



A National Look at Infant-Toddler Teachers in Child Care Centers

Who Are They, and How Do They Compare with Other Early Educators?

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Infant-toddler teachers in child care centers are a critical but understudied sector of the child care and early education (CCEE) workforce. In the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, about 60 percent of children younger than age 3 used nonparental CCEE regularly.¹ Although the majority were in home-based CCEE settings, more families in recent years, especially those with working mothers, have turned to center-based CCEE for their infants and toddlers (Burgess et al. 2014). Yet, in many communities, CCEE supply cannot keep up with demand, particularly for infants who require smaller group sizes and child-to-adult ratios (Jessen-Howard, Malik, Workman, and Hamm 2018). Workforce shortages resulting from the pandemic further challenge the field, with nearly 80,000 child care workers still missing as of January 2023 compared with prepandemic employment counts—a 7.5 percent loss.² Moreover, early educators working with infants and toddlers have historically suffered a wage penalty, earning less than early educators in similar settings working with preschool children (NSECE Project Team 2013a; Whitebook et al. 2018), further challenging staff retention in these jobs.

But who are infant-toddler teachers? How do they differ from preschool teachers and home-based caregivers of infants and toddlers? As state and local child care administrators consider ways to build and sustain the supply of quality care for young children and support the infant-toddler workforce, we provide this research brief as a resource.

In this brief, we present information on the characteristics, qualifications, and compensation of teachers caring for and educating America’s youngest children—infant-toddler teachers in child care centers. We use restricted-use data from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), a nationally representative sample of child care centers, center-based classroom staff, and home-based child care providers (NSECE Project Team 2013b). In our analysis, we identify infant-toddler teachers as early educators working in child care centers with children younger than age 3.³ We conduct descriptive analyses to examine their demographic characteristics, educational attainment and work experience, and compensation and benefits. We compare them with early educators in child care centers working with children ages 3 through 5⁴ (who we refer to as “preschoolers”) and with listed home-based child care providers caring for at least one child younger than age 3.⁵ We also note observed differences between lead and assistant infant-toddler teachers.⁶ In our analyses, we examine pay equity among early educators, building off previous research on this topic.

Key findings, based on 2019 data, include the following:

- Nationally, there were 684,800 center-based infant-toddler teachers working in nonpublic school settings. They comprised 57 percent of teachers working in nonpublic school child care centers. Fifty-six percent of infant-toddler teachers worked exclusively with children younger than age 3 (infants, toddlers, or both groups), while 44 percent also worked with children ages 3 through 5.
- Infant-toddler teachers were younger on average and less likely to be married than teachers working with preschoolers and listed home-based child care providers who cared for infants and toddlers; 36 percent of assistant infant-toddler teachers were younger than age 25.
- About 41 percent of infant-toddler teachers had a child age 12 or younger in their household. Combining data on marital status and household residents, an estimated 16.9 percent were unmarried parents, higher than preschool teachers (13.5 percent).
- In comparison with the US adult population in 2019, infant-toddler teachers were more likely to be Black alone (18 percent versus 12 percent of US adults) and Hispanic or Latino (19 percent versus 16 percent of US adults) and less likely to be White alone (54 percent versus 63 percent of US adults) or Asian alone (3 percent versus 6 percent of US adults).
- Infant-toddler teachers offered rich language diversity, with 30 percent speaking a language other than English, with a higher rate among assistants (34 percent) than leads (27 percent).
- Nearly half (47 percent) of infant-toddler lead teachers had a postsecondary degree. Fifteen percent of infant-toddler teachers held a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential as their highest level of education obtained. A significant percentage of infant-toddler teachers had some college credits but no degree or CDA (25 percent), and 25 percent of assistants and 16 percent of lead teachers were enrolled in school.
- Center-based teachers working exclusively with children younger than 3 earned a median hourly wage of \$11 compared with \$12.30 for center-based teachers working exclusively with preschoolers—a difference of \$1.30 per hour or 11 percent less. Center-based teachers with a

bachelor's degree earned \$1.60 less per hour if they worked exclusively with infants and toddlers versus exclusively with preschoolers.

- Only 25 percent of teachers with a bachelor's degree working exclusively with infants and toddlers earned at least \$15 an hour—nearly half of the percentage for bachelor's-level teachers working exclusively with preschoolers (47 percent).
- Nearly 20 percent of teachers working exclusively with infants and toddlers reported receiving some form of government assistance, such as housing or nutrition assistance—a much higher rate than that of teachers working exclusively with preschoolers in centers (10 percent).
- Reported health insurance coverage was relatively low, with about 78 percent of teachers working exclusively with infants and toddlers insured compared with nearly 87 percent of teachers working exclusively with preschoolers in centers.

What Are the Characteristics of Infant-Toddler Teachers in Child Care Centers?

In 2019, there were 684,800 center-based infant-toddler teachers not associated with public school districts nationally—or 57 percent of teachers working in child care centers. About 56 percent of those infant-toddler teachers (about 382,700 early educators) worked exclusively with that age group. The data do not distinguish infant teachers from toddler teachers. Some teachers may be working with only toddlers or only infants, and some may be working with both. The remaining 44 percent of infant-toddler teachers (about 302,000 early educators) also worked with children ages 3 through 5. Around 105,700 of them, or 35 percent of those serving both age groups, were assistant teachers who worked across age groups. Some teachers may be working in a classroom of two- and three-year-olds and thus get counted as an infant-toddler teacher and a preschool teacher by our definitions.

Sex and Age

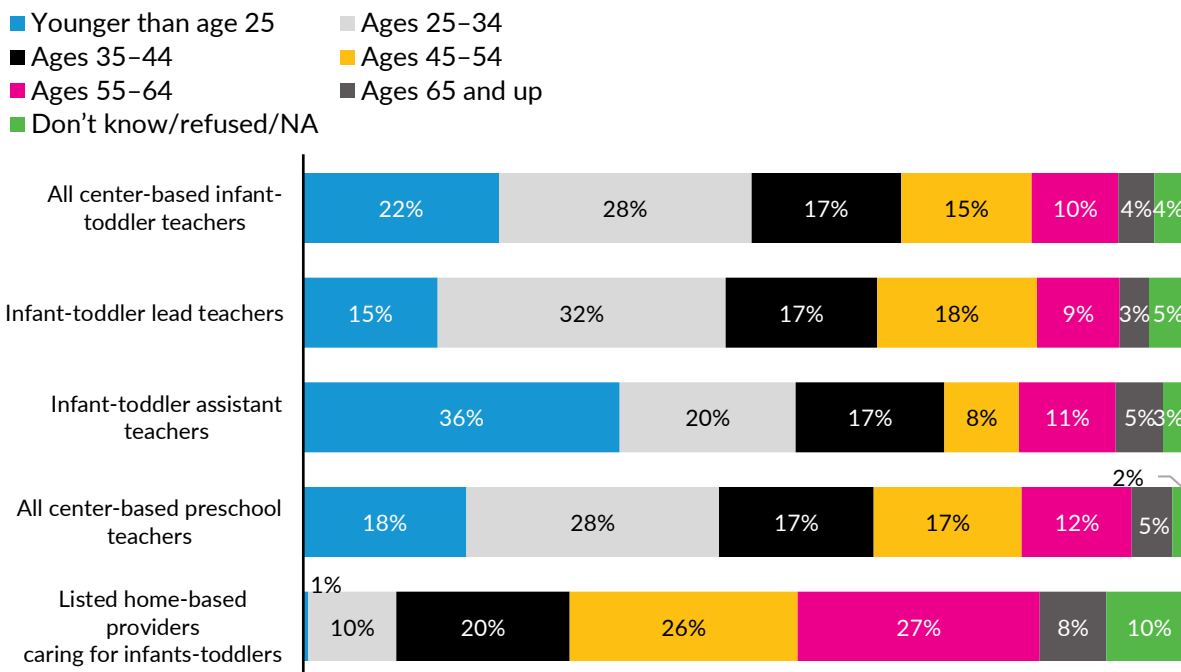
In 2019, most infant-toddler teachers identified as female (99 percent), with 2 percent of lead teachers and 1 percent of assistant teachers identifying as male. In comparison, 3 percent of preschool teachers in centers were male.

