Between a Rock and a Hard Place:

Examining Preschool Teachers' Workplace Experiences and their Influences on Exclusionary Discipline

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Abstract

Preschool expulsions are increasingly studied in terms of their potential negative outcomes on students. This study examined the relationship between preschool teachers' workplace experiences and their use of disciplinary actions, including expulsions. It sought to understand the sociological mechanisms and supports of the teacher workplace, and the psychological influences on teacher decision making and perceptions that contribute to disciplinary actions. Whereas prior research has illustrated the harmful consequences of expulsions and how teacher experiences may be related to expulsions, this study aimed to increase knowledge about the influence of workplace factors on discipline, primarily in private preschools, which are relatively under-studied. Preschool teachers from the Denver area participated in semi-structured interviews to gain understanding about their stress, perceptions of challenging behaviors, perceived institutional support, and institutional norms regarding discipline. Using open-coding methods, the qualitative data was analyzed and several key themes were established. The findings indicate that preschool teachers generally lack adequate support, especially in regard to challenging behavior management, and that this creates a great deal of stress. Additionally, although preschool expulsions may be declining, they are being replaced by other exclusionary disciplines, including "soft" expulsions to mitigate teacher stress in the absence of knowledge on how to actively improve challenging behaviors. These findings have important implications as they show there needs to be easily accessible training opportunities concentrated on how to handle challenging behaviors and more opportunities for workplace collaboration to better support teachers in dealing with these behaviors, and thus mitigating the negative consequences of exclusionary discipline.

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As the benefits of pre-primary education are becoming better understood, American preschools are growing increasingly populated, with approximately 61% of children in the United States aged three to five years enrolled in schooling in 2019 (Cannon et al., 2017). This shift also means that preschool is becoming more accessible, even to students who are at risk for challenging behaviors and other educational concerns. However, the resources allocated to teachers are not increasing with the higher level of enrollments. Preschool expulsions were, until recently, an unconsidered phenomenon with serious consequences for expelled students. With many teachers feeling ill-prepared to manage and improve challenging behaviors in overcrowded classrooms throughout long days (for which they are poorly paid), the frequency of the sobering decision to remove a child from a school becomes unsurprising. Research into this unfortunate phenomenon is only just beginning to tackle in-depth, important questions, but it is already clear that early childhood expulsions have numerous negative implications academically and socially for the children who experience them. However, nearly all research and statistics that have been gathered focus on public preschools, which may be subject to different regulations than private centers.

This thesis research aimed to contribute to the scientific understanding of preschool expulsions and the factors that make them more likely. Walter Gilliam, a psychologist at Yale University, offers an important lens through which to see child expulsions: he sees them as an adult decision rather than merely a matter of child behavior (Meek & Gilliam, 2016). In using this lens, the current study examined the experiences and perceptions of teachers in relation to

disciplinary practices. The purpose of the current study was to explore the factors that influence teacher decision making regarding preschool expulsion and discipline. It did so by considering the psychological experiences of teachers, including stress and perceptions of challenging behaviors, as well as the sociological context of teachers, such as institutional structure, support availability, and professional relationships. The present study focused on private preschools as well as other center types, such as public, to contribute a better understanding of institutional norms in private centers, which have been relatively under-studied. The results from the study may have important implications for tactics and interventions that could be implemented in early childhood education centers to reduce expulsion rates and their negative consequences. Results may also provide guidance for future areas of research into early childhood expulsions and teachers' professional experiences.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Expulsions

In the context of early childhood education, expulsion is an irreversible decision to cease the caregiving by an educational entity for a particular student, meaning a "complete and permanent removal of a student from an entire education system" (Gilliam, 2005, p. 1). Nationally, it has been estimated that preschoolers are expelled at a rate of 6.67 per 1,000, and that preschoolers in the United States are three times more likely to be expelled compared to K-12 students (Gilliam, 2005). Expulsion rates are higher for African American children, children with disabilities, and male students (Meek & Gilliam, 2016). Because these startling expulsion rates have been identified, and because of their disproportionate impact on male and African American students, there has been a growing scientific focus on the outcomes of preschool expulsions since Walter Gilliam first revealed the startling prevalence of the phenomenon in

2005. Expulsions fall into one of two categories: "soft" and "hard." Soft expulsions are not official, but occur in response to school practices that make the educational arrangement unable to continue, such as continually sending a student home until the parents remove the child from the school. Hard expulsions occur when a school officially tells a student that they must make new arrangements and will no longer receive any services from the school (Novoa & Malik, 2018).

Importantly, early expulsions influence children's self-concept and views about education in a negative way, and are detrimental to their development and ability to overcome the challenging behaviors that may have led to disciplinary action (US Department of Health & Human Services, 2021). Furthermore, those at risk for early expulsion are often the students who would benefit the most from high-quality services that promote success. Losing out on these opportunities early-on can lead to compounding gaps in access to services, especially as prior research has illustrated a connection between early expulsions and future expulsions, dropping out of school, and incarceration (Meek & Gilliam, 2016). Because of the hugely negative consequences that preschool expulsions pose for future generations of students, it is vitally important to understand how and why they occur. Through a deeper comprehension of this prevalent and harmful phenomenon, steps can be taken to reduce expulsions and reduce the number of children who suffer their consequences. Additionally, as Gilliam and peers have stated, "expulsions and suspensions are not child behaviors; they are adult decisions" (Meek & Gilliam, 2016, p.6). Comprehension of the experiences of the relevant adults (teachers) and how they relate to disciplinary practices such as expulsion is a critical piece of the puzzle to address preschool expulsions.

