper was the most appropriate format to provide the findings and possible solution for this issue. For any changes to take place with the child development programs of the Navy, a position paper may be a valuable tool to utilize to present the issue, to provide the data in support of the issue, and to encourage the support of Navy leadership. Position papers are a common avenue in which to present new ideas or strategies when suggesting to leadership the implementation of changes or new programs (Creswell, 2012).

### **Summary**

In Section 2, I provided an overview and justification of the qualitative research design and a case study methodology I chose for this study. In Section 2, I also discussed my role as the researcher, participants, population and sample, protection of participants' rights, data collection and analysis, accuracy, and credibility of findings. I also presented how a qualitative case study was utilized to explore the work experiences of employed, first-year childcare workers, prior childcare workers, and management team at a military child development center to discover the factors that caused childcare workers to resign.

The purpose of this study was to discover factors that lead to the low retention rates of childcare workers in a military child development center. Based on the literature review and the data analysis from the participant interviews, Section 3 provides an overview of a project that was developed to address the low retention rates at the military child development center located in the Northeast United States. By identifying factors that influence retention rates of military childcare workers, this study sought to provide

the military community with additional research specific to the needs of childcare workers with the hope of improving retention rates. It is my hope that Navy leadership may recognize the importance of understanding the perceptions and experiences of first-year military childcare workers to put supports in place for childcare workers during their first year of employment. I selected a position paper as the best way to present the research findings to Navy leadership and stakeholders.

### Section 3: The Project

The project chosen was a position paper that outlined a mentoring program to decrease worker attrition in childcare facilities on military bases. In the first year of employment at such centers, workers often leave their positions because of a variety of factors both intrinsic and extrinsic. These factors relate to inherent features of childcare work, the military work environment, the nature of employees at child development centers, and the way centers are supervised.

I performed a qualitative, interview-based study of childcare workers at a military child development center. The purpose of the study was to understand the factors, intrinsic and extrinsic, that might lead to the high turnover rate of childcare workers. The theoretical support for the study came from Herzberg's (1966) motivation-hygiene theory, which classified motivation for persistence in a job into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic or hygienic. Intrinsic motivation is the emotional and psychological factors affecting individuals' decisions to leave their jobs or stay (Herzberg's, 1966). Extrinsic or hygienic motivation refers to aspects of the workplace and work environment, including relationships with coworkers and supervisors (Herzberg's, 1966). A core premise of the theory is that any attempt to increase job satisfaction and promote retention must address each category separately.

The project chosen was to develop a position paper that provided an overview of the study and steps needed to implement a 3-day mentoring program for use at military childcare facilities to increase retention of workers. Results from the qualitative thematic analysis of the interviews revealed the firsthand perceptions of the childcare workers with

regard to the factors that affect their decision to remain or leave their positions at the military child development center. The outcome of my project study resulted in a position paper that provided information on developing a mentoring program for first-year childcare workers because the first year of employment is when worker retention is most problematic.

### **Rationale for the Project Genre**

The position paper was chosen as a vehicle to present the findings of my study to the local site and to Navy leadership to address the gap in research surrounding the factors that lead to the retention or resignation of childcare workers in a military child development center. As a result of the gap in research regarding reasons for low retention rates of military childcare workers, the study was designed to address the local problem and to discover factors that lead to low retention rates of first-year childcare workers in a military child development center. A position paper was determined to be the most appropriate format to provide the findings and possible solution to the local site and Navy leadership regarding this issue. Information from the literature review, interview responses, and data analysis was used to answer the research questions by providing insight into the perceptions and personal experiences of childcare workers; however, for changes to take place with child development programs in the Navy, there needs to be way to present the issues, findings, and possible solutions to Navy leadership. A position paper was selected to present the issue, provide the data and findings in response to the issue, and encourage the support of Navy leadership. Position papers are often used to

present new ideas or strategies to leadership regarding the implementation of changes or new programs.

Military facilities, particularly those in the Northeast United States, are struggling to retain childcare workers who are in their first year of service (Henning-Smith & Kozhimannil, 2016). The inability to hire and retain skilled childcare workers decreases the quality of service offered to military families (Edie, 2007; Henning-Smith & Kozhimannil, 2016). The issue of low retention rates has been identified at the local site by the number of resignations that are received each year. The information in the position paper may help stakeholders, supervisors, and others affected by the problem to reduce attrition rates for employees at military child development centers. The problem of attrition largely has been ignored, even though it is a significant drain on resources. Conditions that cause workplace turnover also prevent it from being studied because disgruntled employees leave or are transferred and can no longer report their experiences. In addition, military service members are often transient and sometimes cannot be located to relate their previous childcare experiences, both as workers and parents (Henning-Smith & Kozhimannil, 2016).

At the study site, the problem of employee retention was critical. According to the director at the center in a series of personal communications pertaining to the difficulties associated with retaining childcare workers in the military, most employees left the program within their first year of appointment. As reported by the director of the center, the 2013 turnover rate of childcare workers was 32%, and this rose to 94% in the fourth quarter of 2016. During this period, the director noted that 25% of the untrained and

inexperienced staff members resigned within their first year of employment. In agreement with findings of researchers such as Edie (2007) and Henning-Smith and Kozhimannil (2016), the director reported that most of the resignations came from individuals who lacked degrees or appropriate training.

This problem was exacerbated, according to the participants in the study, by a lack of hands-on training given to them after they started their jobs. Individuals who started a childcare job at the facility and were trained insufficiently or were unqualified for the position were unlikely to receive training to make up the deficit. This meant that almost all of the first-year workers were unqualified and remained unqualified to some degree. Being unqualified for a position but expected to perform its duties is a major source of job dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover, especially when the job is to teach or supervise children (Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hall, Hughes, & Thelk, 2017; Sowell, 2017). Several employees complained that it seemed that because they were female, they were assumed to have natural childcare and child supervision talents.

The method used to examine the interview transcripts was thematic analysis (see Guest et al., 2012). The result of this analysis was a series of themes that were used to answer the research questions. The high frequency of many of these themes, including lack of hands-on training as a major source of job dissatisfaction, was a major impetus for the creation of the policies recommended in the position paper. I concluded that if most of the participants reported a problem that led to their job dissatisfaction and turnover, addressing that problem should be included in the position paper.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Addressing the Problem With a Position Paper**

The literature review for the position paper was confined to three areas: how Herzberg's (1966) motivation-hygiene theory applies to a childcare workplace, how it applies to a military workplace, and evaluation of the workplace. The rationale for selecting these areas was that there had been no studies addressing military childcare facility workers, which also drove the purpose of the study. The search terms used were Herzberg (1966), two-factor theory, childcare workers, military children, motivation, position paper, and white paper. These terms were used singly and in combination with Boolean operators such as and, not, and or. The databases searched were EBSCO Host, Jester, and Quesita. I also used the Google Scholar search engine. The search included older and more recent articles; most sources examined were from the previous 6 years.

