



Working Conditions and Well-Being of Center-Based Infant-Toddler Teachers

A Descriptive Analysis of the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education

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Every day, millions of children are left in the trusted hands of early childhood educators. Their dedication and compassion contribute to children’s growth, learning, and developmental trajectories. However, the work can be inherently stressful and lack important “good job” qualities, such as fair compensation, comprehensive employee benefits, and positive workplace climate (Bassok et al. 2013; Otten et al. 2019; Whitebook, Phillips, and Howes 2014).

Moreover, teachers working with infants and toddlers have historically faced a wage penalty, earning less than preschool teachers in similar child care and early education settings (Whitebook et al. 2015). These working conditions can impact staff mental health and well-being and, in turn, their willingness to remain in the field (Totenhagen et al. 2016). High staff turnover was a common problem in the child care industry before the COVID-19 pandemic, and staff vacancies continue to challenge programs across the country (Weiland et al. 2021). The current child care crisis motivates this examination of the working conditions and well-being of early educators working with our youngest children—infant-toddler teachers in child care centers—a critical but understudied sector of the workforce.

We analyzed data from the 2019 National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE), which included a nationally representative sample of child care centers and center-based classroom staff (NSECE Project Team 2013). Key findings¹ described in this brief include the following:

- In 2019, an estimated 684,800 early educators were employed in child care centers not in public school settings and worked with infants and toddlers.² These infant-toddler teachers were 57 percent of early educators working in child care centers. About 56 percent of them

worked exclusively with children younger than age 3 while the other 44 percent also worked with children ages 3 through 5.

- Most infant-toddler teachers agreed or strongly agreed that teamwork is encouraged in their workplace, they feel respected in their workplace, and they receive support with difficult child behaviors. However, some infant-toddler teachers did not report these positive job qualities.
- Most infant-toddler teachers reported feeling appreciated by parents more than once in the past week; 81 percent of lead teachers reported this compared with 76 percent of assistant teachers, although the difference is not statistically significant.
- Assistant teachers were more likely than lead teachers to be moved to a different classroom in the past week, likely reflecting their role of providing teaching support where needed within their center. However, this movement and lack of continuity could be stressful if it occurs frequently.
- Eleven percent of the infant-toddler teacher workforce in 2019 displayed symptoms of major depressive disorder, with rates twice as high for assistant teachers as for lead teachers (16 percent versus 8 percent, respectively). Feeling like everything was an effort and suffering from restless sleep were the most common symptoms of poor mental health.
- Most infant-toddler teachers (78 percent) reported having excellent or good overall health, but about one in five of them (21 percent) fared more poorly.
- Twenty-seven percent of infant-toddler teachers reported recently looking for a new or additional job, with the same rate among lead teachers and assistant teachers and similar rates across racial and ethnic groups. The top reason for looking was to find a job that pays more (51 percent reported this reason).

Background

Multiple recent studies found that early educators have high rates of depression, anxiety, and occupational stress (Gerber, Whitebrook, and Weinstein 2007; Kwon et al. 2022; Otten et al. 2019; Simons et al. 2022; Whitaker et al. 2013), with some variation across settings and age groups (Corr et al. 2014; Smith and Lawrence 2019). In a recent study of infant-toddler teachers, 27 percent scored in the clinical range for depression (Simons et al. 2022), compared with only 2 percent in a national study of Early Head Start teachers (Jones, Shah, and Xue 2022). The 2012 National Survey and Early Care and Education (NSECE) found that psychological distress was highest among teachers with the lowest salaries (Madill et al. 2018).

Some early educators also suffer from poor physical health because of constant exposure to infectious diseases, environmental hazards, and musculoskeletal injury and pain related to bending, lifting, and carrying young children and sitting on floors and child-size furniture (First 5 California 2006; Kwon et al. 2022). A recent study of early educator physical well-being found that more than

half of infant-toddler teachers were obese, and many suffered from backpain, headaches, high blood pressure, and urinary tract infections (Kwon et al. 2022).

Focus groups with both center- and home-based early educators revealed top stressors including challenging interactions with parents and the public perception of early educators as “babysitters” (Faulkner, Gerstenblatt, and Lee 2016). They also shared how work stress affects their personal well-being and manifests through exhaustion, sleep disturbances, and physical health problems (Faulkner et al. 2016). Importantly, early educators often display poorer physical and mental health than women in the United States broadly with similar sociodemographic characteristics (Whitaker et al. 2013).

Child care teachers’ physical and mental health and satisfaction with their work can affect the ways they engage with young children (Sandilos et al. 2015; Smith and Lawrence 2019). Past studies found that workplace stress was related to greater conflict in the teacher-child relationship (Whitaker, Dearth-Wesley, and Gooze 2015), while high depressive symptoms were associated with lower teacher sensitivity (Gerber, Whitebrook, and Weinstein 2007), less emotional and behavioral support (ACF 2015), and lower ratings on instructional quality and support for learning in the classroom (ACF 2015; Johnson et al. 2019; Sandilos et al. 2015).

Though working in child care can be stressful, supports in the workplace, including positive relationships with coworkers and supervisors, teamwork, and a sense of autonomy, can help alleviate the pressure on teachers and lead to more positive mental health (Hur, Jeon, and Buettner 2016; Madill et al. 2018; Smith and Lawrence 2019). Newly available data from the 2019 NSECE offer a look into the work experiences of early educators that can help inform future planning and the development of workplace supports.