Challenging Behaviors

Challenging behaviors are commonly defined as patterns of behavior that interfere with learning and prosocial interaction with peers (Smith & Fox, 2003). Although some aggressive and externalizing behaviors are common in toddlers, in typical behavioral development those aggressive behaviors considered "challenging" in preschool tend to decrease after the age of three. Regular and increasing aggressive behaviors by preschool aged children are not typical (Wakschlag, Tolan, & Leventhal, 2009). Understanding how to manage and improve challenging behaviors is a necessary and critical component of being a teacher, as continued challenging behaviors can be detrimental for the student. Compared to pre-K students who don't engage in challenging behaviors, those experiencing emotional and behavioral issues are more likely to have frequent punitive interactions with adults, academic difficulties, and see negative responses from peers (Fox & Smith, 2007). In fact, long-term studies based on externalizing behaviors have found that those children with moderate to high levels of externalizing behavior starting at age four were more likely to become delinquent or violent relative to those children with low levels of those behaviors (Thompson et al., 2011). Many children at risk for expulsion exhibit these challenging behaviors, have mental health issues, developmental delays, or personal experiences outside of school that make it difficult for them to succeed (Perry et al., 2011). Teachers cite aggressive, defiant, socially delayed, and violent behaviors as causing serious problems in the classroom (Perry et al., 2011). Expulsion is a severe reaction to an inability by teachers to manage and improve these behaviors, utilized as an outlet for personal relief and classroom safety.

Expulsion Factors & Teachers

Prior research has demonstrated a relationship between teacher stress and expulsions. Managing challenging behaviors is commonly cited as a significant cause of stress for teachers

(Kaiser, Rogers, & Kasper, 1993). This may be because teachers feel unprepared and unsupported in behavior management tasks. Preschool teachers cite behavior management as one of the areas in which they need the most training and support. In fact, families, administrators and teachers recognize this deficit in knowledge as a serious impediment to successful pre-primary educational practices, even greater than lack of funding (Fox & Smith, 2007; Perry et al., 2011). Because job stress has also been linked with poor job performance and burnout, it is unsurprising that Gilliam has stated that job stress and expulsion are meaningfully linked, and services to teachers that reduce such psychological experiences ought to be considered (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers who have expelled students generally cite higher levels of stress than their counterparts who had not expelled a student, and specifically noted student behavior as stressful, especially when dangerous (Zinsser et al., 2019). Teachers in Zinsser and colleagues' study were surveyed on their access to social-emotional learning (SEL) supports, expulsion rates, and their stress levels. Teachers mentioned three main sources of stress: a particular student with externalizing behaviors (especially those that were dangerous), balancing individual needs with caring for the whole class, and feeling isolated or without help to turn to (Zinsser et al., 2019). Zinsser and colleagues' research even illustrated that SEL supports in preschool classrooms can greatly reduce the likelihood of expulsions, but that their effectiveness is mediated by whether or not the SEL supports reduce teacher stress.

The perceptual experiences of preschool teachers clearly play an oversized role in decision-making regarding disciplinary practices, and is not limited to perceptions of their own mental state. A growing body of research is looking at the path to expulsion, as defined by perceptual stages experienced by teachers in regard to the student and others. Once a child is exhibiting challenging behaviors, teachers attempt to find the "trigger" or cause of the behavior,

but may not be able to define one. Teachers then move to attempt to collaborate with parents, which, if behavior doesn't improve, leads to the perception of the child as dangerous and the parents as incapable; thus, teachers turn to exclusionary discipline (Martin et al., 2018). The perceptual experience of the teacher develops throughout the attempts (and failures) to manage the behaviors, ending with negative perceptions of the child and their family.

Expulsion Factors & Context

The workplace experience of preschool teachers has also influenced expulsion likelihood and rates. Specific characteristics of the workplace are influential, some having been shown to be a common denominator among institutions where early childhood expulsions are common. A study investigating 20 cases of children who were expelled from early childhood programs in Maryland because of challenging behavior found that one of the main commonalities among programs that expelled students was structure. Some schools were overly structured, leaving the teachers little room for personalization and in-the-moment action; others lacked necessary guidance and generalizability across the school (Perry et al., 2011).