According to Newsom and Hayes (2018), position papers are aimed to “state an organization’s position on an issue” (p. 69). The position paper should contain an extensive background and a clear explanation of the organization’s point of view on the issue (Newsom & Haynes, 2018). In this case, I used the position paper to present the findings of this study and used the data as evidence on why a mentoring program is recommended to address the most common issues experienced by novice childcare workers. Powell (2012) and Stelzner (2010) proposed that a position paper is a good way to disseminate findings and provide ideas to address any gaps in research.

Researchers have found that a position paper can provide an avenue to present a factual summary of the study in which to gain stakeholders’ attention, provide

background information and details of facts pertaining to relevant issues, add to the existing body of knowledge regarding the low retention rate of military childcare workers, provide a solution to the problem, and add to credibility of the study (Newsom & Haynes, 2018; Powell, 2012; Stelzner, 2010). A position paper should include a topic, purpose, and data and be no more than 2 pages in length with an introduction, description, and conclusion (Newsom & Haynes, 2018; Powell, 2012; Stelzner, 2010). A position paper is an important tool that can provide information on a solution to the problem in an intellectual and summarizing manner (Newsome & Haynes, 2018). This type of paper offers a way to present the information to stakeholders that clearly demonstrates the gap in research regarding the low retention rate of military childcare workers.

In forming recommendations from the data analysis, I considered that supervisors and stakeholders had direct control over the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of employees to stay at their positions. The extrinsic factors, referred to by Herzberg (1966) as hygienic, are elements of the workplace such as physical features, accessibility, work space, and needed materials. Intrinsic factors are motivations such as pay, work schedules, training, and relationships with coworkers and supervisors. Supervisors and stakeholders should be able to have a major effect on both intrinsic and extrinsic factors of the childcare workplace.

**Herzberg in childcare work.** Bridges et al. (2011) pointed out that most childcare workers are poorly paid, usually earning minimum wage or less. Bridges et al. found this odd in that childcare is a high-stakes field in terms of its importance. The

welfare of children is obviously important and the quality of care and supervision they receive affects their welfare (Bridges et al., 2011). Bridges et al. recommended that training and job satisfaction levels may be increased if childcare workers were better paid.

Motivation-hygiene theory suggests that childcare work has inherent stressors that lead to turnover. Edie (2007) and Coffee, Ray-Subramanian, Schanding, and Feeney-Kettler (2013) recommended that early childhood teaching staff should be well educated and well trained. Herzberg (1966), with his later emphasis on educational settings, posited that a lack of education and training was a major inherent stressor in the education professions. Edie (2007) built on this statement and indicated that trying to cope with the demands of a childcare position without being qualified or trained properly was a major stressor and a source of burnout and turnover. The results of my study supported that opinion.

Gil-Flores (2017) stated that the nature of the workplace affected how well compensations can be made for deficiencies in training. Gil-Flores mentioned that even if employees were insufficiently trained, a careful and nurturing mentoring and training environment could help make up for that shortfall. This is a way that extrinsic actions can modify extrinsic factors in the childcare workplace (Gil-Flores, 2017). My position paper recommendations were based on the premise that mentoring can improve intrinsic and extrinsic needs and shortfalls for novice childcare workers. The importance of mentoring in a teaching role, which is not much different from supervisory childcare, was also stressed by Gordon and Lowery (2017).

The importance of mentoring was also mentioned by Nolan and Molla (2016), and Schatz-Oppenheimer (2016). Teaching and supervising a group of young children is not a skill that is inherent in many individuals and must be taught. Therefore, working with someone who has learned how to do so fosters job expertise better and faster than simply acquiring experience (Nolan & Molla, 2016). A salient feature of the data gathered in my study was that many participants reported that they had been expected to do the latter. Any complex job, including group childcare, cannot be well or quickly learned by simple exposure (Nolan & Molla, 2016). Therefore, mentoring was deemed vital in helping the novice childcare workers adjust to their new responsibilities with the guidance of more experienced childcare workers. However, scholars reported how mentoring also requires training, effort, and hard work from both the mentors and the mentees (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Thomlinson, 2009). For the goals of the mentoring relationships to be achieved, both parties must be dedicated and willing to work together, learn, and sustain the positive changes even after the program (Johnson & Kardos, 2005; Law et al., 2014).

Another extrinsic workplace factor that often affects new childcare workers is the prospect of supervising a dozen or more children at once. Thomason and La Paro (2013) pointed out that even a person with formidable parenthood skills could be overwhelmed by the task of supervising 10, 20, or more children simultaneously. One theme that was revealed in the current study was that supervisors assumed that women who had child-rearing experience were qualified to perform center-based childcare. The daunting nature

of the work is both extrinsic (the nature of the work and workplace) and intrinsic (expectations of the worker regarding the job).

Among the many researchers affirming the value of mentoring in childcare and teaching were Weinstock et al. (2012), who examined a toddler-care program that featured onsite training. Weinstock et al. found that proper training was very effective in smoothing the entry of workers into the field and fostering job satisfaction and employee retention. The surprise element of the childcare workplace mentioned by Thomason and La Paro (2013) was also mentioned by Weinstock et al. (2012), who stated that one of the reasons for onsite training and mentoring was that novice childcare workers often had a fairly poor idea of what they were getting into. I alluded to this in the position paper with a recommendation that incoming employees at the childcare center be thoroughly briefed about the job and working conditions.

The socially positive contribution that childcare workers make to society is not recognized in the wages they are paid, which have remained low even though the problem has been recognized for some time (Whitebook et al., 2014). Within the somewhat enclosed world of the military and military families, this problem may still exist if civilian workers are hired for childcare positions, which is the case at the site of this study. It is likely that both mothers and fathers of children on military bases are on active duty, which means there is no pool of military childcare workers to draw upon, which increases the need for day care. The following section addresses the literature regarding how Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory affects childcare operations on military bases.

**Military bases as workplaces: Herzberg and other perspectives.** Herzberg (1966) did not consider military bases as a category to study, but his two-factor theory applies to military bases as it applies in the private sector. Certain features of childcare for military families warrant discussion. These features may also affect employee job satisfaction and turnover intention.