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

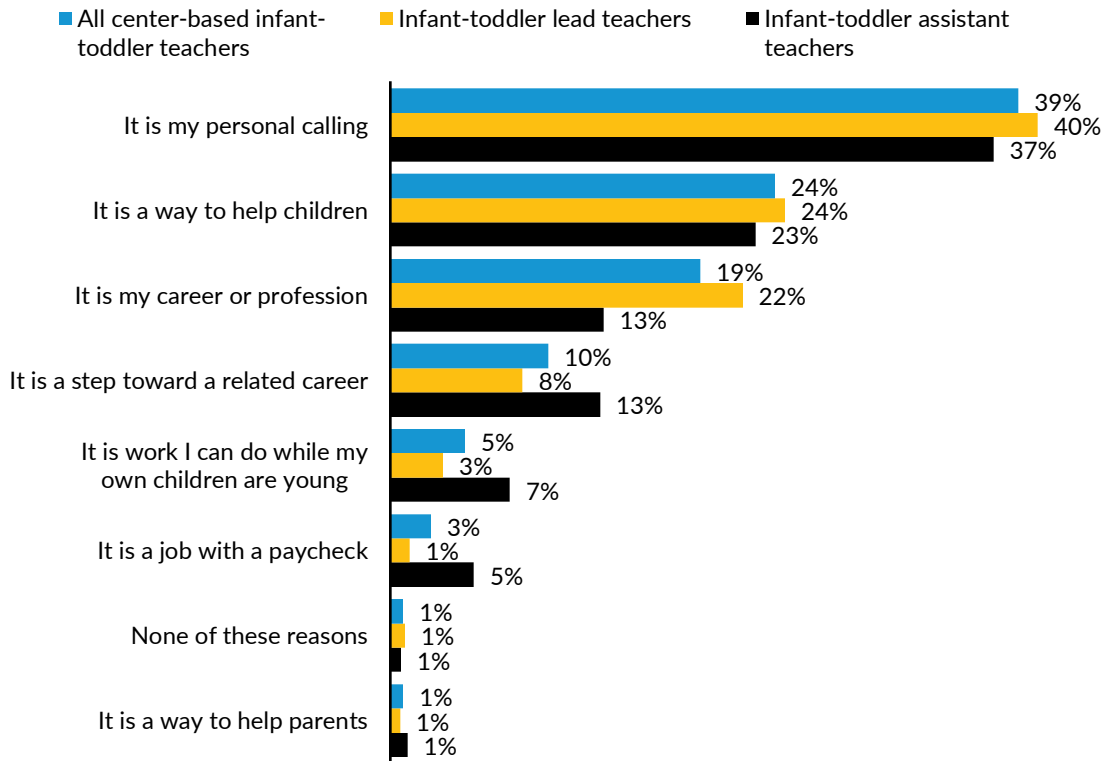
Relationships with Children and Families

Many teachers of young children choose to work in their field because they enjoy the relationships they build with children and families. In fact, when asked about their career choice, infant-toddler teachers reported choosing to work with young children primarily because “it is a personal calling” (39 percent reported this reason) or “a way to help children” (24 percent) (figure 1). Lead and assistant teachers varied somewhat, with assistants more likely to report their jobs were “a step toward a related career” (13 percent), work they can do while their own children are young (7 percent), or “a job with a paycheck” (5 percent). The differences in responses by staff position point to the temporary nature of the assistant position by design. Our companion brief on infant-toddler teachers’ characteristics (Sandstrom, Casas, and Lou 2023) describes how assistant teachers are younger on average than lead teachers, which is one explanation for differences in their career motivations.

FIGURE 1

Infant-Toddler Teachers Largely Reported Working with Young Children as a Personal Calling

Reasons why center-based infant-toddler teachers chose to work with young children for their career



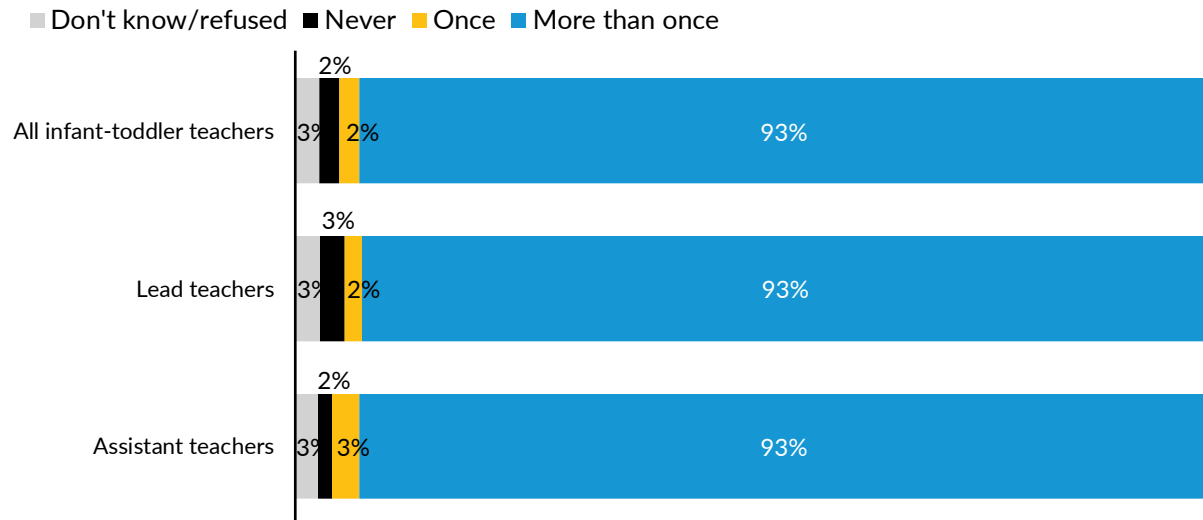
Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce data.

Notes: This analysis excludes those who responded "I don't know" and those who refused this question.

Positive relationships with children and families can contribute to a positive work environment, whereas stressful interactions with families and children in the classroom, such as high levels of demand from parents or difficult child behaviors, can contribute to feelings of job stress. We examined these aspects of infant-toddler teachers' workplaces. A large majority of infant-toddler teachers in 2019 reported having positive interactions with children, with 93 percent saying they knew children were happy with them more than once in the past week (figure 2). A smaller but still large share (79 percent) felt appreciated by the parents in their programs more than once in the past week, and another 12 percent felt appreciated by parents once in the past week. We observed a small difference by staff position, with lead teachers feeling more appreciated: 81 percent reported feeling appreciated by parents more than once in the past week while 76 percent of assistant teachers did (figure 3); however, this difference was not statistically significant.