Even broader than each center's structure, the teaching profession is an important context that influences each teacher. One of the primary factors is the pay, or lack thereof, received by preschool teachers. Preschool teachers in the United States are paid less than half of what kindergarten teachers are paid; as a result, programs struggle to hire teachers that have more qualifications, experience, and specialized training that would make them better equipped to manage challenging behaviors in the classroom (Barnett, 2003). Teacher turnover thus leads to a majority of teachers being underqualified and inexperienced (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). In addition, teacher turnover is directly related to teacher compensation, with annual turnover rates of 25% to 50% being commonplace (Barnett, 2003). Turnover has become an increasingly

difficult issue during the COVID-19 pandemic; a national survey in November 2020 found that 69% of early childhood care workers surveyed found hiring and keeping qualified employees to be more difficult during the pandemic than before the pandemic (Tate, 2021). Turnover is one issue that contributes to an overall teaching shortage in the United States, and both phenomena negatively influence teachers and their efficacy. Continual change in the teaching staff harms the morale of the teachers that remain and damages the school environment as a whole (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). This can lead to negative psychological experiences for teachers, such as stress and burnout, linking back to individual teacher factors. Burnout is a negative psychological experience characterized by chronic stressors at work, and there are three identifiable dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of feelings of personal accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1997). Experiencing burnout does more than harm teacher mental health; it also influences appraisals and decision-making regarding challenging behaviors from students. One study showed a negative association between burnout and perceptions of adverse behaviors, especially antisocial and oppositional/defiant behaviors; the more burned out a teacher was, the more severely they tended to perceive the challenging behavior (Kokkinos, Panayiotou, & Daavazoglou, 2005).

Organizational climate, defined as the perception of the work environment, is also an important factor for expulsion; it considers how resource availability, administration, and staff are perceived by teachers (Hoy & Clover, 1986). A study conducted on preschool teachers in Florida found that teachers who perceived greater availability of supports were less likely to have a child removed (Miller, 2014). Access to supports such as early childhood mental health consultations has been repeatedly associated with reduced expulsion requests (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). In Miller's (2014) analysis from Florida, high quality supervisory relationships were

associated with perceptions of behavioral supports, indicating that administrative behavior is as important to expulsions and exclusionary discipline as teacher behavior.

Theoretical Framework

Psychological Theories

Decision Making & Stress

Prior research has made it abundantly clear that stress is a psychological experience common among preschool teachers, that stress is caused or exacerbated by challenging behaviors in the classroom, and that the teachers who experience more psychological stress are more likely to have a student removed (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Kaiser, Rogers, & Kasper, 1993; Zinsser et al., 2019). Workplace stress has been significantly and negatively associated with job performance, indicating that teachers who experience such severe levels of psychological stress may be underperforming, have difficulty assisting students exhibiting challenging behaviors and helping the rest of the students in their classroom meet their daily needs (Foy et al., 2019). It is unsurprising, then, that teachers with higher levels of stress are more likely to remove challenging students from their classroom (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Zinsser et al., 2019). They may simply be unable to work with them to manage their behaviors given their psychological reality at work.

Furthermore, decision-making pathways are influenced by the experience of stress. The stress induced deliberation-to-intuition (SIDI) model posits that when an individual is under stress, decision-making becomes more influenced by subcortical regions of the brain that are used for intuition and fight-or-flight threat responses (Yu, 2016). In his research, Yu found that it is likely that stressed individuals, because they are relying on this intuitive decision-making pathway, may be more reliant on heuristics and biases. Thus, they will be more vulnerable to

social influence, less likely to use cognition to thoroughly examine their response to a situation, and more sensitive to punishment. Because of this intuitive approach to decision-making, teachers are likely to be more guided by the norms of their institutions regarding discipline, not necessarily considering the long-term consequences of their decisions for the child in question. This is due to reduced usage of the prefrontal cortex, used for evaluating risks, consequences, and other long-term decision-making and planning. This perspective may also help explain why there are demographic disparities in preschool expulsion rates, where African American and male students are more likely to be expelled, perhaps because of the biases surrounding African American and male students as more aggressive, dangerous, or prone to misbehavior (Meek & Gilliam, 2016).

Some research has begun examining teacher decision-making regarding preschool expulsions and the factors that play a role in their decision to expel or request to expel a child. Gilliam and his peers developed the Preschool Expulsion Risk Measure (PERM), which revealed four decision factors that seem to mobilize teachers to seek expulsion: perceived level of classroom disruption, fear of accountability for actions that may harm others, hopelessness regarding improving the behavior, and teacher stress from the behavior (Gilliam & Reyes, 2018). Gilliam and Reyes found that the PERM could predict with 80% accuracy whether a student had been referred to early childhood mental health consultations (ECMHC) or had been considered for removal. The development of this measure gives great insight into the factors that influence disciplinary decision-making by preschool teachers and once again highlights the critical role that teacher stress plays in decision making processes.

Teacher Attributions of Behavior

How teachers regard the behaviors exhibited by their students is important, especially what they perceive as the cause of the behavior. These attributions guide their reactionary strategies, their dispositions toward students, and whether or not they attempt to help the student overcome their difficulties (Poulou & Norwitch, 2000). If teachers attribute challenging behaviors to issues at home, they may be likely to make little effort to improve the behavior because they perceive it as originating outside of the classroom, or they may choose responses that put the majority of the responsibility for improvement onto the parents. Investigations into the most common types of attributions used by teachers found that in the case of moderate to severe behavior, the most common attribution was to out-of-school factors (Kulinna, 2007). With the primary attribution of challenging behavior being to external factors, this indicates a likelihood that teachers do not perceive personal responsibility for their students' challenging behaviors. Thus, they may be less likely to seek improvement strategies and instead attempt to simply eliminate the stressful behavior through removal of the student.