Lester and Flake (2013) pointed out that in wartime, military families often are affected. Hisle-Gorman et al. (2015) discussed how military children are more prone to experiencing mental health challenges upon military parents' deployment. Hisle-Gorman et al. added that young children with "deployed and combat-injured military parents" (p. 294) have increased "post deployment visits for mental health issues, injuries, and child maltreatment" (p. 294). Furthermore, children experience separation trauma when their parents are deployed to war zones, often for several months at a time (Figley, 2012). Moreover, the absent parent is now as likely to be the father as the mother. This places an additional burden on childcare workers, who as a result, often have to be virtual surrogate parents and work longer hours than they might work in the civilian sector (Lester & Flake, 2013).

One consequence of military service is the serious life-threatening injuries that military personnel may experience as there is always the risk of a parent being killed or seriously injured in the line of duty (Pexton, Farrants, & Yule, 2017). This risk, whether actualized or just a possibility, affects families and their pattern of caring for their children (Holmes et al., 2013). It is almost a truism that children of military families become accustomed to life in the military, with its near-constant changes of location and

uncertainty; however, that does not mean they become comfortable with the idea of a parent being injured or killed in the line of duty (Holmes et al., 2013). A problem that a civilian childcare worker may encounter is that the children may have different psychological makeups from civilian children. Herzberg's (1966) theory suggests that the nature of the clientele childcare workers serve in the workplace is a strong extrinsic influence on job satisfaction. When a childcare worker's job is not what the childcare worker thought it would be, the childcare worker becomes stressed.

Easterbrooks et al. (2013) did remark that children of military families tend to be more resilient than children of civilian families. This difference in resilience could be because children of military families have become inured to periodic moving, resettling, losing friends, having to make new friends, and adjusting to changing environments (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). The stereotypical, Army brat, supposedly is unconcerned about a life of traveling, but even if that is true for a given child or group of children, that does not mean that a civilian childcare worker is prepared to serve military children. Caring for children of military families is a hygienic factor, and is a responsibility civilian childcare workers often do not anticipate. A few of the participants in this study mentioned that military children were different from civilian children.

**Synthesis.** In the position paper, I explored how supervisors and stakeholders of the child development center could improve the military child development workplace and work environment for childcare workers. Improvements could include (a) extrinsic or hygienic factors to improve the mindsets and attitudes, or (b) intrinsic or motivational factors of individuals who work in military child development centers (Herzberg, 1966).

The above review of the literature suggested that there are particular nuances for working as a children's supervisor that are unique to the profession, and stressors include lack of training, lack of mentoring, lack of recognition of effort, and low pay. Researchers suggested that childcare workers who desire to serve in the military work environment should understand that the military work environment is different from the civilian work environment (Alfano, Lau, Balderas, Bunnell, & Beidel 2016; Gullotta & Blau, 2017; Sumner, Boisvert, & Anderson, 2015; Wadsworth & Riggs, 2011).

One theme that emerged in the literature search was the distinctive nature of children of military families. This theme was not well explored in the literature, but there were a few studies available. Researchers suggested that military children are accustomed to change, may be more resilient than others, and are used to having multiple friend and familial relationships (Sumner et al, 2015; Wadsworth & Riggs, 2011). Military children suffer from stress, mental health problems, academic failures due to separation anxiety, and at times, the loss or injury of parents from deploy (Alfano et al., 2016; Gullotta & Blau, 2017). Caring for military children is a different task from caring for children in the civilian sector. I recommend in my position paper that childcare center workers be made aware of differences between the military and civilian sector.

Developing and implementing a mentoring program are only the first steps, as recommended in the position paper. Implementation should include processes and procedures to evaluate whether the program was effective.. Throughout the literature search regarding mentoring programs, the topic of evaluation emerged. According to Cohen (2000), in order to determine if a mentoring program was effective an evaluation

is necessary. Clutterback, Kochan, Lunsford, Dominguez, and Haddock-Miller (2017) proposed that prior to implementing a mentoring program, there needs to be a baseline or starting point identified prior to the program, and then compare the baseline with the results of the implementation. Cohen (2000) noted two common types of evaluation for mentoring programs, including the formative and summative approaches which can be combined to gain helpful information on the effectiveness of the mentoring program. For this proposed project, these two types of evaluation methods could be applied by the managers and military leadership as they are implementing the program and upon completion of the program. These approaches can be used to identify if the mentees are benefiting from their learning experience and determine if the program is effective or not (Cohen, 2000). I recommend in the position paper that managers and leadership evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

### **Project Description**

The project is a position paper aimed to assist supervisors, managers, and other stakeholders of military child development centers. The findings of this study included several prominent themes that illustrate the state of the problem at the study site, which I feel is representative of most of the US military bases. The goal of the qualitative analysis was to identify themes to form recommendations.

I interviewed 15 workers at the military childcare center. Three worked in a supervisory capacity and were salaried; the other 12 were current and former employees who were paid nominally or not paid at all. All were female; their ages ranged from 18 to 54, though most were younger than 40. The findings from the analysis of the interviews

indicated the major source of job dissatisfaction for the participants was the nature of the work environment. However, workers viewed the nature of the work itself positively. This led to the suggested need for policy and workplace modification by implementing a 3-day mentoring program outlined in a position paper. The mentoring program could be used to lessen the dissatisfaction of the childcare workers and to maximize the workers' positive outlook or attitude towards their work.

**Implementation.** I cannot implement the recommendations because I am not a supervisor at the military child development center. However, what I can do is provide a position paper suggesting that a 3-day mentoring program is available to managers, supervisors, and stakeholders at the center on the military base where the study was conducted. If Navy leaders find the recommended program worthwhile, they may implement the program at other child development centers on other military bases. It is beyond the scope of the permission granted to me for me to implement the program.

A possible implementation program could have the following format:

1. Develop an outline of duties and requirements of a mentor for training and mentoring childcare workers.
2. Select a mentor from a current pool of seasoned childcare workers.
3. Assist the newly selected mentor with drafting protocols for mentoring and supervising novice childcare workers.
4. Encourage workers to share their insights and recommendations, while giving them an informal platform to provide input.

5. Establish a baseline of employee knowledge prior to mentoring and conduct a post program assessment after implementation to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.
6. Keep and compare statistics on retention to assist with evaluating the overall effectiveness of the mentoring program.

The position paper developed for the capstone project includes a recommendation for a change to the training policy of the study site to create a mentoring program reflective of the six dimensions listed above. Themes uncovered from the analysis of the interviews of the research study are to be integrated into the recommended mentoring project. As supported by the finding of Shwartz and Dori's (2016), successful mentoring relationships may reduce worker attrition in childcare facilities on military bases and create an opportunity to sustain the hiring and retention of the childcare workers. It is important to note that for high quality mentorship, the experienced childcare workers must be open and ready to perform the role of a mentor and should not be forced or coerced by the management team to join the program (Johnson & Kardos, 2005). Further, the mentees must also be enthusiastic to learn and accept the ideas, teachings, and values the mentors impart; and the mentees should become self-sufficient after the program is implemented (Law et al., 2014). The mutual goals and willingness of the participants to complete the program and create a positive change in their organization must be the driving force for every mentor and mentee.