FIGURE 2

Lead and Assistant Infant-Toddler Teachers Report Children Were Happy with Them at Similar Rates
How often center-based infant-toddler teachers reported children were happy with them in the past week

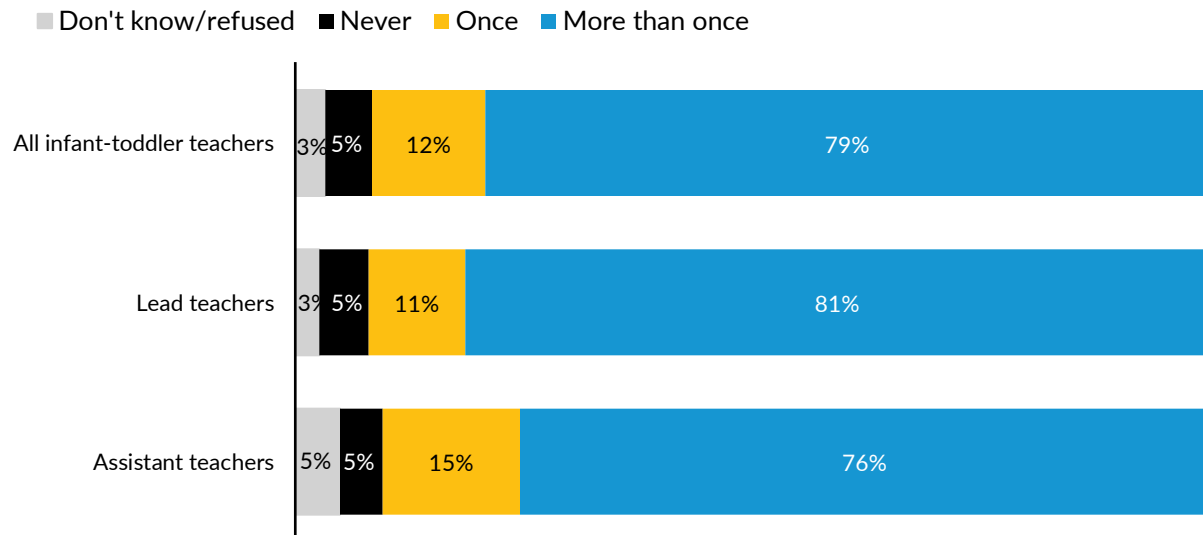


Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce data.

FIGURE 3

Lead Infant-Toddler Teachers Reported Feeling Appreciated by Parents More Frequently Than Did Assistant Teachers

How often center-based infant-toddler teachers reported feeling appreciated by parents in the past week

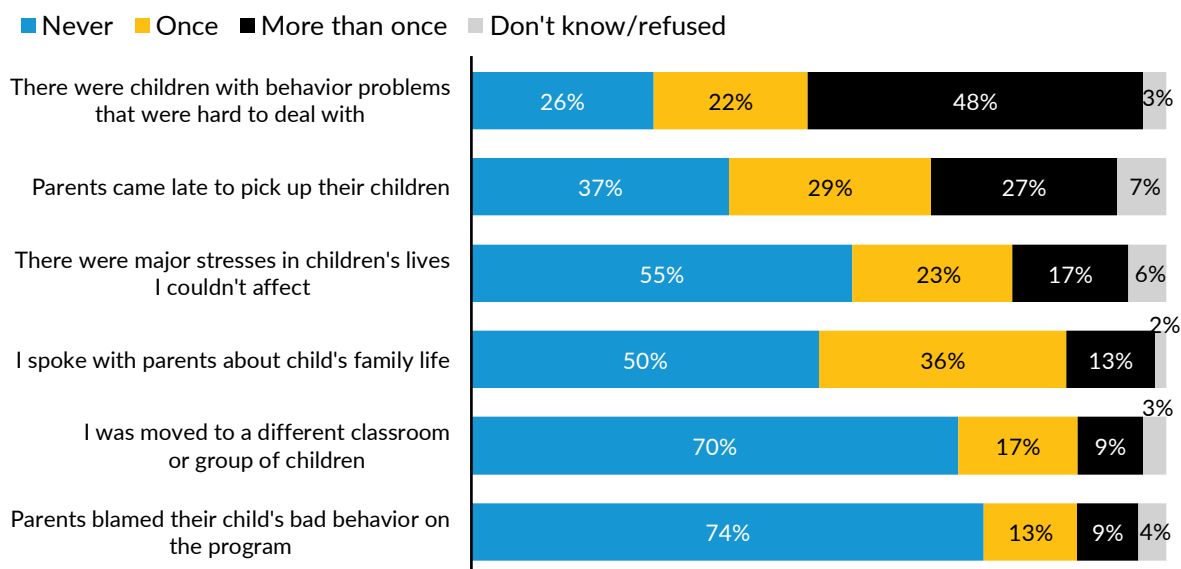


Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce data.

Work Challenges and Stressors

Child care teachers become invested with the young children they care for but can feel that they have limited influence beyond classroom interactions. For infant-toddler teachers, 40 percent of them felt once or more than once in the past week that there were major stressors in their children’s lives they could not affect (figure 4). Additionally, half of them (50 percent) had not had the opportunity to speak with parents in the past week about children’s family lives, suggesting they often do not have regular opportunities to engage in conversations with parents. These data reflect prepandemic times, before masking, social distancing, and restrictions on parents’ entering child care facilities were put in place. Parent-teacher interactions may currently be more limited, or were in the height of the pandemic, compared with 2019 rates.

FIGURE 4
Infant-Toddler Teachers’ Reports of Stressful Experiences with Children and Parents in their Programs
How often center-based infant-toddler teachers reported experiences in the past week