Infant-toddler teachers were 40 years old on average, slightly younger than center-based preschool teachers (41.7 years old) and much younger than the average listed home-based provider caring for infants and toddlers (52.6 years). Lead teachers working with infants and toddlers were slightly older on average than assistant teachers (41 years compared with 38.4 years). Among infant-toddler teachers, assistant teachers were also much more likely to be younger than age 25 (36 percent) than lead teachers (15 percent) and less likely to be ages 25 to 44 (20 percent versus 32 percent) or ages 45 to 54 (8 percent versus 18 percent; see figure 1 for the age distribution of these groups).

FIGURE 1

Infant-Toddler Teachers in Centers, Especially Assistants, Are Younger on Average Than Teachers Working with Preschoolers and Listed Home-Based Providers Caring for Infants and Toddlers

Percentage of teachers in child care centers and listed homes across different age groups



Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: The figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups.

Race and Ethnicity, Language, and Country of Origin

As with other early educators, infant-toddler teachers were racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. More than half (54 percent) of infant-toddler teachers were White alone, 19 percent were Hispanic or Latino, 18 percent were Black alone, 3 percent were Asian alone, and 3 percent were two or more races or another race (figure 2). In comparison, larger shares of the US adult population in 2019 were White alone (63 percent) or Asian alone (6 percent), and smaller shares were Black alone (12 percent) or Hispanic or Latino (16 percent).⁷

Twelve percent of infant-toddler teachers were born outside the US, most commonly in Mexico (3 percent of all infant-toddler teachers; figure 3), and 30 percent reported speaking a language other than English (figure 5). Nativity rates are similar to national estimates from 2019, when immigrants were 13.7 percent of the total US adult population.⁸

COMPARISONS BY INFANT-TODDLER TEACHER ROLE

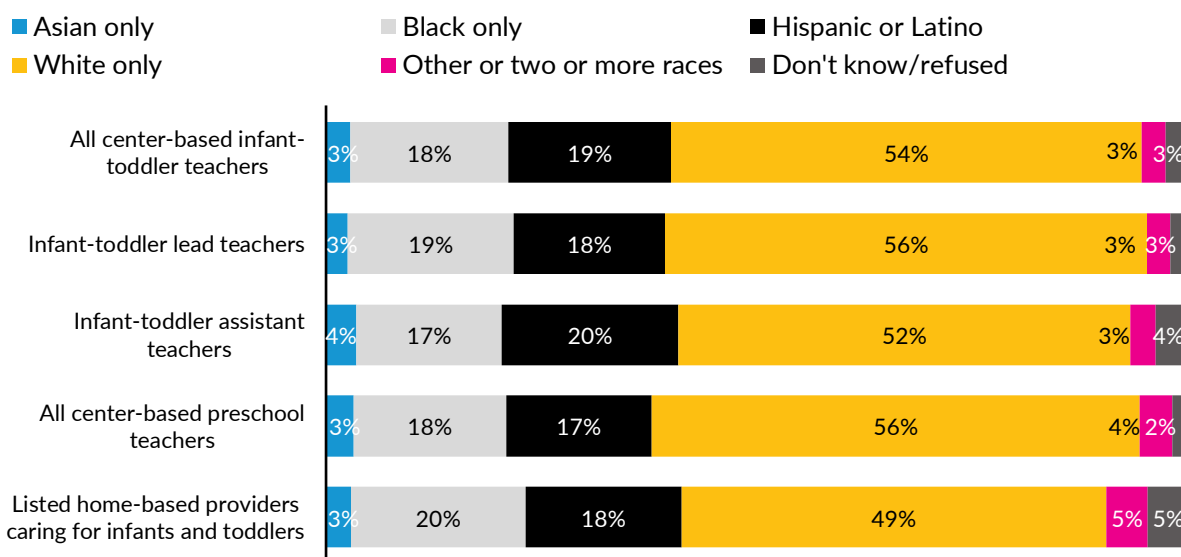
Among infant-toddler teachers, lead teachers and assistant teachers were quite similar in terms of their racial and ethnic backgrounds (figure 2). Assistants were slightly more likely than lead teachers to

be Hispanic or Latino (20 percent versus 18 percent) while lead teachers were slightly more likely than assistants to be Black alone (19 percent versus 17 percent) or White alone (56 percent versus 52 percent). However, these small differences are not statistically significant.

Also, larger shares of assistants were recent immigrants and reported speaking Spanish (figures 4 through 5). Specifically, 34 percent of assistant teachers reported speaking a language other than English compared with 27 percent of lead teachers (figure 5). This language diversity among assistants may be viewed as an asset to programs serving children and families of diverse backgrounds and for programs embracing the opportunity to enhance children’s language exposure more generally.

FIGURE 2
Infants-Toddler Teachers Are as Racially and Ethnically Diverse as Preschool Teachers in Centers and Home-Based Providers of Infants and Toddlers

Percentages of teachers in child care centers and listed homes across different racial and ethnic groups



Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

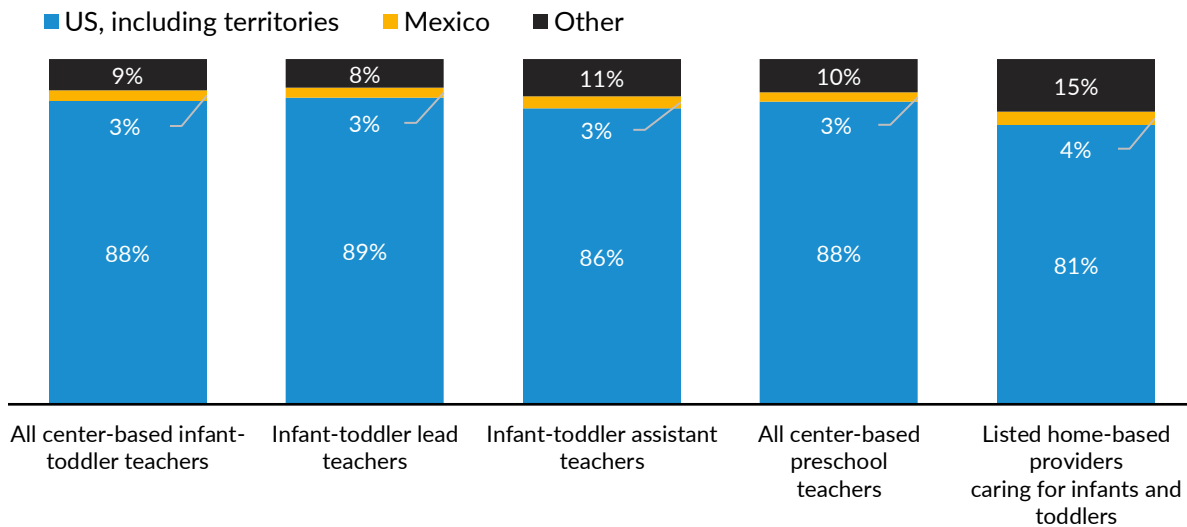
Notes: For disclosure reasons, the NSECE team coded those who selected only American Indian or Alaska Native, only Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and two or more races as “Other.” The figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups.