I will present the position paper containing the recommendations on the mentoring program at the study site. The Navy Child and Youth Programs department

head will be contacted to request an opportunity for me to present the study findings and recommendations. I will request permission to work with the leadership to share the findings of this study with the leaders of other military child development centers. In sharing my findings, I will also discuss the content and recommendations of the position paper. By enlightening the leaders, key stakeholders, and representatives of other military child development centers with regard to the possible fruitful results of a 3-day mentoring program, I may begin to create opportunities for novice childcare workers to have a chance to be successful and to find ways to improve their first year at the center. Over time, the low retention rate of childcare workers at military child development centers may be reduced.

**Barriers to implementation.** What I am recommending is change, and change comes slowly in a large organization such as the U.S. military. There is a strict hierarchy, including the chain of command, which must be respected at all times. That hierarchy is multi-layered, which means that individuals at lower levels may have very little autonomy, compared to those individuals in equivalent civilian positions. It might be difficult to convince the organizational leaders and key stakeholders to consider the recommendations found in the position paper.

Budget constraints continue to present barriers to program development and implementation processes. Creating another full-time or part-time position or adding additional duties to current staff, requiring them to conduct a 3-day mentoring program, could increase the budget of the center. Additional funds for the center may not be available, and even if they are, obtaining funds on an ongoing basis may require approval

from the Department of Defense's leadership. While the military leaders do take care of military families, that task is somewhat peripheral to the overall mission of the military, and may not be prioritized.

As a researcher for this project study, I may be available to respond to inquiries about my study and the position paper. I do not have an assignment that allows me to make or implement any recommendations. I do not work at the center or on the base that participated in this study. I am employed in a different region at a different level; however, it is my hope and understanding that the position paper I created will be used at the center, and beyond, to ease the problem of worker turnover. The literature review in Section 1 confirmed that worker turnover is a problem of significance.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

A simple evaluation approach may provide military leadership with feedback and recommendations to the program. Clutterback et al. (2017) discussed the importance of having evaluation models and frameworks to determine the effectiveness of mentoring programs. Clutterback et al. (2017) identified the need for a baseline assessment which consists of the mentors and mentees' mutual goals as participants of the program.

Cohen (2000) listed two common types of evaluation models for mentoring programs. The formative and summative approaches can be combined to gain helpful information on the effectiveness of the mentoring program. For this proposed project, formative and summative evaluation methods could be applied by the managers and military leaders as they are implementing the program and upon completion of the program. Formative evaluations focus on what is currently taking place (Cohen, 2000).

This approach is used to identify if the mentees are experiencing positive changes or benefits from the relationship (Cohen, 2000).

Immediate feedback may be gathered to provide the mentors with the opportunity to correct or to improve their approach to achieve their goals (Cohen, 2000). The formative evaluation could be completed by conducting group or one-on-one discussions, creating checklists, or answering surveys. The summative evaluation approach focuses on the “cumulative retrospective data” (Cohen, 2000, p. 24). This method may be performed after the program has been completed through surveys and assessments (Cohen, 2000). Management and military leadership may be able to select the evaluation method that best suits their needs. I propose to evaluate the mentoring program formatively through checklists and surveys. A summative evaluation may consist of an assessment at the end of the program.

It was not possible to compare this plan with other plans for mentoring programs because I could not find any evidence of a mentoring-based program that had been used to reduce military base childcare worker turnover. I did find robust evidence in my literature searches of the overall value of mentoring in childcare facilities. What seems to be lacking in the private and military sectors is the recognition that mentoring of new workers is necessary to ensure optimal childcare practices. Participants from both prior childcare worker and current childcare worker groups in this study remarked that they were placed into the job with no preparation or training.

This problem of job placement without adequate training may result from the general misconception that women are natural childcare givers, and they should be able

to figure out how to supervise a group of young children. It could be that while this important task was assigned to the workers I interviewed, sometimes some of these workers were not equipped for the job and often had no training. I believe this misconception will have to be dispelled before any resources can be diverted to improving military childcare.

The stakeholders are the parents of the children involved, military childcare workers, and military personnel responsible for the welfare and morale of serving on the base. By extension, that could apply to all persons on all US military bases. Providing service members' children with proper care, while parents are on duty, is vital to the well-being and morale of military service members. The goal of providing childcare service should be given more attention; the study problem, a high turnover rate among first-year military childcare workers is an indication that this goal is not being addressed.

### **Project Implications**

Implications for social change could include better morale for service members, as their children are better cared for while service members are on duty. In addition, the vital role of childcare workers could be highlighted. It may be valuable to dispel the misconception that women are natural caregivers and do not need appropriate, hands-on training to work in childcare. Numerous skills and much training are required for workers who are responsible for the care of children, especially those with military parents.

As higher numbers of women enter the military, the need for on-base childcare will increase. The availability of well-trained, competent, on-base childcare workers may encourage service members with families to remain in their profession, which may lend

stability to the military forces of the United States of America. It may also serve as a valuable recruiting tool to assure prospective service members with young children that their children will be cared for properly while they, the service members, are on duty or are deployed. One might expect that such a concern may keep some potential recruits away from selecting military service.

The pattern shown in the thematic analysis of the study underscores a point that could apply to every work environment. Every participant said that she was happy with her work; several said that they loved their work. The dissatisfaction most of the participants reported was the lack of training and feeling ignored and undervalued. Employee job dissatisfaction and resultant turnover can occur even when employees find the work enjoyable. It is just as important, for workers to feel valued and appreciated as it is for hands-on and appropriate training and mentoring to be made available to them.

Military families are different from civilian families, especially if one or both parents have made the military a career. The research and several parenthetical remarks the study participants made suggest the children of military families are different as well. There is limited literature or research regarding the social, cognitive, and behavioral development of children of military families. Moreover, the phenomenon of both parents being in the military, has not been explored fully. Military service imposes a unique set of stressors on military families, but these stressors have not been studied in the context of the makeup of the U.S. military. Improving quality of life and morale for service members by addressing childcare needs could have major implications for service productivity. The following chapter contains my final recommendations, reflections, and

observations, stemming from conducting and completing this project and the study that supported it.

#### Section 4: Reflections

This section consists of thoughts and reflections I had while conducting and completing the project, which was to create a position paper that included recommendations for personnel practices to reduce employee turnover in a military child development center. The project provided recommendations for the study site, although there were some surprises in the data. Talking to the participants directly proved to be a much more effective method of conducting the research than a less direct method, such as quantitative surveys, may have been.

#### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The major strength of the project was that I was able to talk to the participants directly and was able to discover their views and experiences as childcare workers. As a neutral observer, I was able to elicit their views in a way that someone in their own organization or someone in authority may not have been able to elicit; at the very least, their answers regarding organizational and authority figures may have been guarded. Participants told me a number of things that I expected to hear, but I was often surprised by their reports. An example of the latter was that all 15 participants reported enjoying the job and being satisfied with the work. Their concerns were about how they were perceived, treated, and trained, not about the nature of their employment.

A limitation that presented itself in the course of the data collection was that I asked only certain questions, although they were designed to be open-ended. There were many topics I could have asked about topics that might have been relevant, for example the participants' individual motherhood experiences. In addition, the study was weighted

heavily toward workers as opposed to supervisors resulting in a 4:1 ratio. Views of additional supervisors could have been valuable. These concerns are inherent in qualitative research, and a qualitative study should not attempt to be comprehensive, but rather serve as a springboard for future studies (see Creswell, 2012).

The deliverable for this project was a position paper containing a series of recommendations with the focus on creating a mentoring program that may assist novice childcare workers as they adjust to their new roles at the military child development center. The purpose of a 3-day mentoring program was to provide novice childcare workers with an opportunity to develop their newly learned skills and to share their insights, concerns, and recommendations with a peer. This sharing could generate more open and active communication that may allow the organization to determine the issues of the childcare workers and be more proactive in accommodating their needs. As a result, job dissatisfaction and attrition rates at the center may be reduced.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

The purpose of this project study was to explore work experiences of childcare workers during their first year of employment at a military child development center to discover the factors that influenced their decision to resign. Despite various regulations and benefits, retention and recruitment of childcare workers in military child development centers come with many difficulties. Retaining childcare workers is important to military readiness because worker retention provides continuity of care for military children and assists with maintaining the military child development center's requirements. There was a limited number of options to present the information to

stakeholders, management, and military leadership to prompt change. I considered two options for dissemination of the research findings: internal publication and external publication. I chose an internal publication in the form of a position paper to complete the qualitative case study.

A position paper was my preferred method to present the information gained from this study and to disseminate the recommendation of the proposed change to the training policy to implement a mentoring program for novice childcare workers during their first year of employment. The position paper may be presented to military leadership. There were a few alternate ways in which to present the research findings, such as publication in a professional journal as a completed doctoral study or presenting a lecture at a professional conference. However, these external formats may not have given military leadership direct and convenient access to the study's results. These alternate options may not have been the best method to provide the outcomes of this study to military leadership.

### **Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change**

The process of designing and performing this research and creating the project was enlightening. The preparation and design of the study required careful thought. The nature of the problem drove the design of the research questions, while the nature of the research questions compelled the study approach. I learned that every step of the research had to be grounded in theory, evaluations, practice, and methodology.

For the project, I found that it was necessary to support every step with data from the literature and the responses from the participants. I learned not to make assumptions

about what the data may be. It was enlightening to discover what was important to the participants was not what I had expected. It was also interesting to see how much information could be gleaned from careful and thorough thematic analysis of the data.

I learned that research is rigorous, and every step must be well documented and described. Particularly important was the realization that one misstep in the design of the study or execution could invalidate the study and its findings. Likewise, the project deliverable was valuable only because it was produced from careful research. I believe that the hard work associated with this project showed me what scholarly truly means and gave me respect for all those researchers who have conducted studies.

### **Reflection on the Importance of the Work**

The social importance of research depends on two things: the number of people it may affect and the degree of good it can do. The number of people potentially affected by the findings of this study could be large. According to the Department of Defense (2014), there are over 1.4 million service members in the U.S military. The number of service members with children young enough to be placed in a child development center rather than attending school is considerable. A potential benefit of the study is the possible increase in the quality of childcare for military families.

The contribution this study and project could make to scholarship is to stimulate research on a poorly examined group: military families with small children, as well as workers who care for the children of military families. The contribution to theory is limited, as Herzberg's (1966) two-factor theory is well known, but the study could add to the understanding of the role extrinsic factors play in jobs that are satisfying but low-

paying and/or without benefits, such as childcare and teaching. Herzberg's (1968) later work focused on those areas.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

This project could affect social change by the inclusion of a mentoring program that provides support and role-modeling for first year childcare workers to increase positive work experiences and knowledge base, which could increase retention. Childcare worker retention may improve the well-being of military families by providing improved continuity and quality of care for their young children. Military service can be stressful, and it is often difficult to raise a family while serving. The recommendations in this project may provide benefits to the military childcare worker by improving stability, economic well-being, and professional development, which may also support the well-being of the military family.

Although the military is fond of procedures, standards, and regulations, it was surprising to find that few regulations existed for a mentoring program for first-year childcare workers. Effective and meaningful training programs such as a 3-day mentoring program, if successful, could be standardized and implemented at other military bases with child development centers.

### **Future Research**

Future research could include a follow-up study to determine the effectiveness of the mentoring program and whether there was an increase in retention rates of first-year childcare workers at the study site. An additional study at the same center could be conducted to identify additional or new factors that impacted retention rates. A future

study comparing factors impacting retention rates, once a mentoring program has been implemented, at various centers with similar demographics may be beneficial to assess any improvement.

### **Conclusion**

The key finding from this project was that childcare workers need attention and supervision and that they often did not receive these supports at the study site. Moreover, childcare workers need to feel valued and appreciated. Herzberg (1966) noted that material rewards are effective in motivation and retention, but not as much as previously thought. What really matters, Herzberg suggested, is that employees need to feel valued and appreciated. The findings of this study supported that statement and were a fundamental element of the position paper.

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## Appendix A: The Project Position Paper

### Job Retention of Childcare Workers in a Military Child Development Center

#### **Introduction**

An issue is present with low retention rates of childcare workers in child development centers on military bases during their first year of employment. In the first year of employment at a military child development center in Northeast United States, workers often leave their positions due to a variety of factors both intrinsic and extrinsic. These factors both relate to inherent features of childcare work, the military work environment, the nature of employees at child development center, and the way such centers are supervised.

Based on my study of the experiences of novice childcare workers and my personal experience from over 25 years working for the military as a childcare worker, childcare program director, trainer, inspector, and program manager, I recommend a change to the training policy to include the implementation of a mentoring program. The purpose of this position paper is to present my recommendations on how to reduce the attrition rates of novice childcare workers at military centers with the implementation of a change to the current training policy to include a mentoring program for all new childcare workers. The information in this position paper may help stakeholders, supervisors, and other affected by the study problem to reduce attrition rates for employees at military childcare centers. It appears that the problem of attrition has been ignored, although employee turnover is a significant drain on resources. A reciprocal effect in workplaces relates to high turnover of workers. Whatever conditions in the workplace that cause high

turnover also prevent the issue from being well-studied as disgruntled employees leave or are transferred and can no longer report their experiences. Military service members are often transient and sometimes cannot be located to relate their past childcare experiences, both as workers and as parents.