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

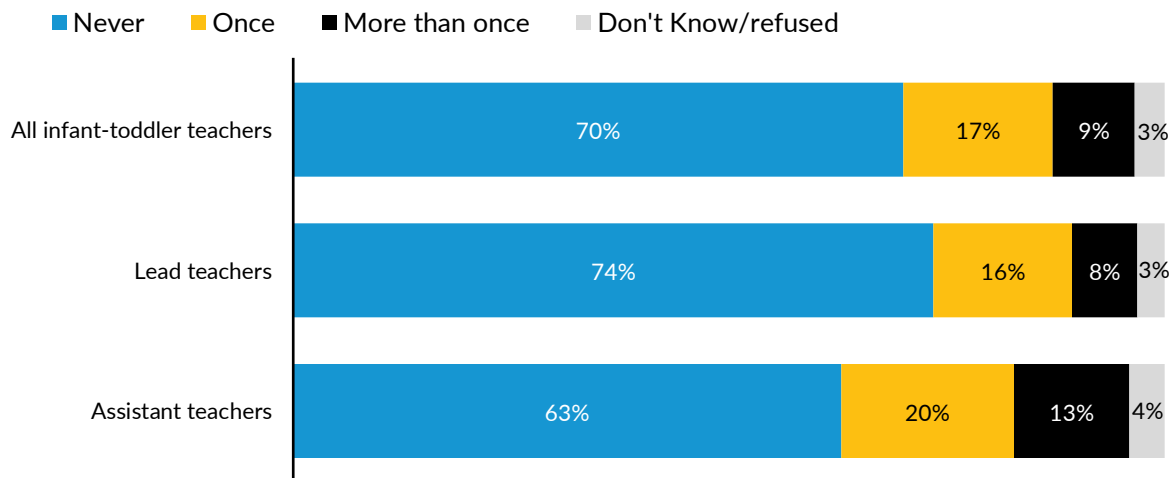
Infant-toddler teachers also reported experiencing other stressful experiences in the past week. Nearly half (48 percent) experienced children with challenging behaviors that were hard to deal with on more than one occasion (figure 4). Additionally, 22 percent said parents blamed their child’s bad behavior on the program at least once in the past week.

Infant-toddler teachers reported working an average of 36.8 hours a week (table 1), with 13 percent working more than 40 hours a week, including 15 percent of lead teachers and 7 percent of assistant teachers. More than half of infant-toddler teachers (56 percent) experienced parents coming late to pick up their children one or more times in the past week. Having to stay late at work may

threaten work-life balance and complicate their own parenting responsibilities; 41 percent of all infant-toddler teachers reported having a child ages 12 or younger.

Other work-related stress can come from lack of control over working conditions, such as being moved to a different classroom or put with a different group of children. For infant-toddler teachers, a large majority (70 percent) had not experienced this in the past week, but more than a quarter of them (26 percent) had (figure 4). Assistant teachers were significantly more likely than lead teachers to report being moved or assigned to a different group, with 33 percent reporting this happened at least once in the past week compared with 24 percent of lead teachers (figure 5).

FIGURE 5
Infant-Toddler Teachers' Reports of Being Moved to a Different Classroom or Group of Children
Differences by staff position



Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce data.
Notes: This difference between leads and assistant teachers is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

Workplace Climate

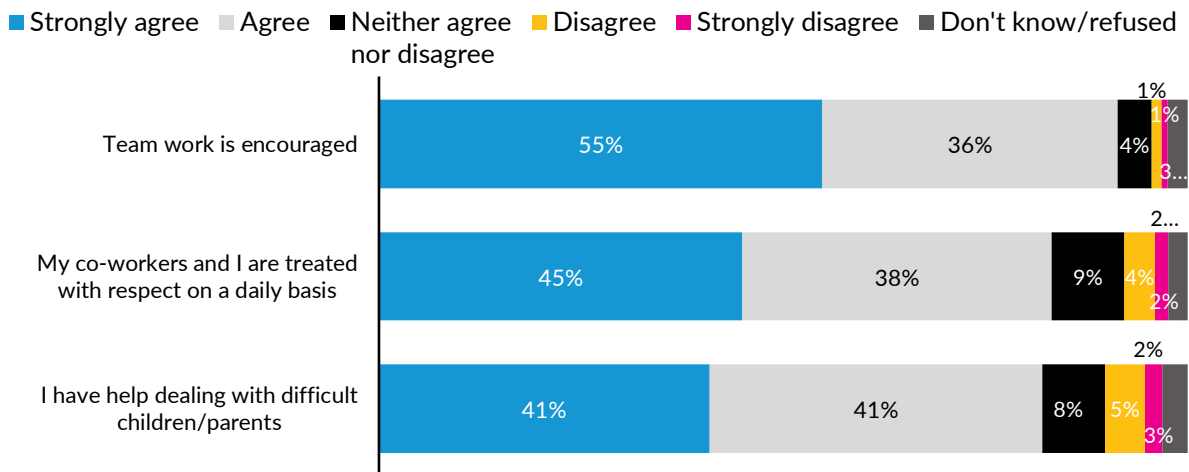
Relationships with and support from colleagues, as well as feeling respected in the workplace, are important elements of a healthy work environment and can contribute to staff well-being. In 2019, most center-based infant-toddler teachers reported having positive perceptions of their workplace (figure 6).

A large majority (91 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that teamwork was encouraged in their programs. Slightly less, but still a strong majority (83 percent), agreed or strongly agreed that they were treated with respect on a daily basis. Finally, 82 percent of infant-toddler teachers agreed or strongly agreed they had support dealing with difficult families or children they serve. Lead teachers and assistant teachers responded very similarly about their experiences (not shown). Though positive overall, we note about 15 percent of infant-toddler teachers were not feeling the same respect and support on the job as colleagues in other programs were experiencing. Teachers who reported a less

positive work environment tended to be white educators, have less than a bachelor’s degree, not have young children in their household, and make less than \$15 an hour. However, these correlations are small and not statistically significant, suggesting no specific pattern between certain individual-level characteristics and perception of work environment. Other center-level and contextual factors are likely contributing to these feelings of teamwork and respect.

FIGURE 6
Infant-Toddler Teachers’ Experiences of Teamwork, Respect, and Support Managing Challenges on the Job

Degree to which center-based infant-toddler teachers agree with statements about their workplace



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

Professional Development Opportunities

Providing staff with opportunities for professional development can improve program quality but also support staff growth and advancement in the field. Many infant-toddler teachers reported engaging in professional development activities in the past 12 months, with 78 percent participating in a workshop and 56 percent creating a professional development plan with their supervisor (table 1). Hours spent on professional development per month ranged widely, with about 27 percent spending one-to-two hours, another 26 percent spending more than two hours but less than one day, 15 percent spending one day, and 27 percent spending more than one day per month.

Finding time and money to participate in professional development can be challenging for early educators without proper supports. Only 33 percent of infant-toddler teachers reported receiving release time to participate in a professional development activity. Similarly, 37 percent received assistance with tuition costs or registration fees from their employer, a local agency, or school, while 12 percent received help with other participation costs (e.g., travel reimbursement).