COMPARISONS WITH OTHER EARLY EDUCATORS

Overall, infant-toddler teachers were similar along these demographic characteristics to preschool teachers in centers and home-based providers caring for infants and toddlers. We observe only minor differences among groups. A slightly larger share of infant-toddler teachers than preschool teachers identified as Hispanic or Latino (19 percent versus 17 percent). Compared with home-based providers, a slightly smaller share of infant-toddler teachers identified as Black alone (20 percent versus 18 percent), and a larger share identified as White alone (49 percent versus 54 percent).

We also observe few differences across subgroups of early educators in their country of origin (figure 3), with a largest difference between teachers in centers and home-based providers. While about 88 percent of infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers were born in the US, a smaller share (81 percent) of home-based providers caring for infants and toddlers were born in the US. Like infant-toddler teachers, immigrant early educators across preschool and home-based settings most commonly immigrated from Mexico, though 15 percent of home-based caregivers were born in another country besides the United States or Mexico.

FIGURE 3
Most Infant-Toddler Teachers Were Born in the US Followed by Mexico, with Assistant Teachers in Centers and Listed Home-Based Providers Bringing Greater Diversity in Country of Origin
Percentage of teachers in child care centers and listed homes by country of origin



Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: This figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations, those who responded “I don’t know” to this question, as well as those who declined this question. Because of disclosure concerns, the NSECE team collapsed all other countries represented into “Other.” Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

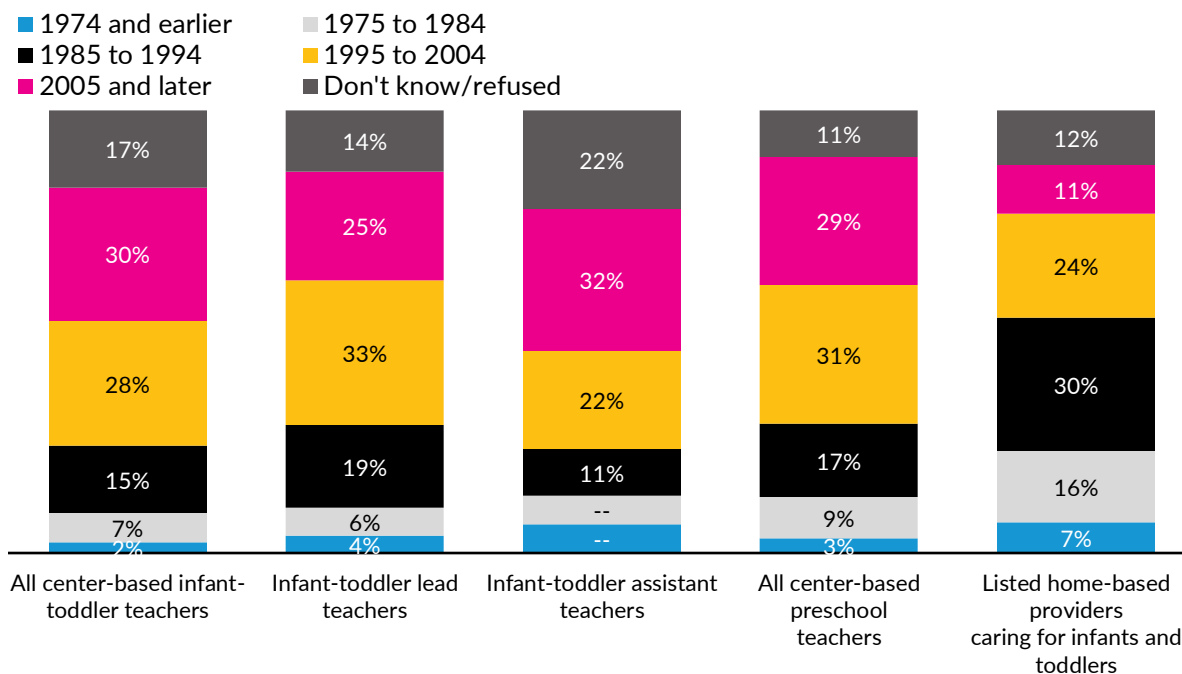
We also examined the year when immigrant teachers came to the US. A large share of survey respondents reported “don’t know” or refused this question (figure 4), but 30 percent of infant-toddler teachers in centers reported arriving in the US in 2005 or later. In contrast, a smaller share of home-based providers caring for infants and toddlers reported arriving since 2005 (11 percent), but this difference may partly stem from the staff age differences across settings.

Overall, center- and home-based teachers serving infants and toddlers and preschoolers exhibit similar rates of speaking at least one language other than English (figure 5). A slightly larger share of home-based providers caring for infants and toddlers (32 percent) speaks another language compared with 30 percent of center-based infant-toddler teachers and 27 percent of preschool teachers.

FIGURE 4

At Least 30 Percent of Immigrant Infant-Toddler Teachers Came to the US in 2005 or Later, Whereas Most Home-Based Providers Arrived Earlier

Percentage of immigrant teachers in child care centers and listed homes by year moved to the US



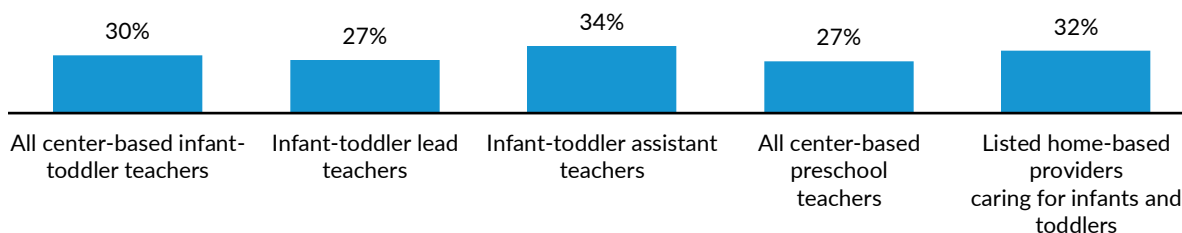
Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public and Restricted-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: This figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations and only includes those who answered that they were born in countries outside of the US and its territories. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

FIGURE 5

Assistant Teachers in Centers and Listed Home-Based Providers Working with Infants and Toddlers Offered the Most Linguistic Diversity among Subgroups of Early Educators

Percentage of teachers in centers and listed homes who indicated they speak a language besides English



Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: This figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations, those who answered “No” or “I don’t know” to the question about speaking a language other than English, and those who declined to answer this question. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive.

Infant-toddler teachers were racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, with assistants slightly more likely than lead teachers to be Hispanic or Latino, be born outside the US, and speak a language other than English.

Family Structure

We examined characteristics of infant-toddler teachers' families, including their marital status and whether they had a child age 12 or younger in their household. The latter is a proxy for whether they are a parent or guardian responsible for the well-being of a child at home. About half (51 percent) of infant-toddler teachers were married at the time of the survey (figure 6), and a large share (41 percent) had a child in their home (figure 7). Combining those two variables, an estimated 16.9 percent were unmarried parents, defined as not being married and having a child age 12 or younger in the household; however, the data do not indicate whether or not they have a cohabiting partner.

COMPARISONS BY INFANT-TODDLER TEACHER ROLE

Among center-based teachers working with infants and toddlers, a greater share of lead teachers than assistants were married at the time of the survey (55 percent versus 42 percent; figure 6) and had a child age 12 or younger (44 percent versus 36 percent; figure 7). These differences are statistically significant. This largely correlates with assistants being younger than lead teachers.