Sociological Theories

Teachers as Socializing Agents

Besides primary caretakers, teachers are one of the most influential adults to whom young children are exposed during the extremely formative pre-primary years (Herzfeldt-Kamprath & Ullrich, 2016). Classrooms are an important place for even children as young as preschool to begin performing the social norms that have been passed on to them by teachers and parents. Research has illustrated that even preschoolers are able to perpetuate broad societal hierarchies from within the classroom environment (Streib, 2011). Teacher practices have been found to help perpetuate the social construction of and social ideas about sexuality as early as preschool (Gansen, 2017). Clearly, children are aware of the social messages being inadvertently

taught to them by the adults in their life, including teachers. As a result, teachers can be considered as socializing agents because they are able to transmit and enforce social norms to students (Gansen, 2021).

The role of teachers as socializing agents extends even to their disciplinary practices. Teacher decisions about how they enforce classroom expectations have influences on students because of the particular messages they send. Two types of disciplinary strategies have been identified in prior research, one being punitive, which is primarily exclusionary, where students are excluded from classroom activities and removed from their peers (strategies like timeouts and expulsions); the other is positive discipline, which is focused on the development of social skills (Gansen, 2021). Gansen's study on the socialization impacts of these different types of discipline revealed that teachers who use primarily punitive disciplinary measures conveyed social messages to the children about who was a "good" student, and who was "bad," whereas those who relied on positive disciplinary strategies did not influence how students labeled each other or themselves. Teacher behavior, including how they choose to enforce behavioral expectations, may have long-lasting impacts on the self-concept of students and their social interactions. Gansen further found that punitive disciplinary strategy choices were associated with the race, class, and gender of the students receiving discipline, indicating that the messages being sent may perpetuate existing social hierarchies. Understanding the immense influence preschool teachers have in their role as socializing agents over young children in formative years of development illustrates the need for highly skilled teachers who are trained to understand and avoid biases in their classroom behavior and who will be positive influences on individual students and society as a whole.

The Role of Social Support & Collaboration

As previously mentioned, there have been many studies illustrating the impacts of workplace stress on teachers and how stress is detrimental to performance (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Additionally, workplace stress is negatively associated with social support at work, which suggests that increasing social support at work may be a viable avenue to reduce teacher stress and the negative outcomes associated, such as increased rate of removal or attempted removal of students (Foy et al., 2019; Zinsser et al., 2019). Social support refers not only to the availability of social relationships, but to having relationships that provide comfort and assistance, particularly when an individual is experiencing stress. In essence, social support hinges on its ability to improve the individual's experience with stress through the resources social relationships provide (Southwick et al., 2016). Social support, in life and in work, is negatively associated with work stress, in particular when the sources of support and stress are the same (Etzion, 1984). Because preschool teachers experience a great deal of stress originating from their job, it is important that they also experience social support at their job. For teachers, one form of social support at work comes from collaborative relationships with peers. This opportunity for collaboration can be considered a form of social support because it is critical to helping teachers manage their stress at work, stress which prior research has noted can come from challenging behaviors (Kaiser, Rogers, & Kasper, 1993). Collaboration among teachers has been shown to have benefits at all levels; for teachers themselves, they experienced improved morale, a reduced workload, better motivation, reduced feelings of isolation, and improved communication (Vangrieken et al., 2015).

Sociology of Work

An understanding of the preschool teaching profession in its social context as a job is necessary to understand the social structures that influence the experiences of those participating

in said job. A sociological understanding of work posits that the experience of a job is influenced by social structures of inequality, global economic structures, family, the labor market for the job, and the conditions of the job (Tausig, 2013). The present study was primarily concerned with the conditions of a preschool teaching job and their influence on teacher experiences at work; thus, the demands-resource model is particularly relevant. Job demands can be understood as the speed workers must complete tasks, the amount of work they have, and if they have enough time to complete these demands (Tausig, 2013). The demand-control model, created by Robert Karasek, states that individuals that have a job with a high level of demands but little control over how the work is completed will feel high levels of distress (Karasek, 1979). If preschool teachers experience low levels of decision latitude (control), they will be highly prone to distress because they experience a high level of job demands. This model can be expanded to encompass the previously discussed benefits of social support in the workplace, stating that higher levels of support can help reduce the strain of job demands, thus being named the demand-control-support model (Johnson & Hall, 1988).

A complementary model exists, the demand-resource model, which views demands broadly as general work pressure and physical and emotional demands; resources can be thought of as monetary resources, social support, decision making contributions, promotion opportunities, job security, and feedback (Tausig, 2013). If preschool teachers do perceive a lack of resources of any or all types, then they would be more susceptible to the psychological distress associated with high job demands. These demands clearly exist for a teacher needing to perform emotional labor for students, especially those with challenging behaviors, and physically navigate classrooms of many small, energetic children. Once again, social support becomes relevant, as it is a major resource that preschool teachers can utilize to balance demands.