We examined whether infant-toddler teachers reported different opportunities than center-based teachers working with preschoolers. Rates of engagement in professional development opportunities

were similar across groups, with preschool teachers somewhat more likely than infant-toddler teachers to receive coaching or mentoring (35 percent compared with 31 percent). Preschool teachers were also slightly more likely to participate in a professional development workshop or professional organization meeting. In terms of employee benefits, a greater share of preschool teachers than infant-toddler teachers reported receiving release time to attend training (36 percent and 33 percent, respectively) and tuition assistance (43 percent and 37 percent, respectively). Infant-toddler teachers worked about an hour more on average per week than center-based preschool teachers.

TABLE 1

Center-Based Infant-Toddler and Preschool Teachers' Professional Development Activities, 2019

	Infant-toddler teachers	Preschool teachers
Professional development activities completed in the past 12 months		
Participated in professional development workshop	78%	81%
Attended professional organization meeting	28%	30%
Received specialist coaching, mentoring, or consultation	31%	35%
Took relevant college or university course	24%	25%
Hours per month spent on professional development		
None	5%	5%
One-to-two hours	27%	30%
More than two hours	26%	22%
One day per month	15%	14%
More than one day per month	27%	30%
Professional development assistance		
Received release time to participate in activity	33%	36%
Received help with direct costs (e.g., tuition, fees)	37%	43%
Received help with other participation costs (e.g., travel)	12%	11%
Supervisor or advisor helped create professional development plan	56%	58%
Hours worked per week		
Average number of hours	36.8	35.7

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

Notes: Variables under the subheading "Professional development assistance" were only asked to respondents who indicated they had participated in professional development activity in the past 12 months.

How Do Infant-Toddler Teachers Fair in Their Mental and Physical Health?

Prevalence of Depressive Symptoms

To capture information on mental health, the 2019 NSECE Workforce Questionnaire asked staff questions from the seven-item Center for Epidemiological Studies Short Depression (CESD-7) screener. The CESD-7 is a shortened version of the 20-item CES-D scale, which has been shown to be an accurate, rapid assessment of depressive symptomatology in the general population (Radloff 1977). We analyzed infant-toddler teachers' responses to each of the CESD-7 survey items and examined the overall prevalence of presenting symptoms indicative of major depressive disorder (combined score of 8 or higher on the CESD-7 scale ranging from 0 to 21).

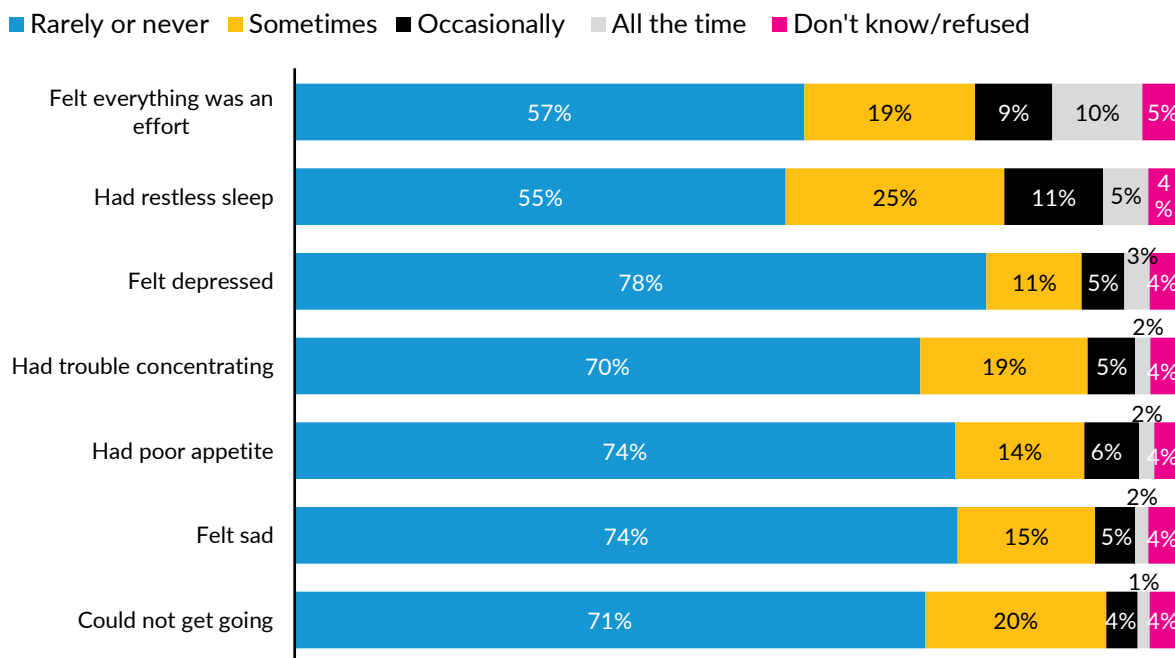
Thirty-eight percent of infant-toddler teachers reported feeling that “everything was an effort” sometimes, occasionally, or all the time in the past week, with 10 percent reporting “all the time” (figure 7). More than 40 percent suffered from restless sleep at least “sometimes.” Most (78 percent) did not report feeling depressed, but 19 percent did feel depressed at least “sometimes.” Some infant-toddler teachers also reported having trouble concentrating (26 percent), not being able to get going (25 percent), having poor appetites (22 percent), and feeling sad (22 percent) sometimes, occasionally, or all the time. Overall, assistant teachers reported these symptoms more frequently than lead teachers (not shown), with statistically significant differences on two symptoms; specifically, assistants were more likely to feel depressed “all the time” (5 percent versus 2 percent of lead teachers) and have restless sleep “all the time” (7 percent versus 4 percent of lead teachers).

Overall, about 11 percent of the infant-toddler teacher workforce in 2019 showed signs of having major depressive disorder (figure 8). This rate is higher than the Centers for Disease Control's published estimates of major depression in the US adult population from 2013 to 2016 (8.1 percent across ages and gender) but similar to the rate for all US women in that same time frame (10.4 percent) (Brody, Pratt, and Hughes 2018). When looking across roles, assistant teachers were twice as likely as lead teachers to be suspected of having major depressive disorder (16 percent versus 8 percent, respectively). This difference by staff role was statistically significant.