COMPARISONS WITH OTHER EARLY EDUCATORS

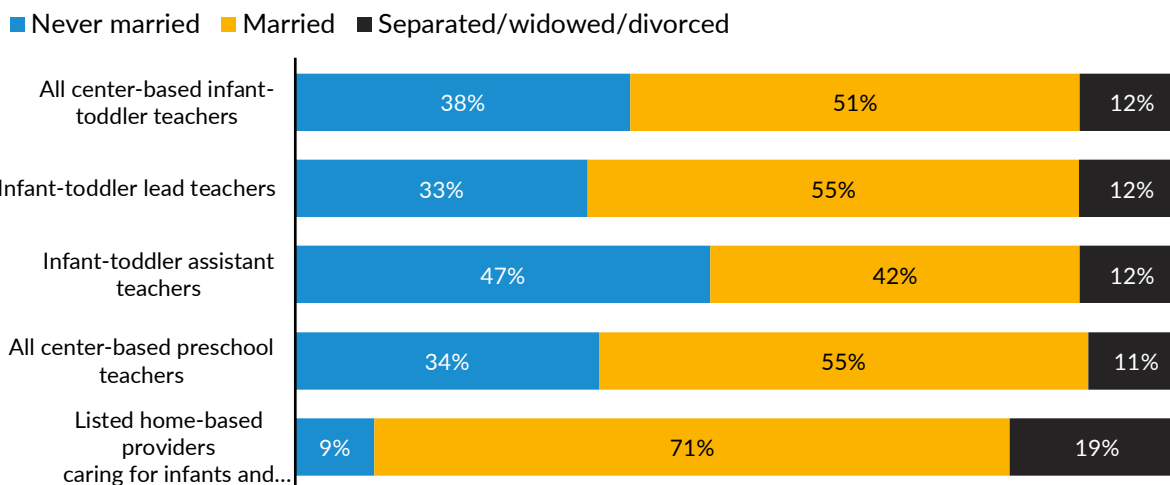
We observe small differences between all infant-toddler teachers in centers and preschool teachers in centers, with the former slightly less likely to be married but slightly more likely to have a child age 12 or younger at home (a difference of 4 percentage points on both variables). Combining those two variables, we estimate about 13.5 percent of preschool teachers in centers were unmarried parents, a smaller share than the nearly 17 percent of infant-toddler teachers.

Compared with home-based providers caring for infants and toddlers, infant-toddler teachers overall were much more likely to be “never married” (9 percent versus 38 percent; figure 6) and slightly less likely to have a young child (44 percent versus 41 percent; figure 7). This pattern combined with the age data shared earlier in this brief suggests that home-based providers are more likely to be older and married and have a family with young children compared with center-based teachers. Moreover, these findings suggest a somewhat greater percentage of unmarried parents among center-based infant-toddler teachers than home-based providers caring for this age group.

FIGURE 6

Marital Status Varies Widely across Infant-Toddler Teacher Positions and Care Settings

Percentage of teachers in child care centers and listed homes by marital status



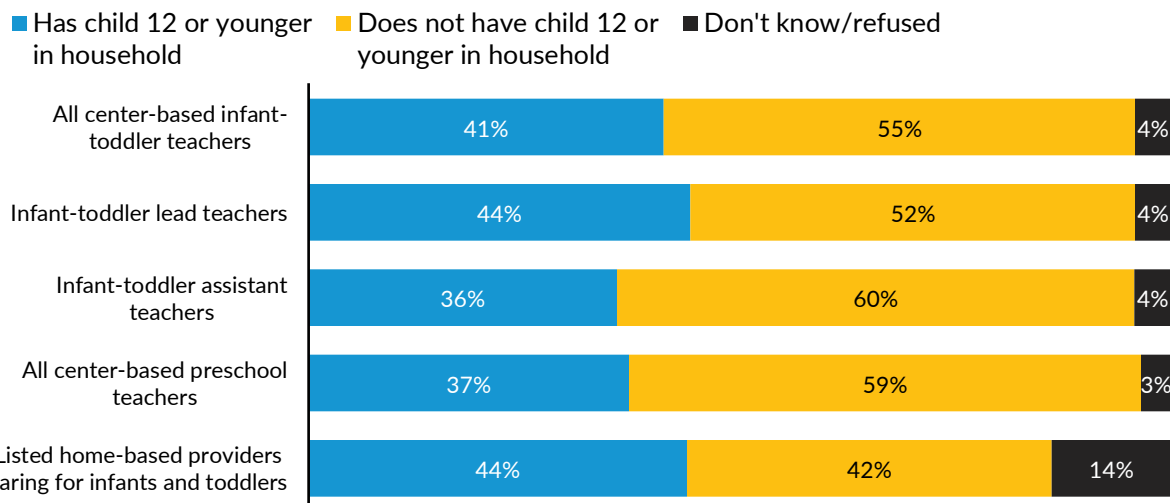
Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: This figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations, those who responded “I don’t know” to this question, and those who declined to answer this question. Respondents who responded that they are separated or widowed or divorced were grouped into one category because of small sample sizes. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups.

FIGURE 7

A Larger Share of Infant-Toddler Lead Teachers Have a Young Child Compared with Their Assistants and Preschool Teachers in Centers

Percentage of teachers in child care centers and listed homes who had a child age 12 or younger in their household at the time of the survey



Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: This figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups.

Educational Attainment, Credentialing, and Certification

Obtaining relevant coursework and certification to teach young children is an important component for delivering high-quality instruction and for early educators' own professional development and growth. We examined infant-toddler teachers' highest educational attainment, the focus of their degree or certification, and their current enrollment in degree programs at colleges or universities.

In 2019, 41 percent of all infant-toddler teachers had a postsecondary degree, with an associate degree being the most common (20 percent; figure 8). Fourteen percent had a CDA credential as the highest educational attainment. A large share (25 percent) had some college but no degree or CDA. Another 16 percent had a high school education, and the remaining teachers had a GED or equivalent (2 percent) or did not yet complete high school (2 percent).

Additionally, 34 percent of infant-toddler teachers held a state certification or endorsement in early care and education (ECE; figure 9). Nineteen percent were enrolled in a postsecondary degree program at the time of the survey (figure 10).

COMPARISONS BY INFANT-TODDLER TEACHER ROLE

Looking across staff roles, lead infant-toddler teachers had higher educational attainment than assistants, on average, with nearly half holding a postsecondary degree (47 percent for lead teachers compared with 31 percent for assistants; figure 8). Lead teachers were significantly more likely than assistant teachers to hold a state certification or endorsement in ECE (38 percent versus 26 percent; figure 9) and to have an ECE major rather than another major for their postsecondary degree (61 percent versus 42 percent; figure 11). Such differences are expected given that lead teachers are typically required to have more education and specialized training than assistants.

In contrast, a significantly larger share of assistant teachers than lead teachers reported being enrolled in a postsecondary degree program (25 percent versus 16 percent; figure 10), suggesting that assistant teachers are more likely to be early in their careers and pursuing additional education.