### **Background**

I explored the work experiences of childcare workers during their first year of employment at the military child development center to understand the factors that could influence the workers' decision to resign. I examined the high turnover rate of childcare workers and what could be done to retain them by exploring how childcare workers described their work experiences during their first year of employment at a military child development center. I also explored their positive work experiences during their first year of employment that influenced their retention as well as their negative work experiences during their first year of employment that influenced their decision to resign from the center.

I focused on the problem of high turnover rates in military childcare workers within their first year of employment. The fact that quality childcare is essential in military services makes this problem significant. Furthermore, the military constitutes the largest employer of employer-supported childcare workers in the U.S. (Civic Impulse, 2017). The participants' experiences at the military childcare center provided insight about childcare workers' positive and negative work experiences. I interpreted and integrated the outcomes of the information-gathering with what emerged from the

literature to form a comprehensive idea of why military childcare workers leave the employment at such high rates.

The studies reviewed regarding childcare workers indicated that various influences may affect job satisfaction of workers in the military childcare center, including factors such as education, training, wages, social status, organizational culture, and behavioral issues of children in the childcare center. In summary, the researchers in these studies examined hygiene factors related to compensation and benefits, professional development, workplace conditions, and organizational culture, all of which demonstrated an influence on job satisfaction and retention of childcare workers. The results provided insights relative to the high turnover rate of childcare workers at the military child development center.

Although compensation and benefits also influenced current and prior childcare workers on their decision to leave the center, it is important to note that pay and benefits are determined and established by the Department of Defense and not determined at the local installation level. A mentoring program could be implemented at the local installation level and have a positive impact on the professional development of novice childcare workers during their first year of employment and improve retention rates. The mentoring program may include a 3-day training for all new mentors and mentees and may be part of the professional development of all novice childcare workers during their first year of employment.

Administrators in a military child development center in the northeast United States were experiencing difficulty retaining childcare workers, particularly workers

during their first year of employment. The center administrators were struggling to meet staff and child ratio requirements and had to resort to hiring some workers who were unskilled. According to the director of the center at the study site, the large number of childcare workers who leave the military child development program within the first year of employment is an indicator that the problem exists and the problem of employee retention was acute. The director at the study site communicated about the difficulties associated with retaining childcare workers in the military, the majority of employees left the program within their first year of appointment. The 2013 turnover rate of childcare workers was 32%, and even rose to 94% in the fourth quarter of 2016. During this period, 25% of the untrained and inexperienced staff members resigned within their first year of employment. Furthermore, in agreement with findings of researchers such as Henning-Smith and Kozhimannil (2016), the director found that the majority of resignations came from individuals who lacked degrees or appropriate training. “This problem was exacerbated, according to the participants in the study, by a lack of mentoring to assist with the training given to them after they started their jobs.

A current childcare worker shared, “The training I have received is a bit overwhelming and it keeps on coming with little time to actually let it sink in.

Similarly, another current worker had the same perception on the training sessions and requirements, “Just a lot of training during my first few months here, and it has been hard to keep up at times with being able to practice what I have learn.”

Another current childcare worker commented on why the training sessions are believed to be ineffective. Noting the lack of time and mentoring, she added, “The training does not

properly prepare you for the classroom as it should. No. There is just too much information that you are expected to learn and be able to implement with little to no mentoring.”

Any individual who started a childcare job at the facility and did not already have childcare experience or was qualified for the position was unable to implement the training they received to make up the deficit. This meant that almost all of the first-year workers were and remained unqualified. Being unqualified for a position but expected to perform its duties is a major source of job dissatisfaction, burnout, and turnover, especially when the job is to teach or supervise children (Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hall, Hughes, & Thelk, 2017; Sowell, 2017). A current worker stated, *“The training is too much, and it doesn’t really prepare you for the job. I feel they train you and then throw you in the classroom and you have to sink or swim.”*

While several employees complained that it seemed that because they were female, they were assumed to have natural childcare and child supervision talents. Adding a mentoring program to their initial training may provide novice childcare workers with the opportunity to apply their training under the supervision of experienced childcare worker.

Shwartz and Dori (2016) conducted a research study on the perceptions of mentors and novice teachers with regard to their mentoring experiences. Shwartz and Dori (2016) suggested the use of a mentoring program that facilitates the inclusion and needs of the new teachers and ensures the quality of education being provided to the students. Shwartz and Dori (2016) uncovered the following relevant aspects in a

mentoring relationship: “(a) technical dimension; (b) professional dimension; and (c) affective dimension” (p. 151). These factors affect the mentors and mentees on a daily basis in their workplace. The three factors may then be applied in the proposed mentoring program where under the technical dimension, basic administrative tasks and responsibilities of the mentees are discussed, explained, and even demonstrated. Another dimension is the professional dimension which highlights the understanding of the novice childcare workers’ knowledge with regard to the actual content of the curriculum they are supposed to teach the children. Finally, the affective content encompasses the values that the mentors and new childcare workers need to practice in order to successfully experience a mentoring program and relationship (Shwartz & Dori, 2016).

It is important to note that for high quality mentorship, the experienced childcare workers must be open and ready to perform the role of a mentor and are not forced or coerced by the management to participate (Johnson & Kardos, 2005). Further, the mentees must also be willing to learn and accept the suggestions, lessons, and values imparted by the mentors; and become self-sufficient after the program (Law, Bottenberg, Brozick, Currie, DiVall, Haines, & Yablonski, 2014). The mutual goals and willingness of the participants to complete successfully the program and create a positive change in their organization must be the driving forces for each mentor and mentee.

### **Recommendations for Content and Structure of a Mentoring Program**

Based on my personal work experience of over 25 years in military child care, research literature, and the study findings I determined the best approach to reduce the low retention rates of childcare workers may be a change to the current training policy at

the study site to implement a mentoring program for all newly hired childcare workers. The mentoring program may be a part of their professional development during their first year of employment. The current training of the Navy for childcare workers was found to be inadequate due to a lack of support after training was provided. Therefore, the proposed mentoring program may consist of a 3-day training for mentors and mentees to enhance the current training requirements of the Navy's; these requirements already in place for new childcare workers. With Harrison and Killion (2007) noting that a 3-day mentor training for teacher leaders contributes to school and student success and my personal work experience, I determined that a 3-day training for mentors and mentees may be sufficient for the study site to implement a mentoring program.