The sociological perspective of work does consider social structures, including those that may lead to inequality, such as gender. Compared to male-dominated work, female-dominated work is typically more stressful: it is lower paid, is usually in smaller institutions that are non-unionized, and has less flexibility in workers' tasks (Tausig, 2013). In essence, predominantly female professions are less resourced, leaving them with less to balance out their job demands. Because teaching is a female-dominated profession, especially preschool teaching, many of these characteristics do apply. Considering the other implications of this kind of identity is beyond the scope of the present study, but understanding how social structures, such as gender, influence experiences at work is relevant.

The Present Study

The present study attempted to discover the relationship between various factors experienced by preschool teachers and the disciplinary practices they undertake, primarily their undertaking of expulsions. The factors considered included level of stress experienced by teachers, their perceptions of challenging behaviors and their personal decision-making processes regarding disciplinary actions, their perception of the availability and quality of teaching supports, their institution's disciplinary norms, and their institution's structure and functionality, including administrative relationships. The goal of this thesis was to contribute to the growing conversation surrounding early childhood expulsions with a relatively novel approach that considers the experiences of teachers, and to give understanding of the variables that influence preschool expulsion rates and disciplinary strategies so that practical measures can be taken. Much of the prior research regarding preschool expulsions focuses on rates, predictors, and impacts. There is a significant deficit in the scientific understanding of the influences on teachers that lead to expulsions. Some existing research considers either teacher factors, such as

mental health and stress, or center-wide variables. The present study aims to join these various factors, examining how one may affect the other, thus affecting expulsion rate and disciplinary strategies.

The present study utilized qualitative research methods to further understand the psychological and social mechanisms that play a role in preschool discipline, including expulsions and suspensions. Interviews were used to obtain information about teacher stress, decision-making processes and how institutional norms may guide these, as well as information about the institutional climate they work in, including the level of support and resources they perceive. Qualitative methods provides an opportunity to gather specific details from participants that illustrate differences in experiences (Zulauf, Silver, & Zinsser, 2019). Qualitative interviews allow room for personalization, as teachers can be asked to elaborate on unique experiences or share personal stories they feel are relevant. Preschool is not a uniform experience, especially in private schools where there is less governmental oversight, and qualitative methods better allow for these variations to be captured.

The current study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the various institutional norms regarding disciplinary practices and preschool expulsion, and how do they affect teachers' disciplinary decisions?
2. How is teacher perception of the availability and quality of support and training opportunities related to disciplinary strategies chosen by teachers?
3. How do teachers perceive the challenging behaviors they experience?
4. What contributes to teacher stress and is stress related to disciplinary practices?

It was hypothesized that teachers would feel inadequately supported to handle challenging behaviors by their institution or other entities. It was further hypothesized that

teachers would experience high stress, originating from a lack of support and from challenging behaviors from students, and that teacher decision-making, unless it follows institutional guidelines regarding discipline, would be relatively intuitive rather than rational, due to the stressful context.

Methods

Design

The present qualitative study utilized virtual, semi-structured interviews of preschool teachers. The study examined the different institutional experiences of preschool teachers, including levels of perceived support and stress, and disciplinary norms and their impact on the disciplinary decisions.

Because the goal of this study was to increase knowledge about the particular experiences of teachers and the specific institutional factors that influence expulsions, qualitative methods seem best suited. Personal stories, examples, and details that come out of qualitative research benefits understanding and the development of practical solutions to the problems underscored here. Prior studies, such as one conducted by Zulauf, Silver, and Zinsser (2019), have indicated that qualitative data, specifically for studies investigating preschools, can provide deeper insights than quantitative data and are especially valuable for intervention design. Qualitative data are often richer in detail and provide more context and background to phenomena or decisions, compared to quantitative data, which may merely assess whether or not certain events transpired. In particular, Zulauf and her colleagues' analysis determined that qualitative data provide a powerful complement to quantitative data, helping to clarify complex topics and present the whole story about what happens in classrooms where expulsions occur. Other researchers argue that qualitative research is especially beneficial for studies that deal with complex variable

relationships because of its ability to tolerate and explain contradictions and outliers, and it can lead to improved interventions to relevant problems because important considerations are revealed through qualitative research that quantitative data fail to bring to light (Black, 1994; Cleland, 2017; Willig, 2013). Because much of the prior research on preschool expulsions or on preschool teacher experiences has utilized quantitative data, the present study adds and strengthens existing literature by providing a qualitative perspective on teacher experiences. It is already well established that expulsions occur in preschools; this study utilized qualitative measures to better comprehend the specific *experiences* of teachers that create a context where expulsions and exclusionary discipline may be more likely to occur (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Martin et al., 2018; Meek & Gilliam, 2016). This contextual information may be valuable to intervention efforts to better support teachers and reduce the incidence of harmful disciplinary practices such as expulsion. Given this perspective, the present study examined quantitative data from interviews with a sample of preschool teachers in the Denver area.