COMPARISONS WITH OTHER EARLY EDUCATORS

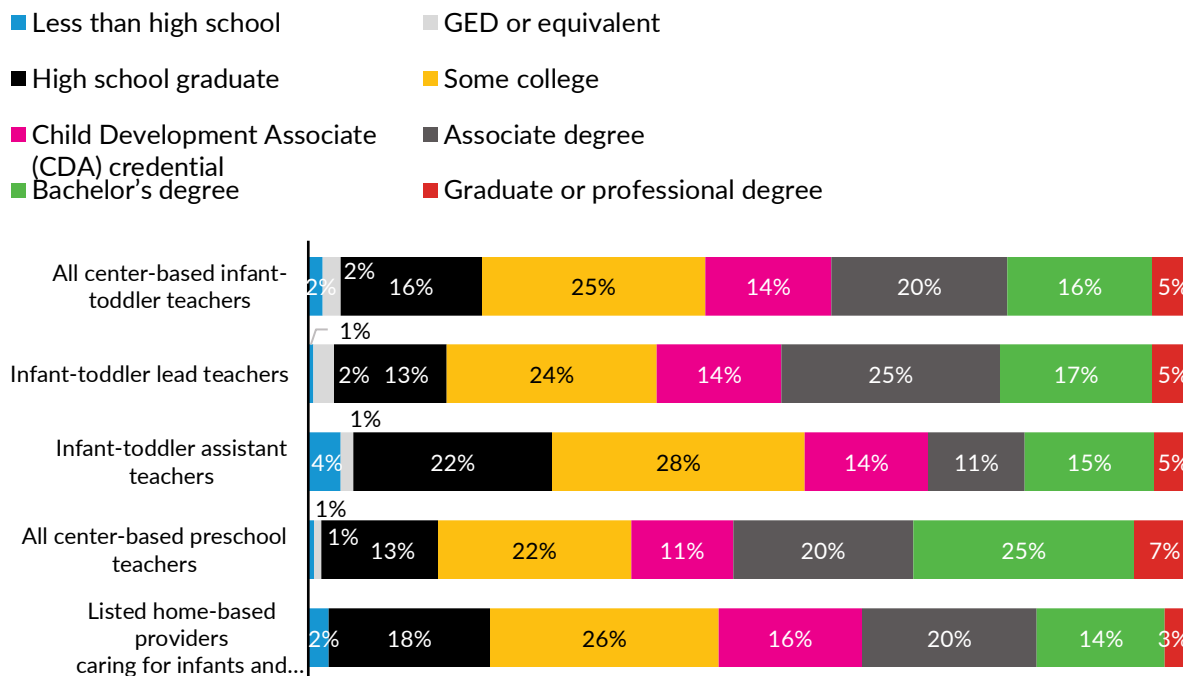
Center-based preschool teachers reported higher educational attainment than infant-toddler teachers, with 32 percent versus 21 percent holding a bachelor's or higher degree. While the two groups had similar rates of state certification or endorsement in ECE, infant-toddler teachers obtained a CDA at a higher rate than preschool teachers. Also, a similar percentage of teachers in both groups were enrolled in a postsecondary education program, indicating that infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are equally engaging in efforts to advance their education (figure 10).

In 2019, nearly half of infant-toddler teachers had a postsecondary degree, with an associate degree being the most common.

FIGURE 8

Infant-Toddler Teachers in Centers Have Lower Educational Attainment Overall Compared with Preschool Teachers in Centers

Percentage of teachers in child care centers and listed homes across different educational attainment levels



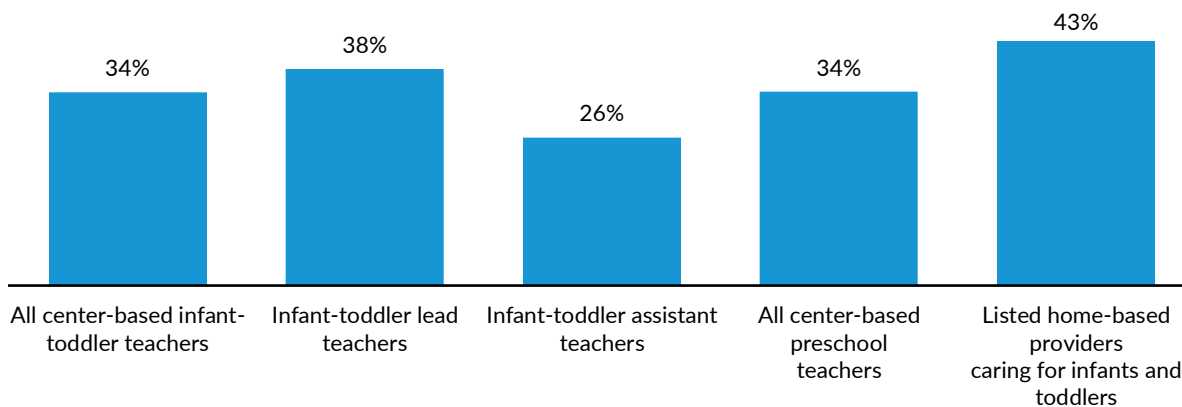
Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: The estimates included in the figure exclude less than 5 percent of the sample who responded “I don’t know” to this question as well as those who declined to answer this question. The figure also excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups. For listed home-based providers, the 2019 NSECE Home-Based Provider Survey has “High school graduate or GED completion” as one response option to the question about educational attainment. We are unable to separate responses to match the response options for the Workforce Survey respondents; therefore, the category for “High School Graduate” may include home-based providers with a GED or equivalent.

FIGURE 9

More Than a Third of Infant-Toddler Teachers in Centers Have a State Certification or Endorsement in ECE, the Same Rate as Center-Based Preschool Teachers

Percentage of teachers in child care centers and listed homes with state certification or endorsement to teach ECE



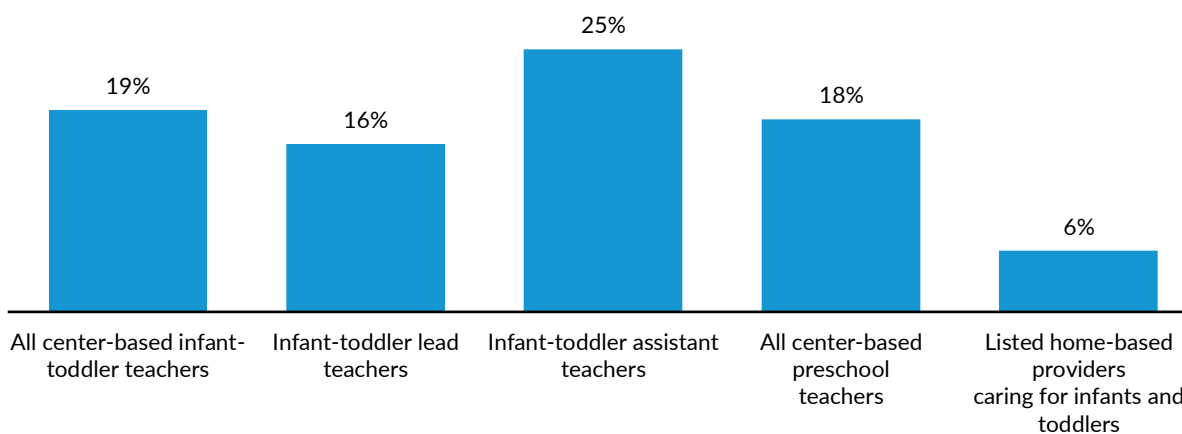
Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce data.