FIGURE 7

Infant-Toddler Teachers' Responses to the CESD-7 Depression Screening Instrument

How often in the past week center-based infant-toddler teachers reported feeling depressive symptoms

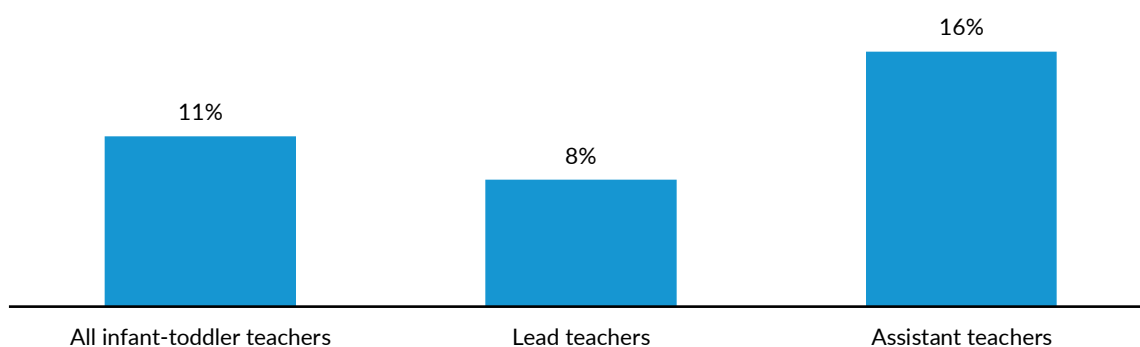


Source: Urban Institute analysis of the 2019 NSECE Public-Use Workforce data.

FIGURE 8

Share of Infant-Toddler Teachers Suspected to Have Major Depressive Disorder, By Teaching Role

Percentage of center-based infant-toddler teachers that are suspected to have major depressive disorder based on their overall score on the CESD-7 screening instrument



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

Notes: Respondents with a CESD-7 score below the cutoff (i.e., 0–7) were not suspected of having major depressive disorder and received a code of 0; respondents with a score above the cutoff (i.e., 8–21) were suspected to have major depressive disorder and received a code of 1. Respondents who did not provide a response to one or two symptoms in the scale had the average of their other symptoms imputed for these values when calculating the total score. Respondents who did not provide a response for three or more of the symptoms were coded as missing and are not included in the total estimate. Estimates are rounded to nearest whole number. Difference between lead and assistant teachers is statistically significant at $p < .01$.

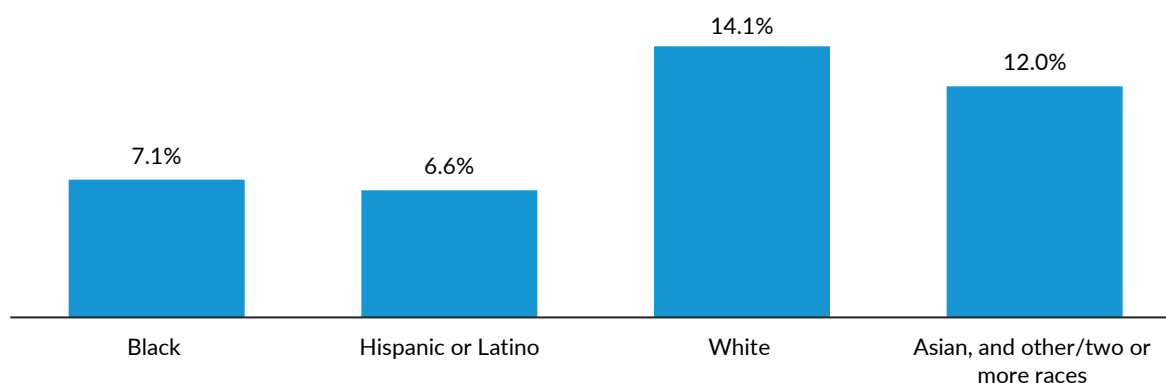
We also examined differences by reported race and ethnicity. The likelihood of being suspected for major depressive disorder (i.e., total CESD-7 score) was significantly higher for white infant-toddler teachers at 14 percent than Black and Hispanic/Latino infant-toddler teachers (both about 7 percent; figure 9). The rate was also high for a combined group of Asian teachers and those who identified as two or more or unlisted races (13 percent), but this rate was not statistically different from the others. (Because these group sizes are small, we were not able to disaggregate rates on this variable.)

We also find a few statistically significant differences on individual symptoms. The results largely show a great frequency of symptoms among white infant-toddler teachers. They were more likely than teachers who identified as Black, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, and other/two or more races to report feeling depressed “all the time” and having difficulty concentrating “sometimes” or “occasionally.” Compared with other groups, white teachers were also more likely to report having a poor appetite “sometimes” or “occasionally” and trouble sleeping “occasionally.” Further, compared with Hispanic/Latino infant-toddler teachers, white teachers were more likely to report feeling sad, that everything was an effort, and that they could not get going “sometimes.” The one symptom that showed a different pattern was “feel that everything was an effort,” on which Black infant-toddler teachers reported greater frequency than other groups (18 percent said “all the time” compared with 5 percent of Asian teachers, 9 percent of Hispanic/Latino teachers, and 8 percent of white teachers).

FIGURE 9

Share of Infant-Toddler Teachers Suspected to Have Major Depressive Disorder, by Race and Ethnicity

Percentage of center-based infant-toddler teachers that are suspected to have major depressive disorder based on their overall score on the CESD-7 screening instrument