### **Mentor Training Day 1**

The first day of training for the proposed mentoring program may include mentors and mentees being introduced to each other after they have been matched by management based on age groups and classroom assignments. The program may need to include the technical aspects of the roles and responsibilities of mentors and the mentees at the workplace. This component of the program is crucial as novice childcare workers must be aware of the general workplace environment, processes, and systems at the center such as professional development, professional relationships with families and co-workers, and other organizational elements. Mentors may also explain and orient the novice childcare workers to the basic responsibilities they will need to fulfill; and the benefits and opportunities they have as they continue their service at the center.

Current and prior childcare workers and management team members shared in their interviews their disappointment with the lack of personal and professional growth opportunities, and the feeling of being overwhelmed by the training requirements. The participants also expressed their feeling of not having anyone to assist them with implementing their newly learned skills in the classroom. The first day of the mentoring program may allow the mentors to provide the novice childcare workers with details of the childcare center, and the advantages of working there. This aspect is crucial in setting the expectations and requirements of the job with the new childcare workers in order to help avoid any misunderstandings or disappointments along the way.

The first day of training for the mentoring program may be informal where the mentors could discuss with the new childcare workers work related topics. It may also be helpful for the new childcare workers to annotate and share with their assigned mentor their initial questions regarding what will be expected of them. This may help the mentee and the mentor to have open communication, and for the mentee to better express their feelings and concerns to their mentor given that in the beginning the mentee may not be comfortable with expressing their feelings or concerns.

### **Mentor Training Day 2**

The second day of training for the mentoring program should be more formal and include a presentation of the professional components of the novice childcare workers' job. Mentors may even choose to work together to present and discuss the childcare workers' crucial roles in the lives of young children they are about to manage and supervise at the center. The mentors should share with the mentees the management

strategies and pedagogical aspects of their work. There should also be sharing of appropriate workplace skills and techniques with mentees to help them increase their job competency with the one-on-one aspect of a mentoring program. Through a formal discussion of the developmental, emotional, and physical needs of the children, novice childcare workers can be made aware of their value in the lives of young children where the quality of their care must be warranted at all times (Bridges, Fuller, Huang, & Hamre, 2011; Douglass, 2011; Sugarman, 2011; Weinstock, Bos, Tseng, Rosenthal, Ortiz, & Bentley, 2012; Whitebook, Phillips, & Howes, 2014). Novice childcare workers must have the belief in the task of caring for the children of military families. The presence of this value will greatly assist the novice childcare workers in fulfilling their duties despite the childcare workers' and management team's issues with the lack of benefits, possible management and program politics, and even the lack of appreciation even with their efforts and hard work.

### **Mentor Training Day 3**

The last day of training for the mentoring program should include the mentors working with the mentees to communicate and convey to the new childcare workers the overall responsibilities, values, and importance of their profession. During this time, the mentors may also seek to understand the personal thoughts and feelings of the mentees in their new journey as actual childcare workers. Childcare workers may be asked to reflect on their initial perceptions of their new job, as well as their feelings on having the responsibility to care for and performing the crucial task of assisting with the development of young children at the center. The reflection portion may be helpful in

order to build the confidence of the mentees and motivate them to continue with their work despite the possible difficulties and barriers they may face. Although the initial mentoring are planned for three days to fit into the current new employee training schedule, the training schedule of the study site can be adjusted to provide a more flexible timeline for mentoring training to meet the needs of the staff. The desired outcome of the initial mentoring training is that a relationship may be formed between the mentors and the mentees that may continue and help new childcare workers to develop their knowledge and skills throughout their first year of employment at the center and respond to the ultimate goal of reducing turnover rates.

An evaluation is recommended to be conducted at the end of the 3-day training of the mentoring program and again at the end of the new childcare workers' first year of employment by both the mentor and the mentee to determine the effectiveness of the program. One way to evaluate the effectiveness of the program may be to develop a structured evaluation using a survey to receive feedback from the participants on what they have learned and on the procedures of the program following the 3-day training, at mid-point, and at the end of the first year. An evaluation could also include a checklist the participants could utilize to annotate the topics/areas they have covered as they progressed through the mentoring program and should be on-going and include participants' feedback over a specified timeframe as they are implementing newly learned skills and techniques in the classroom.

In general, the mentoring program targets opened effective communication between the mentor and the mentees. By having an open and effective communication

style, issues on professional growth opportunities, pay and compensation, work hours, and management, mentors can relay support to their mentees. By having mentors who they can trust and with whom they can share their thoughts and feelings, the childcare workers could feel valued and respected as members of the organization. If workers have a feeling of being valued and respected this could, in turn, create a more positive work environment and lead to increased productivity among the workers.

### **Conclusion**

Low retention rates of childcare workers are a national problem impacting working families. The problem of the low retention rates of childcare workers can be seen on the local level, in a military child development center in the Northeast United States. When childcare workers leave the program, this problem creates additional strain on the center to maintain the required ratios. Childcare workers attrition leaves the children without the continuity of care needed in early childhood programs.

The purpose of implementing a change to the current training policy to include a mentoring program may be to assist and accommodate the initial needs of novice childcare workers during their first year of employment as they develop their newly learned skills. Over time, by slowly adjusting to the environment, with the help of experienced childcare workers (mentors), the novice childcare workers (mentees) may have an increased chance of staying and even working at the center for an extended period. In turn, the mentees might become the future successors of their mentors and help the upcoming childcare workers as they enter the military child development center. As a result, military child development centers could have a sustainable process of developing

and retaining their childcare workers; and a sustainable process of developing and retaining their childcare workers could lead to a better quality of provision and service to the children of military families. This sustainable process could reduce the overall attrition rates of childcare workers over time.

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## Appendix B: Interview Guidelines, Protocol, and Questions

### **Prior to Interview**

1. Design a set of interview questions tailored for the purpose of the study and the interviewee.
2. Identify interviewee and essential background information about them.
3. Ask for consent form to be signed prior to interview.
4. Arrange date and time of interview, explain aims of project.
5. Send interview questions ahead of interview after consent letters have been signed with short synopsis of the study, and personal e-mail address and contact details of interviewer.
6. Inform interviewee that a copy of the completed data analysis will be provided to them to assist with accuracy of my interpretation of their responses.
7. Request permission for audio-recording of the interview.
8. Check digital recorder on iPhone.
9. Conduct voice test of digital recorder on iPhone.

### **During Interview**

1. Provide background information to the project at interview.
2. Re-confirm permission to record, confidentiality and transcript to be provided.
3. Take notes throughout interview.
4. Identify any action to be followed up and request permissions to follow up issues by telephone/e-mail
5. Thank interviewee for taking the time to speak with you.