Notes: The figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations, those who responded “I don’t know” to this question, and those who declined to answer this question. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups. The difference between lead and assistant infant-toddler teachers is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

FIGURE 10

Large Shares of Early Educators, Especially Assistants, Are Pursuing Postsecondary Education

Percentage of teachers in child care centers and homes enrolled in a postsecondary degree program



Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: The figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations. It also excludes those who answered “No” or “I don’t know” to the question about being enrolled in a degree program at a college or university at the time of the survey, as well as those who declined to answer this question. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups. The difference between lead and assistant infant-toddler teachers is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

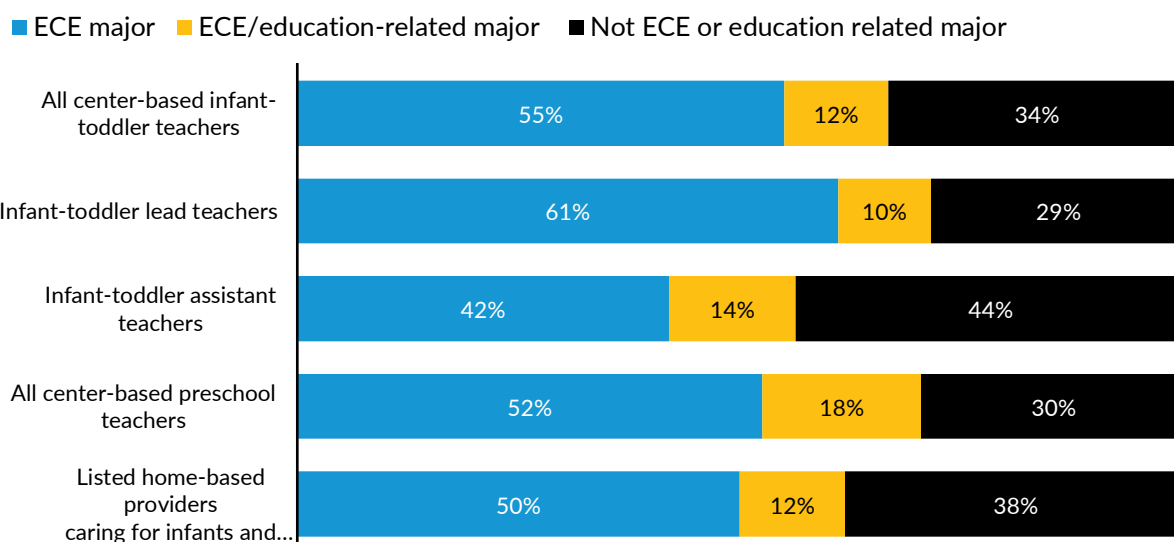
Home-based providers offering care for infants and toddlers reported similar educational attainment as center-based infant-toddler teachers, with slightly fewer holding a bachelor's or more advanced degree. Home-based providers were less likely to be enrolled in a college or university program than both center-based infant-toddler and preschool teachers (6 percent, 19 percent, and 18 percent, respectively).

Among center-based infant-toddler teachers with a postsecondary degree, more than half (55 percent) majored in ECE and another 12 percent in an education-related major (figure 11). Lead infant-toddler teachers in particular focused on ECE, with 61 percent reporting this major, a greater share than center-based preschool teachers overall (52 percent) and home-based providers (50 percent).

FIGURE 11

More Infant-Toddler Lead Teachers Specialize in Early Care and Education Than Infant-Toddler Assistant Teachers, Preschool Teachers in Centers, and Home-Based Providers

Percentage of teachers in child care centers and homes by college degree major



Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: According to the NSECE team, an “ECE-related major” refers to majors that involve at least one course related to children’s development, psychology, or mental health. An “Education-related major” refers to majors that involve courses related to teaching skills. This analysis excludes those who did not attend college and for whom this question was not applicable, those who responded “I don’t know” to this question, those who declined to answer this question, and staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups. The difference between lead and assistant infant-toddler teachers is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Work Experience

Years of relevant work experience is one component of staff qualifications. We examined reported work experience in five-year increments. Overall, infant-toddler teachers reported multiple years of relevant experience, with about 40 percent having 10 or more years of experience and another 24

percent having 5 to 9 years or experience (figure 12). However, a large share (about 37 percent) had fewer than five years of experience. In fact, at the time of the survey, 24 percent of infant-toddler teachers had been employed at their current jobs for less than one year (figure 13).

COMPARISONS BY INFANT-TODDLER TEACHER ROLE

As we compare staff by positions, we observe that many assistant teachers were newer to their work, with nearly half (47 percent) having fewer than five years of related experience compared with 31 percent of lead infant-toddler teachers (figure 12).

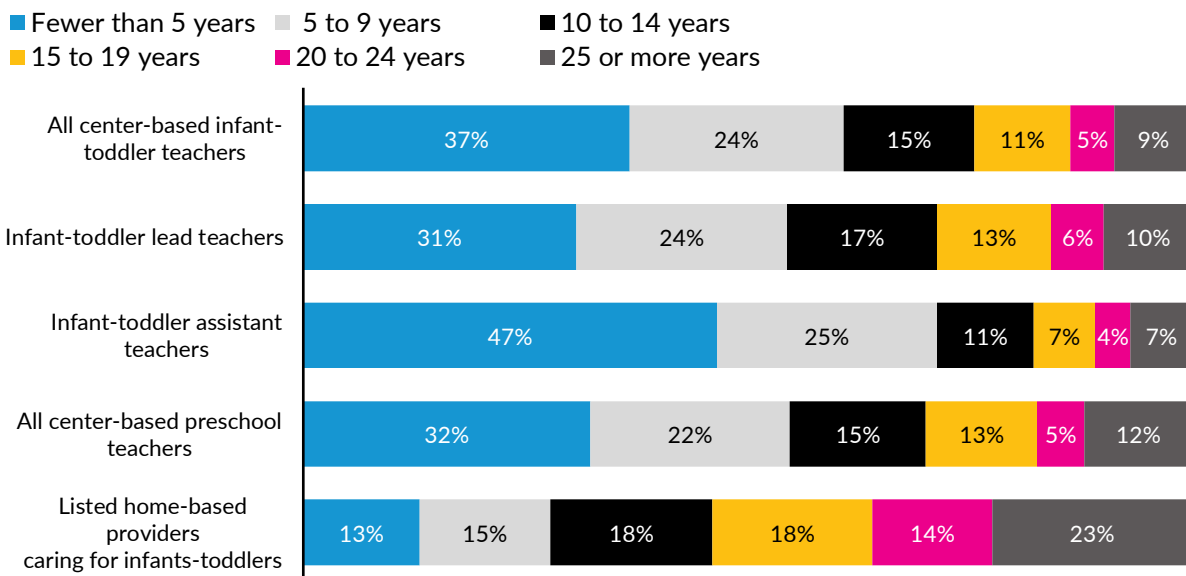
COMPARISONS WITH OTHER EARLY EDUCATORS

Somewhat similar patterns for years of experience are observed among preschool teachers in centers as among all infant-toddler teachers. But overall, preschool teachers reported more years of relevant work experience and a smaller share of them (32 percent versus 37 percent of infant-toddler teachers) had fewer than five years of experience. In contrast, listed home-based providers overall reported a longer track record of working with young children, with 23 percent having 25 or more years of experience compared with only 9 percent of infant-toddler teachers (figure 12).