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

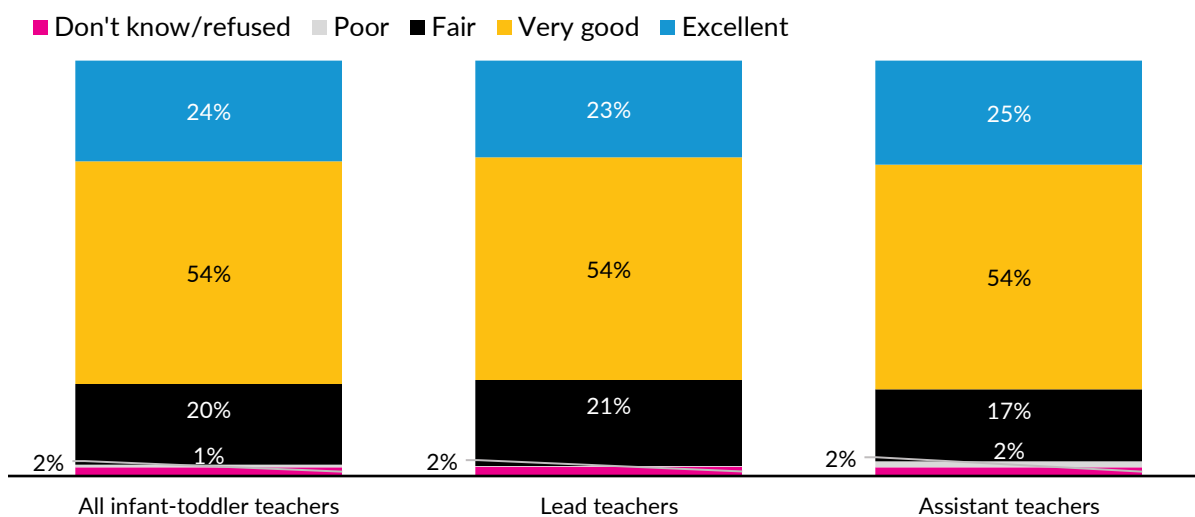
Notes: Respondents with a CESD-7 score below the cutoff (i.e., 0–7) were not suspected of having major depressive disorder and received a code of 0; respondents with a score above the cutoff (i.e., 8–21) were suspected to have major depressive disorder and received a code of 1. Respondents who did not provide a response to one or two symptoms in the scale had the average of their other symptoms imputed for these values when calculating the total score. Respondents who did not provide a response for three or more of the symptoms were coded as missing and are not included in the total estimate. We combined Asian only infant-toddler teachers with other, or multiracial infant-toddler teacher due to disclosure concerns. The difference between Black and white infant-toddler teachers is statistically significant at $p < .05$. The difference between Hispanic/Latino and white teachers is statistically significant at $p < .10$.

Overall Health

Most infant-toddler teachers reported having “excellent” (24 percent) or “very good” (54 percent) overall health, although a fifth (20 percent) reported having “fair” health (figure 10). Lead and assistant teachers reported similarly. When examining self-reported health across different racial and ethnic groups, we found that Black and Hispanic or Latino infant-toddler teachers were significantly more likely to report “excellent” health than white infant-toddler teachers (32 percent, 35 percent, and 23 percent, respectively). This overall health measure is limited and does not capture aspects of physical health (e.g., body mass index; amount of physical activity) or work-related pain or symptoms, as previous research has found (Kwon et al. 2022).

FIGURE 10

Infant-Toddler Teachers’ Self-Reported Health Status



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

What Are Infant-Toddler Teachers’ Reasons for Leaving the Field?

To estimate turnover intentions, the 2019 NSECE asked child care teachers if they looked for a new or additional job in the past three months. We find that 27 percent of infant-toddler teachers in 2019 reported looking for a new or additional job in the past three months, with the same rate among lead teachers and assistant teachers. Although looking for a new job is not the same as leaving one’s job, it may be a good indicator of the workforce’s stability.

Overwhelmingly, the top reason for looking for a new or additional job was to find a job that pays more (51 percent), with assistant teachers slightly more likely to report this reason (figure 11). In our companion brief (Sandstrom, Casas, and Lou 2023), we report that center-based teachers working exclusively with children younger than age 3 earned a median wage of \$11 an hour in 2019—\$1.30 or

11 percent less than center-based teachers working exclusively with preschoolers. Only 14 percent earned at least \$15 an hour.

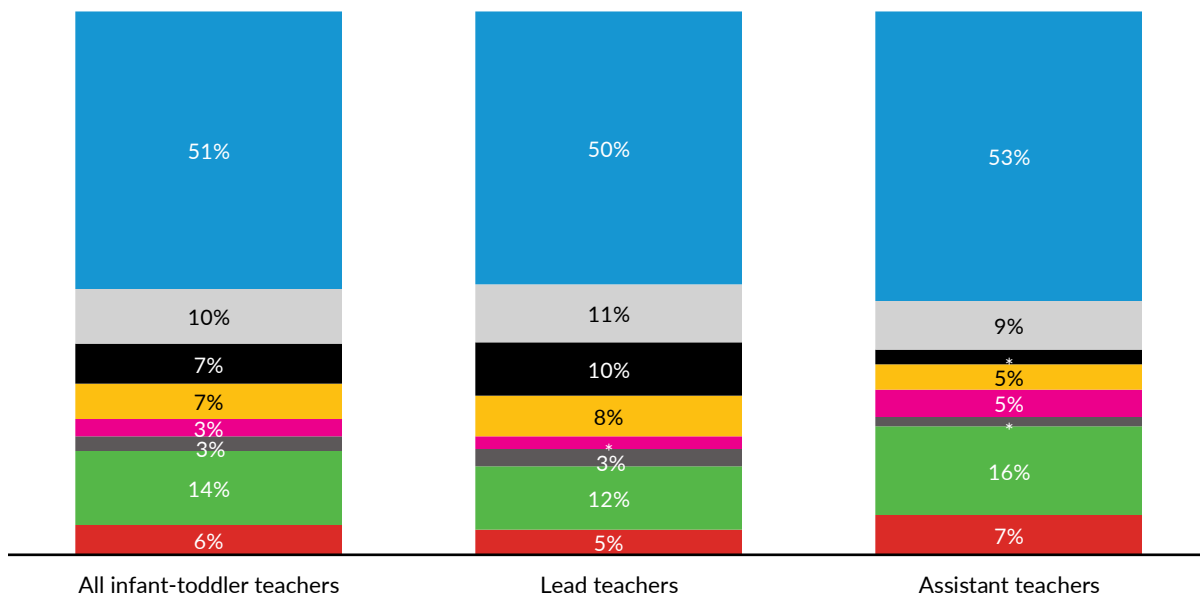
Other main reasons for looking for a job included to find a second job (10 percent), find improved working conditions (7 percent overall but 10 percent for lead teachers), and find a job that offers professional growth or advancement within the child care field (also 7 percent overall but 10 percent for lead teachers). Less common reasons included wanting to reduce commute time or find a better schedule. In sum, reasons for potential turnover reflect aspects of poor job quality: low pay, poor working conditions, lack of advancement opportunities, and challenging work schedules.