Virtual interviews were necessary for the safety of researchers and participants during the COVID-19 pandemic and presented some unique challenges and benefits compared to traditional in-person interviews. The convenience and ease of the interviews was beneficial for the researcher and the study participants and may have increased their level of comfort. Virtual interviews required significantly less effort to participate in and were likely more convenient than in-person ones. Teachers may have felt more open when they were able to be somewhere comfortable and convenient, without the pressure of talking to a stranger face-to-face. However, the interviews were fairly brief, usually taking between 20 and 40 minutes to complete. Participants may not have felt as committed to giving their full attention and time to the interview when they had expended so little effort to engage in it and may have been distracted by

their chosen environment. Some interviewees were around children, family members, roommates, or were in distracting environments at the time of the interview. Additionally, an online format could have made it more difficult for the researcher to develop rapport with the participants and to make them comfortable enough to expansively open-up during their interviews, which may also explain the brevity of the interviews.

Participants

The sample included 10 preschool teachers in the Denver area. To be considered for inclusion in the study, teachers had to teach a preschool class in the Denver-metro area. There was no incentive to participate. All participants were solicited to complete the study by email. Contact information was obtained through connections with preschool professional development trainers and district employees. A close family member of the primary researcher is employed by the Broomfield Early Childhood Council and conducts Pyramid Plus Training Courses for teachers in the Denver area. Pyramid Plus trains teachers in practices developed through research at the University of Florida to support students' social emotional development and to address challenging behaviors (Fox et al., 2003). This close family-member and her employers at the Broomfield Early Childhood council provided email addresses of teachers they thought would be willing to participate in the study. They further provided the contact information of two preschool administration faculty in the Denver area who then provided email addresses of one of their staff members to participate in this study. One participant, who is a former University of Colorado Boulder student, had her email address provided by a faculty member at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Aliases are used to protect their privacy and the confidentiality of participants' data. All of the participants identified as female, with an average age of 30.9 years, and an age range of 23

to 47 years of age. In terms of education, 30% did not have a college degree, 40% had completed a bachelor's degree, and 30% had completed graduate degrees. There are several paths a lead-teacher may take to be considered qualified in the state of Colorado, including a bachelor's or associate's degree, a certified training program, or a combination of training and experience (Colorado Department of Education). The average teaching career length was 6.5 years, with a range from 9 months to 16 years. Seventy percent of the participants had been a teacher for more than 5 years. The program types represented included 1 public school, 8 private schools, and 1 Head Start program, which is a center designed to prepare children aged 3 to 5 years old for school at no cost for low-income families (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Of the private schools, four were corporate, which are for-profit schools owned by a corporation or are part of a franchise. The average classroom had 15.6 students, but classroom size varied widely among teachers, ranging from 5 to 24 students. This is likely partially due to the age of the students. Legal guidelines regarding teacher-to-student ratios are different based on different age-groups, but all teachers except for one would have been required to have at least one co-teacher in the classroom with them (Code of Colorado Regulations, 2016). The full legal guidelines regarding teacher-to-student ratios may be found in Appendix C. Most teachers taught children ages 3 to 5 years old, with only three teachers having students younger than 3 years old. See Table 1 (Appendix A) for information about the participants' aliases, ages, teaching experience, educational attainment, program type, student age range, and classroom size.

Measures

Participants were asked a brief series of questions written specifically for the present study that focused on several topics: school and classroom information, past expulsions and disciplinary strategies, disciplinary norms, stress, support and relationships, and challenging

behaviors. An example of a question is: *What instruction or resources does your institution provide to aid you in dealing with and improving persistent challenging behavior from students?* See Appendix B for the full questionnaire. Participants were also asked several simple demographic questions; see Table 1 for full demographic information. The video conferencing software Zoom Video Communications was utilized to facilitate all virtual interviews.

Data were analyzed using open coding methods, where codes are determined from reviewing the data rather than utilizing a pre-determined coding scheme. Interviews took between 20 and 40 minutes and were manually transcribed and coded. Interviews were audio recorded; all participants consented to audio recording. The audio-recorded data and further analysis were stored on a secure University of Colorado Boulder server accessed through the University of Colorado Boulder VPN. Transcripts were re-read to get a sense of general concepts to begin open coding, and then coded to note major themes and commonalities between the interviews. In the analysis of the interviews, eleven themes were considered predominant. These predominant themes became the coding categories. The themes were: 1) psychological experiences of stress, 2) administrative inconsistencies, 3) challenging behaviors as aggressive, 4) lack of training, 5) external attributions of challenging behavior, 6) the occurrence of soft expulsions, 7) exclusionary disciplinary strategies, 8) social support and collaboration as being helpful, 9) lack of an official expulsion policy, 10) understaffing issues, and finally 11) expulsion norms, both institutional and personal.

Results

Preschool expulsions have been previously estimated to occur in state preschools nationally at a rate of 6.67 children per 1,000 (Gilliam, 2005). A further study by Gilliam and Shahar (2006) investigated a variety of nonprofit and for-profit childcare settings in

Massachusetts, as well as Head Start programs and private and public preschools, and found that 39% of teachers had expelled at least one student. Given these findings, the qualitative data from this study helps shed some light onto why these expulsions occur and helps reveal if any difference exists between the rates of expulsion in private and state schools, as the prior data collected by Gilliam has concentrated on the rates of expulsions in public centers.