FIGURE 12

A Large Share of Assistant Teachers Working with Infants and Toddlers Are Early in their Careers

Percentage of teachers in child care centers and homes by years caring for children younger than age 13



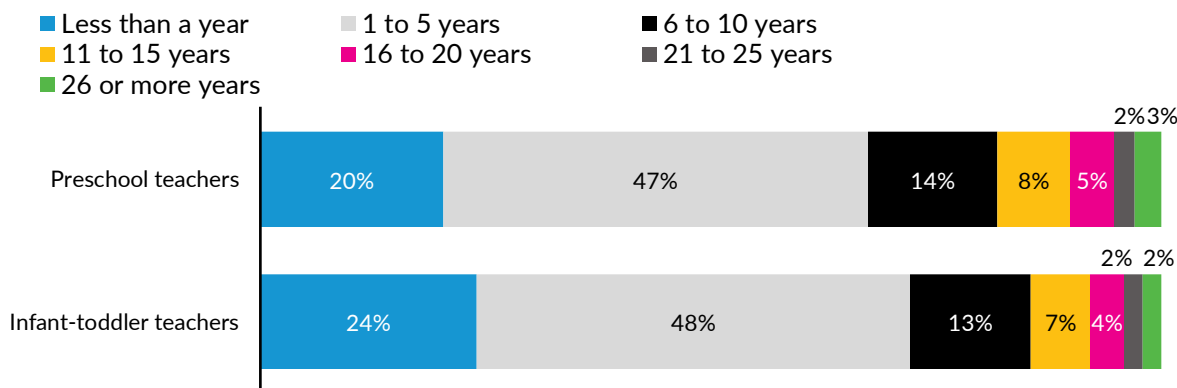
Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: The figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations, those who responded “I don’t know” to this question, and those who declined to answer this question. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups.

FIGURE 13

The Majority of Teachers in Child Care Centers across Age Groups Have Been Teaching in Their Current Programs for Fewer Than Six Years

Center-based teachers serving infants and toddlers or preschoolers by years teaching in current program



Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce data file.

Notes: The figure excludes staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations, those who responded “I don’t know” to this question, and those who declined to answer this question. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups.

How Much Do Infant-Toddler Teachers Earn?

We examined infant-toddler teachers’ reports of job earnings, total household income, health care coverage, and receipt of government benefits. We analyzed differences by staff position, race and ethnicity, and educational attainment and made comparisons with center-based preschool teachers.

Reported Earnings, Household Income, and Benefits

In 2019, the median hourly wage for infant-toddler teachers was \$11.20, with lead teachers earning \$12 an hour and assistants earning \$10.80 an hour (table 1). The mean is higher at \$13.30 an hour and \$455 a week. Assuming a full-time, year-round position, \$455 a week equates to \$23,660 a year. Overall, 82 of infant-toddler teachers earned less than \$15 an hour. We observe large differences by staff role with 22 percent of lead teachers versus 11 percent of assistant teachers earning at least \$15 an hour.

The reported median total household income was \$28,000 a year across all infant-toddler teachers, with income higher for lead teachers than assistants. Nearly 20 percent of infant-toddler teachers reported receiving some form of government assistance, such as housing assistance, nutrition assistance, and free or reduced-price lunch for their own children. A slightly larger share of assistant teachers than lead teachers received government assistance (21 versus 19 percent). These rates were much higher than that of preschool teachers in centers (13 percent).

Although most early educators across the identified subgroups reported having health care coverage, coverage was lowest for infant-toddler teachers—80 percent compared with 85 percent of

preschool teachers in centers and 92 percent of listed home-based providers. Coverage rates were the same for lead teachers and assistant teachers working with infants and toddlers.

TABLE 1

Compensation and Benefits of Infant-Toddler Teachers, 2019

Comparison with center-based preschool teachers and home-based providers serving infants and toddlers

	All center-based infant-toddler teachers	Infant-toddler lead teachers	Infant-toddler assistant teachers	Center-based preschool teachers	Listed home-based providers caring for infants and toddlers
Median hourly wage	\$11.20	\$12.00	\$10.80	\$12.00	--
Mean hourly wage (SD)	\$13.30 (\$19.60)	\$14.20 (\$23.40)	\$11.60 (\$9.11)	\$14.40 (\$16.60)	--
Median weekly job earnings	\$426	\$450	\$373	\$440	\$538
Mean weekly job earnings (SD)	\$455 (\$318)	\$489 (\$341)	\$388 (\$260)	\$501 (\$582)	--
Percent earning at least \$15 an hour	18%	22%	11%	27%	--
Median total household income	\$28,000	\$30,000	\$26,800	\$33,000	\$30,000
Receives government assistance	20%	19%	21%	13%	--
Has health care coverage	80%	80%	80%	85%	92%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public and Restricted-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: -- = data not available on this characteristic. Government assistance refers to financial or in-kind assistance from a government program, such as housing assistance, free or reduced-price lunch for their children, and nutrition assistance. The estimates presented in the table exclude staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations. Categories for infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers in centers are not mutually exclusive, as some teachers worked with both age groups. Table 3 provides estimates for mutually exclusive groups.

COMPARISONS BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

We observed small racial and ethnic differences in infant-toddler teachers' earnings, with White teachers earning a median hourly wage about 50 cents higher than Black teachers but 40 cents lower than Hispanic teachers (table 2). The racial gap means Black infant-toddler teachers working full-time and year-round earned about \$1,040 less than White teachers per year. Asian infant-toddler teachers are a small portion of the workforce but earned a median \$17 per hour—much higher than other groups. This gap equates to a difference of more than \$11,000 between Asian teachers and teachers

of other races or ethnicities when working full-time over a year. Median total household incomes and rates of health care coverage from any insurance plan (through employer, spouse, public insurance, or other) were highest among White and Asian infant-toddler teachers while their receipt of government assistance was lowest.

TABLE 2

Compensation and Benefits of Infant-Toddler Teachers by Race and Ethnicity, 2019

Center-based teachers working with children younger than age 3 by racial and ethnic groups

	Asian only infant-toddler teachers	Black only infant-toddler teachers	Hispanic only infant-toddler teachers	White only infant-toddler teachers	Other or multiracial infant-toddler teachers
Median hourly wage	\$17.00	\$10.60	\$11.50	\$11.10	\$10.90
Median weekly job earnings	\$576	\$400	\$435	\$420	\$385
Percent earning at least \$15 an hour	61%	17%	13%	18%	9%
Median total household income	\$30,000	\$21,000	\$25,000	\$32,000	\$30,000
Receives government assistance	13%	25%	19%	18%	32%
Has health care coverage	92%	77%	73%	82%	86%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public and Restricted-Use Workforce and Home-Based data.

Notes: The NSECE Workforce Survey asked respondents if they receive financial or in-kind assistance from a government program, such as housing assistance, free or reduced-price lunch for their children, and nutrition assistance. The estimates presented in the table exclude staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations.

COMPARISONS WITH OTHER EARLY EDUCATORS

Recent research has shown significant disparities in child care workers' wages depending on the age group they work with most, with a pay penalty for working with children younger than age 3 (Whitebook et al. 2018). We find that center-based teachers working with preschoolers earned a median \$12 an hour, about 80 cents more per hour (a 7 percent difference) than center-based teachers working with infants and toddlers. Reported median *weekly* earnings were only about \$14 higher for preschool teachers in centers than infant-toddler teachers. Over the year, assuming 52 weeks of pay, that difference equates to about \$728 less in job earnings.

We also observe a disparity in median total household income, with infant-toddler teachers' households grossing \$28,000 a year, about \$5,000 less than those of preschool teachers in centers. Reported median weekly earnings for listed home-based providers total \$538, about \$112 more than center-based infant-toddler teachers.

ESTIMATES FOR TEACHERS WORKING EXCLUSIVELY WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS

As noted, the infant-toddler teacher group and the preschool teacher group were not mutually exclusive, and some teachers in our sample worked with both children younger than age 3 and children ages 3 through 5. To refine our analysis of job earnings, we examined median and mean hourly wages for teachers working exclusively with infants and toddlers compared with teachers working exclusively with preschool-age children. We also examined differences in wages by whether the educator had at least a bachelor's degree (table 3).