FIGURE 11

Reasons Why Infant-Toddler Teachers Searched for New or Additional Work in Past Three Months

Main reason identified for looking for a job among those who reported looking

- To find a job that pays more
- To find a second job
- To find improved work conditions in program
- To find job for professional growth/career advancement within child care
- To see what else is available
- Hope to reduce commute or improve schedule
- Other
- Don't Know/refused



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

Notes: This figure only includes those who indicated that they had looked for a new or additional job in the past three months. Because of sample size restrictions, several response options were consolidated into “other,” including “worried that this job may end,” “to find summer employment,” “to find job with benefits/insurance,” “to find job that offers more work hours,” “to find job in new area because moving/relocating,” “to find a job that is a better fit with training/experience,” and “other.”

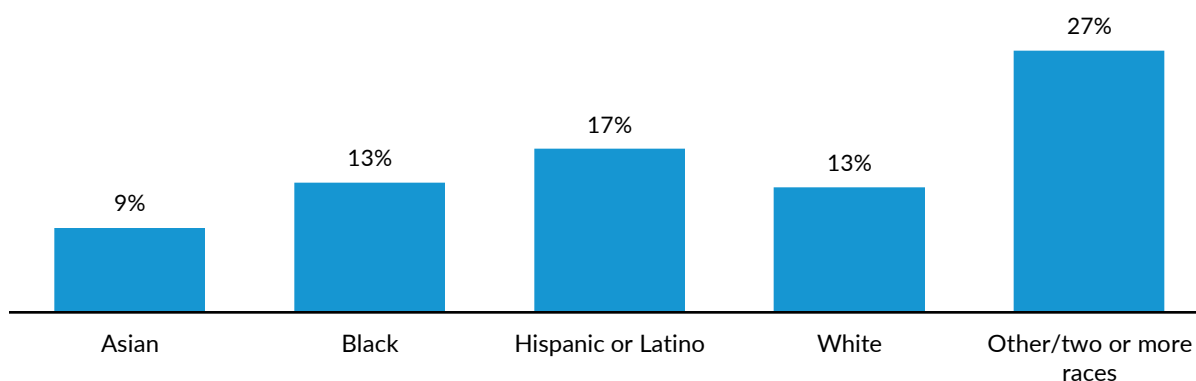
We find fairly similar patterns when examining across different racial and ethnic groups. The main reason infant-toddler teachers of all racial and ethnic groups searched for a new job in the past three months was to find a job that pays more, followed by looking to find a second job. Among those who job-searched, Black and Hispanic or Latino infant-toddler teachers were slightly more likely than white teachers to report searching for a job that pays more (54 percent, 56 percent, and 48 percent, respectively), and an even larger share of Asian teachers reported that reason (80 percent).

Overall, in 2019, 17 percent of Hispanic or Latino, 13 percent of white and Black, and 9 percent of Asian infant-toddler teachers searched for a new or second job that paid more (figure 12).

FIGURE 12

Infant-Toddler Teachers Who Job-Searches to Find a Job that Pays More, by Race and Ethnicity

Among all center-based teachers of children younger than age 3



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

Notes: This figure includes all center-based teachers primarily working with children younger than age 3.

Conclusion

A healthy and stable workforce is a critical component of delivering high-quality early care and education. Overall, we found that the majority of infant-toddler teachers in 2019 felt respected among their colleagues and parents in their programs, were in good physical health, and presented depressive symptoms at a similar rate as women overall in the United States. However, some teachers reported challenges including dealing with difficult child behaviors, blame from parents, and other workplace stressors. Assistant teachers in particular reported more depressive symptoms, fewer occasions of feeling respected by parents, and more stressful events, such as being moved to a different classroom to fill in. We also found some racial and ethnic differences, with white infant-toddler teachers reporting greater frequency of most depressive symptoms.

More than a quarter of infant-toddler teachers looked for a new job that pays more or looked for additional employment. Low compensation continues to threaten this workforce’s stability, with poor working conditions and lack of advancement opportunities also causing staff to consider leaving their jobs. Similar to previous research, we found a wage gap by age groups taught, with infant-toddler

teachers working exclusively with that age group earning more than \$1 less per hour than preschool teachers with similar educational attainment. These descriptive findings shed light on the experiences of infant-toddler teachers and the positive relationships most of them have with children, families, and their colleagues. But the findings also point to job quality issues that may be challenging staff recruitment and retention in the field.

These data were collected in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic, which dramatically affected the child care market and caused many teachers across age groups to leave the field.³ The resulting child care workforce shortage continues to challenge programs. Considering the state of the workforce before the pandemic and common reasons for turnover, such as low pay and poor working conditions, can help inform future planning and decisionmaking. Additional research on the workforce during and after the pandemic may identify higher rates of mental health problems and new concerns that will warrant new policy solutions. Expanding infant and early childhood mental health consultation for early educators, for example, is one solution to support the large number of early educators facing difficult child behaviors in the classroom. Wage supplements that can raise compensation levels and achieve pay equity is another strategy to help recruit and retain qualified staff.

Notes

- ¹ Throughout our brief, we try to test group differences for significance wherever possible. Because of the overlap in teachers working with infants and toddlers and those working with preschoolers in the data, as well as wanting to convey the reality of many infant-toddler teachers in the US—which includes working with both groups—we do not use an independent sample between the two teacher types. Therefore, when commenting on the differences between infant-toddler teachers and preschool teachers, our observations are purely descriptive.
- ² We identified center-based infant-toddler teachers in the 2019 NSECE Workforce Survey using the constructed variable, WF9_CLASSRM_UNDER3, which indicates whether the respondent often works with children from birth to age 3. The variable is equal to 1 if the respondent often works with this age group and 0 otherwise. This variable was constructed by the NSECE study team using 11 other raw variables from the survey. For more information, please see the 2019 NSECE User's Guide for Workforce Public-Use Data File: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/2019-national-survey-early-care-and-education-nsece-users-guide-workforce> (accessed November 23, 2022).
- ³ The Bureau of Labor Statistics's Current Employment Statistics survey covers "All employees, thousands, child day care services, seasonally adjusted" ("BLS Data Viewer," BLS Beta Labs, accessed November 23, 2022, <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/CES6562440001>).

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