

Two Years in Early Care and Education

Child Care Workers in the Aftermath of September 11th

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The *Who Stays? Who Leaves?* Study of child care workers in Alameda County, California afforded a rare glimpse into the impact of September 11th on 174 early childhood teachers, directors, and providers, and the children in their care, approximately 4-6 months after the tragic events. The results reveal that, despite their distance from heavily impacted areas of the country, a sizeable minority of child care workers were deeply affected by the attacks, dealt with serious feelings of vulnerability and stress among the children in their care, and provided vital support to the children's families in the aftermath of September 11th. If this is the portrait provided from a West Coast sample, one can only imagine the experiences of child care providers working at the Children's Discovery Center in lower Manhattan, the Pentagon Child Care Center, and other programs in New York City, the Washington DC area, and the area surrounding Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

The following descriptive statistics are based on the responses of 80 early childhood teachers, 28 directors, and 66 home-based providers to a series of questions related to the events of September 11. The questions addressed five broad issues: (1) The teacher/provider's exposure to the attacks through personal loss of family members or friends, or the families' loss of family members or friends, (2) Work-related impacts for the provider/teacher or his/her spouse (e.g., changes in salary or work schedule), (3) Negative emotional and behavioral

reactions (e.g., shaken feelings of safety and security, increased worries about the children in his/her care), (4) Reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress for the children in his/her care, and (5) Actions taken by the teacher/provider in the aftermath of the attacks (e.g., talked to the families, in-service activities).

Findings:

- Despite living and working in California, 13% of the child care workers indicated that they cared for children from families who knew of a family member or friend who had been in the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, or on a hijacked airplane.
- Approximately 20% of the child care teachers and providers reported that the preschoolers and toddlers in their care had expressed fears of becoming the victim of an act of terrorism, and 23% indicated that children had expressed more general fears of being harmed or separated. Close to one-third had observed children engaging in repetitive play scenarios related to the attacks - a common response among young children following disasters.
- One in three child care workers experienced persistent worries that something would happen to the children in their care.
- Following the attacks, the teachers and providers provided substantial support to the children's families. Two-thirds talked to the parents about the attacks and events following

- Over 1 in 5 child care teachers and providers held meetings or in-service sessions regarding emergency response procedures, but a similar share indicated that their program or home was not adequately prepared to respond to a similar event. Both efforts to improve preparedness and concerns about readiness to respond were more common among center-based than home-based child care workers.

These findings indicate a pressing need to enhance the access of child care teachers and providers — not only in heavily impacted areas of the country, but across the nation — to mental health professionals who are trained to provide assistance in the aftermath of disasters. They also reveal yet another way in which child care providers are a vital source of family support during times of crisis, as well as day by day.