### **After Interview**

1. Write up contextual interview notes and transcribe digital recordings.
2. Complete information and enter on to a spreadsheet.
3. Identify themes and code to determine patterns.
4. Send a copy of the completed data analysis to each interviewee to verify the accuracy and credibility of my interpretation of their responses. Request that participants provide an updated response, in their own words, to recorded responses that they feel was not reflective of their own thoughts. Their updated responses will replace my interpretation.
5. Request any additional information or clarification of notes at this point.
6. Enter factual content information from interview onto a spreadsheet (themes, patterns, etc.)
7. Save transcript and notes in a Word or Excel document.

### Interview Protocol for Prior Workers

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. I may like to reiterate that your participation is strictly voluntary and you may decline to participate at any time. Your identity and your responses will remain confidential. Do you have any questions before we begin? The first four questions are demographical questions. The following 12 questions are in regard to your prior work experiences as a childcare worker at the Child Development Center. Are you ready to begin?

1. Please confirm your age. (Verify that participants are over 18 years of age)
2. What is your gender?
3. Please tell me about your educational background. (e.g., highest grade completed/degree earned)
4. How long did you work at the military Child Development Center?
5. What motivated you to work at the military Child Development Center?
6. Please tell me about your pay and the types of benefits you were provided during your employment. (e.g., retirement plan, accrued annual and sick leave)
7. Please tell me about any feedback provided to you by the Training and Curriculum Specialist or Management team during your first year of employment.
8. Please tell me about your positive work experiences as a childcare worker in the military Child Development Center during your first year of employment.
9. Please tell me about any negative work experiences as a childcare worker in the military Child Development Center during your first year of employment.
10. Do you believe anything could have been changed at the center that may have reversed your decision to resign? If yes, please explain.

11. Please tell me about any personal factors that you believe contributed to your decision to resign.
12. Please tell me about any job related factors that you believe contributed to your decision to resign.
13. Is there anything that could have been done differently to help you or other first-year childcare worker be retained on the job?
14. I understand that new childcare workers are provided initial training prior to being placed in a classroom. Did this training adequately provide you the skills and strategies to prepare you for the classroom? If no, please explain.
15. Please tell me about any on-going training during your first year of employment that assisted you with as a childcare worker.
16. Were you provided any mentoring during your first year of employment?
  - a. If you had a mentor, did the mentor help or not help in better preparing you for your position?
  - b. If you did not have a mentor, do you feel that having a mentor may have helped or not have helped in better preparing you for your position?

### Interview Protocol for Current Workers

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. I may like to reiterate that your participation is strictly voluntary and you may decline to participate at any time. Your identity and your responses will remain confidential. Do you have any questions before we begin? The first four questions are demographical questions. The following twelve questions are regarding your current work experiences as a childcare worker at the Child Development Center. Are you ready to begin?

1. Please confirm your age. (Verify that participants are over 18 years of age)
2. What is your gender?
3. Please tell me about your educational background. (e.g., highest grade completed/degree earned)
4. How long have you been working at the military Child Development Center?
5. Please tell me about your pay and the types of benefits you are provided. (e.g., retirement plan, accrued annual and sick leave)
6. What motivated you to work at the military Child Development Center?
7. Are you motivated to continue to work at the military Child Development Center?
  - a. If yes, please explain what factors contribute to the motivation.
  - b. If no, please explain what factors contributed to the loss of motivation.
8. Please tell me about your positive work experiences as a childcare worker in the military Child Development Center.
9. Please tell me about any negative work experiences as a childcare worker in the military Child Development Center.
10. Please explain if you plan on continuing to work for the Center or if you plan on looking for another job.

- a. If you plan on staying, explain what factor are contributing to your decision to stay
    - i. Personal Factors
    - ii. Job Related Factors
  - b. If you plan on resigning, explain what factors are contributing to your decision to leave
    - i. Personal Factors
    - ii. Job Related Factors
11. If you plan on resigning, explain what you believe could be changed that may have a positive influence on your decision.
  12. Is there anything that could be done differently to help you or other first-year childcare workers be retained on the job?
  13. I understand that new childcare workers are provided initial training prior to being placed in a classroom. Did this training adequately provide you the skills and strategies to prepare you for the classroom? If no, please explain.
  14. Please tell me about any feedback you have been provided by the Training & Curriculum Specialist or Management team.
  15. Have you been provided any mentoring during your first year of employment?
    - a. If yes, please explain in detail if how having a mentor has better prepared you for your position.
    - b. If no, please explain in detail if you feel having a mentor may have been helpful or not in better preparing you for your position.

### Interview Protocol for Management

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. I may like to reiterate that your participation is strictly voluntary and you may decline to participate at any time. Your identity and your responses will remain confidential. Do you have any questions before we begin? The first four questions are demographic questions. The following twelve questions are regarding your current work experiences as management at the Child Development Center. Are you ready to begin?

2. Please confirm your age. (Verify that participants are over 18 years of age)?
3. What is your gender?
4. Please tell me about your educational background. (e.g., highest grade completed/degree earned)
5. How long have you been working at the Center?
6. Please tell me about your pay and the types of benefits you are provided. (e.g., retirement plan, accrued annual and sick leave)
7. What motivated you to work at the military Child Development Center?
8. Are you motivated to continue to work at the military Child Development Center?
  - a. If yes, please explain what factors contribute to the motivation.
  - b. If no, please explain what factors contributed to the loss of motivation.
9. Please tell me what your job title is and provide what job duties you are responsible for at the military Child Development Center.
10. Please provide some examples of positive work experiences first-year childcare workers may have in the military Child Development Center.
11. Please provide some examples of any negative work experiences first-year childcare workers may have in the military Child Development Center.

12. Please describe what factor that you believe contributed to childcare workers' decision to stay
- i. Personal Factors
  - ii. Job Related Factors
13. Please describe what factors that you believe contributed to childcare workers' decision to leave
- i. Personal Factors
  - ii. Job Related Factors
14. Explain what you believe could be changed that may have a positive influence on first-year childcare workers' decision to resign.
15. Is there anything that you feel could be done differently to help first-year childcare worker with retention at the child development center?
16. I understand that new childcare workers are provided initial training prior to being placed in a classroom. Can you tell me if you feel that this training provided childcare workers with the tools needed to adequately prepare them for the classroom?
17. Please tell me about any feedback regarding initial training that has been provided to you by first-year childcare workers or the management team.
18. Please explain in detail what types of mentoring, if any, is provided to first-year childcare workers.
- a. If mentoring has been provided, please explain in detail if you feel that having a mentor or mentoring program better prepares first-year childcare workers.

- b. If mentoring has not been provided, please explain in detail if you feel that having a mentor may have been helpful or not in better preparing childcare workers.