During the analysis of this qualitative data, several relevant larger thematic categories were identified, some of which combined two or three of the major themes identified during research. The thematic category of "Perceived Stress" combined the common themes revealed in data analysis of psychological experiences of stress, understaffing issues, and also administrative inconsistencies. The category "Administrative and Institutional Experiences" combined the common themes in the data regarding administrative inconsistencies, lack of an official expulsion policy, and expulsion norms. The category "Disciplinary Strategies" combined the themes of exclusionary disciplinary strategies and soft expulsions. The four other categories each include only one theme. These are "Challenging Behaviors and Aggression," "Support and Training Opportunities," "External Attributions," and "Social Support." These seven categories highlight the many-faceted institutional experiences and perceptions of preschool teachers in the Denver area as well as their disciplinary processes and decisions.

Disciplinary Strategies

The primary discipline strategy investigated during the present study was expulsions. Only one teacher had formally expelled a student from her own classroom. However, thirty percent of the teachers interviewed had requested that it happen but this request was not followed through by administration. Elizabeth, although she had never experienced an expulsion in her own classroom, left her position after her son was expelled from the same school she taught at.

Juliette, although she had not experienced an expulsion, had to have a child moved to a new classroom due to their challenging behavior and the stress it caused her. Several teachers mentioned that soft expulsions did occur, even though they and/or their school did not engage in hard expulsions. As defined previously, soft expulsions are unofficial reactions that make the educational arrangement unable to continue, such as parents withdrawing students after receiving a great number of incident reports, whereas hard expulsions involve administration officially telling a student they cannot return to the school. For the teachers who had seen soft expulsions occur, it was in response to continued parental communication about challenging behaviors, including incident reports being sent home or continuing attempts to have the child moved because of their behavior. Abby reported that soft expulsions occurred at her school, saying, "Parents have just left because they're tired of hearing my kid is doing bad or poorly, or getting really aggressive, and then they just kind of leave." Only 30% of teachers had never witnessed or been a part of any type of expulsion, and only 20% had never witnessed any kind of removal of a student from their classroom. Expulsion rates in this study were significantly less than what prior research has indicated; however, other methods of removal from a classroom were still prominent, with the majority of teachers interviewed having seen a student removed from their classroom in some way.

Although expulsions are one of the most severe forms of disciplinary behavior, other disciplinary strategies are utilized on a more regular basis. It was found to be quite common for the teachers interviewed to rely on strategies that removed the student exhibiting challenging behaviors from the classroom setting. These strategies often gave responsibility for managing the behavior to parents either through physically sending the student home with parents or through sending home behavioral reports. Many teachers (50%) stated that the primary response to

challenging behavior was some form of exclusionary discipline. Most of these involved sending a student to the office or home for the remainder of the day. Only Gabby and Ivy directly referred to suspensions occurring in their schools, but being sent home after exhibiting challenging behavior could be considered an out-of-school suspension. Other teachers simply removed the student from the classroom to the hallway. Fiona said that she would, "We work with them [the student], with our aid and our director to give them the breaks they might need from class. We talk about if they have sensory needs or physical needs that they can meet to get them to re-group and bring them back to class, things like that." Twenty percent of teachers did remove the child from classroom activities, but they remained in the classroom in a "cozy corner" where they could relax and calm down. Ivy described her cozy corner, saying, "So in ours we have books and fidgets and like super comfy pillows, and we try to make that a really warm area for them to calm down. And they can grab, like, a stuffie if they need to, or something like a blanket that keeps them safe." Abby stated that, in response to challenging behaviors, she relied solely on incident reports sent home to parents. Several incident reports were supposed to trigger a parent-teacher or parent-administration meeting, but she stated that this was never followed through :"They [the reports] weren't effective." Juliette used parental reports to involve parents but also relied on other, in the moment actions. Barb, who worked in a Head Start program, also utilized a "cozy corner," as well as a Conscious Discipline coordinator and mental health team. She said, when discussing Conscious Discipline,

> "It's a lot of focus on social-emotional stuff on a daily basis so that it, hopefully, doesn't escalate as much… If it's repeated then it's definitely going to be, the Conscious Discipline coordinator comes in and observes, the mental health team and the Special Ed team comes and observe and we work together to decide what the next best steps are."

When asked to describe what they perceived as the goals of these strategies, the preschool teachers interviewed usually said it was to get the child to calm down, or to remove them from the situation. Holly stated that her strategies, such as a cozy corner, taking a walk, or active ignoring, had the goal of helping children calm down because, "most of the time when kids are upset, very little is getting in so we want to get them back to a nice calm state where they can self-regulate better." Debra perceived the goal of sending students home to be to encourage parents to help improve the challenging behavior, saying that, "It's almost a goal of trying to tell the parents to help with this behavior if they were to get sent home, because the parent is the one who's getting a consequence from it." Fiona said that they attempted to help the student calm down outside of the classroom because, "The goal is always to allow the student to remain in the class [long-term] with their peers and to teach them the way to do that."

Perceived Stress

One of the predominant themes, mentioned by almost every preschool teacher interviewed, was that they experienced great amounts of stress while working. Several teachers mentioned that they felt that the majority of the stress they experienced in their life overall was due to their job, indicating the severity and pervasiveness of the psychological experience.