Center-based teachers working exclusively with children younger than 3 earned a median hourly wage of \$11 compared with \$12.30 for center-based teachers working exclusively with preschoolers—a difference of \$1.30 per hour or 11 percent less. Only 14 percent of exclusive infant-toddler teachers earned at least \$15 an hour. Nearly 20 percent of teachers working exclusively with infants and toddlers reported receiving some form of government assistance—a much higher and statistically different rate than that of teachers working exclusively with preschoolers in centers (10 percent).

Earnings also varied by educational attainment. For example, lead teachers working exclusively with infants and toddlers earned a median wage of \$14 an hour if they had at least a bachelor's degree but only \$10 an hour with less education. Teachers with a bachelor's degree earned \$1.60 less in a median hourly wage if they worked exclusively with infants and toddlers versus exclusively with preschoolers. Only 25 percent of exclusive infant-toddler teachers with a bachelor's degree earned at least \$15 an hour—nearly half that of teachers with a bachelor's degree working exclusively with preschoolers (47 percent). This difference is statistically significant and meaningful in terms of highlighting disparities in earnings by the age group teachers work with.

About 78 percent of teachers working exclusively with infants and toddlers had health insurance compared with nearly 87 percent of teachers working exclusively with preschoolers in centers. This difference is statistically significant.

Only 25 percent of exclusive infant-toddler teachers with a bachelor's degree earned at least \$15 an hour—nearly half that of teachers with a bachelor's degree working exclusively with preschoolers (47 percent).

TABLE 3

Center-Based Teacher Compensation and Benefits by Age Group Served and Education Level, 2019

Comparison of teachers working exclusively with children younger than age 3 with those working exclusively with preschoolers ages 3 through 5

	All Infant-Toddler Teachers, Exclusive			Lead Infant-Toddler Teachers, Exclusive		Assistant Infant-Toddler Teachers, Exclusive		Center-Based Preschool Teachers, Exclusive	
	All educational attainment	Less than a bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher	Less than a bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher	Less than a bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher	Less than a bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree or higher
Median hourly wage	\$11	\$10.50	\$13.40	\$11.00	\$14.00	\$10.00	\$12.50	\$11.00	\$15.00
Mean hourly wage	\$13.10	\$13.00	\$13.40	\$14.20	\$13.50	\$10.60	\$13.20	\$12.30	\$19.70
Standard deviation of hourly wage	\$24.10	\$26.50	\$3.97	\$32.10	\$4.06	\$7.89	\$3.71	\$6.80	\$29.60
Percent earning at least \$15 an hour	14%	11%	25%	13%	24%	7%	25%	19%	47%
Median weekly job earnings	\$420	\$400	\$490	\$426	\$513	\$336	\$472	\$405	\$549
Mean weekly job earnings	\$437	\$421	\$507	\$450	\$509	\$363	\$507	\$438	\$652
Standard deviation of weekly job earnings	\$177	\$171	\$186	\$170	\$175	\$161	\$212	\$282	\$1,020
Median total household income	\$20,000	\$25,000	\$31,000	\$25,000	\$35,000	\$30,000	\$31,000	\$30,000	\$58,000
Receives government assistance	20%	24%	8%	22%	9%	28%	--	12%	6%
Has health care coverage	78%	76%	88%	74%	90%	80%	86%	84%	91%

Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public and Restricted-Use Workforce.

Notes: Categories are mutually exclusive. The estimates presented in the table exclude staff in centers associated with public schools because of data limitations. Government assistance refers to financial or in-kind assistance from a government program, such as housing assistance, free or reduced-price lunch for their children, and nutrition assistance.

Conclusion

Infant-toddler teachers in child care centers are an understudied but important sector of the early childhood workforce. This brief pointed to the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of infant-toddler teachers—in particular, assistant teachers and the wide variation in age and educational attainment. On average, they are younger than preschool teachers and have lower educational attainment, but a significant share have some college experience or are currently enrolled in school.

Notably, infant-toddler teachers earn very low wages with 82 percent overall (86 percent among exclusive infant-toddler teachers) earning less than \$15 a hour—with a higher rate among teachers with less than a bachelor’s degree and among assistants. Supporting previous research (Whitebook et al. 2015), we identify a wage penalty for early educators with a college degree who work exclusively with preschool children younger than age 3 and a smaller wage gap between Black and White infant-toddler teachers. A large share of early educators receive government assistance—including one in four Black infant-toddler teachers—but many remain uninsured. To address the ongoing early childhood education workforce crisis and support staff recruitment and retention in the field, significant efforts are required to achieve pay equity and ensure adequate wages and benefits.

Notes

- ¹ Katherine Paschall, “Nearly 30 Percent of Infants and Toddlers Attend Home-Based Child Care as Their Primary Arrangement,” *Child Trends* (blog), September 4, 2019, <https://www.childtrends.org/blog/nearly-30-percent-of-infants-and-toddlers-attend-home-based-child-care-as-their-primary-arrangement>.
- ² “Child Care Sector Jobs: BLS Analysis,” Center for the Study of Child Care Employment, January 9, 2023, <https://cscce.berkeley.edu/publications/brief/child-care-sector-jobs-bls-analysis/>
- ³ As outlined in the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey User’s Guide, all workforce respondents were selected from centers that completed center-based provider interviews. There were 483 center-based workforce respondents associated with public school districts who did not complete the questionnaire, and the NSECE team used available administrative data to obtain some information about these respondents. Because of this data limitation, no workforce data were collected for these respondents, but they are kept in the data for weighting purposes. These 483 center-based workforce respondents represent 483 center-based providers, or 10 percent of the centers represented in the dataset. Following NSECE data guidelines, we subset the data to exclude all respondents associated with public school districts because of this data limitation. A total of 982 workforce respondents are excluded from our analysis, including the 483 workforce members for which workforce data were not available, plus another 431 workforce members who serve preschool-age children, 10 workforce members who serve infants and toddlers, and 58 workforce members who serve both age groups in a setting associated with public schools. For more information, see the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey User’s Guide (NSECE Project Team 2021a) and the 2019 NSECE Center-Based Survey User’s Guide (NSECE Project Team 2021b).
- ⁴ In total, 1,313 center-based teachers who responded to the Workforce Survey and were not associated with public school districts worked with both children younger than age 3 and children ages 3 through 5. They are counted in both the infant-toddler teacher group and the preschool teacher group in these analyses. They account for 25.3 percent of all workforce survey respondents.
- ⁵ Listed home-based providers include individuals or programs who appear on state and national CCEE provider lists. They provide care to children ages 13 and younger who are not their own for at least five hours a week and in a home-based setting. The majority of listed home-based providers in this sample are licensed home-based programs, but license-exempt providers are also included in the sample.

- ⁶ In the NSECE data, workforce respondents are labeled “lead teacher,” “assistant teacher,” and “other.” In our calculations for “all infant-toddler teachers,” we include respondents across all three job categories. When we disaggregate data by staff role, we only compare lead teachers with assistants, because the sample size for the “other” category is too small to report.
- ⁷ “Adult Population by Race and Ethnicity in the United States,” Kids Count Data Center, Annie E. Casey Foundation, updated October 2022, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/6539-adult-population-by-race-and-ethnicity#detailed/1/any/false/2048,574,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868/68,69,67,12,70,66,71,2800/13517,13518>.
- ⁸ Cecilia Esterline and Jeanne Batalova, “Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States,” Migration Policy Institute, March 17, 2022, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states>.

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