The most often mentioned sources of professional stress were challenging behaviors, lack of support from the school, administrative inconsistency or lack of availability, and understaffing. The majority of teachers mentioned behaviors from students as contributing to their stress, and many said it was the greatest stressor they experienced on the job. Much of this stress seemed to be tied to the fact that challenging behaviors make it difficult to follow a planned curriculum, or to the innately overwhelming nature of dealing with challenging behavior while also managing other students and their needs. For example, in response to being asked the

main cause of her professional stress, Holly said, "a lot of it would be behavior, especially when you have a plan for the day and it's very hard to stick to it."

Inadequate administration was often mentioned with regards to the stress that it causes teachers. Common issues taken with administration were lack of communication, difficulty accessing them for support or advice, and inconsistency or lack of follow-through on requests and promises. These issues will be examined more in depth later on, but it is important to highlight their relationship to the high levels of stress cited by the teachers.

Finally, teachers regularly discussed understaffing as a problem within their institution, and it was commonly mentioned as a cause of stress. A majority (60%) of the teachers interviewed brought up understaffing issues. Because of state regulations regarding the ratio of teachers-to-students for different age groups of children, nearly all the teachers interviewed would be required to have at least one co-teacher in their classroom (Code of Colorado Regulations, 2016). Commonly changing co-teachers or inexperienced co-teachers was an issue, leading to difficulties having an in-sync classroom. Debra mentioned that staffing demands led to poorly-trained teachers being hired to fill those demands, causing her to have to do on-the-job training for her co-teacher, who was ill-prepared for her role. She said that they had, "people coming in with essentially no training or experience which was a huge problem and led to a lot of stress." Furthermore, Fiona mentioned that understaffing led her to feel like she couldn't take days off because it would be difficult to find a substitute, saying, "It's hard to feel like I can take a mental health day, so I feel like that's where a lot of the stress comes in."

Administrative and Institutional Experiences

Half of the teachers discussed their administration in terms of its problems. They frequently found administration to be disorganized, inconsistent, and that they neglected to

follow through on changes suggested by teachers. As previously examined, these difficulties were one of the primary reasons cited for workplace stress. A few teachers mentioned that when they needed assistance, the front office or administration was generally unavailable. For example, Debra said, "If I needed something it is honestly kind of a hit or miss… it just felt inaccessible." Some teachers recounted suggesting to administration to implement strategies from external training they had taken, or discussing next steps regarding a student with challenging behavior, and these conversations were never followed up in either case. Caroline reported that, "when I took Pyramid Plus [teacher training courses focused on social-emotional development], two other girls from my school were doing it, and we talked to our boss and said 'This is awesome, let's do this for every class so the whole school can be on the same page.' And they just said 'Yep we can talk about it,' and then never did anything else."

In addition, the majority (70%) of teachers interviewed did not have an official policy guiding preschool expulsions at their institution. Some had tiered systems of disciplinary steps in regard to challenging behaviors, but most did not have any published guidelines that stated what behaviors would lead to an expulsion. Holly stated that she believed they did have an official policy, but did not know what it actually said. The teachers who did have an official policy at their institution had similar, "three-strikes-and-you're-out" protocol, but only Gabby's school's formal system also involved suspensions.

Generally, institutional feelings surrounding expulsions created an environment where an expulsion was deemed to be a less than favorable occurrence, although it wasn't overtly condemned. Only a few teachers perceived an adamant disapproval of expulsion or an attitude within their school that would make it unheard of for an expulsion to occur. Many teachers either said that the attitude toward expulsions was neutral or seemed unsure what the attitude was,

perhaps because no strong opinions either way had been projected. They often implied that expulsion was an end-of-the-road measure when nothing else worked. For example, Abby stated, "It's not a tool they would jump toward, to move a kid to a different class or remove them altogether. Kind of like a last resort." Ivy described her experience with an expulsion saying, "As a staff, it was very sad…". Only Elizabeth perceived that a school had a pro-expulsion attitude, and it was a school she had recently stopped working at after they expelled her own son, stating that, "They just found out that he was delayed, and they still kicked him out because they just wanted him to be perfect." Describing her school, Debra said that she perceived a pro-punitive discipline attitude among most of the directors and teachers, but not all administrative faculty, "Most of the teachers and the assistant directors were more for the punishment instead of positive reinforcement."

Personal policies guiding expulsion decisions were generally ill-conceived, as if it was something the teachers had not consciously considered previously. When asked if she had a personal policy guiding the decision to ask a student to leave, Ivy responded, "Ummm, so not really. Because, again, it doesn't happen very often." However, most teachers felt that aggressive, violent behavior that was repeated would meet their personal standard for warranting an expulsion, if an expulsion were to occur. For example, Holly stated that, "But, for me, aggressing toward other children is kind of crossing a line. It's one thing to aggress toward adults, but putting my students in harm's way, potentially, is not okay."

Challenging Behaviors and Aggression

Challenging behaviors are a main source of stress for preschool teachers and put students exhibiting them at high risk for expulsion and discipline (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Kaiser,

Rogers, & Kasper, 1993; Perry et al., 2011), so understanding how they are perceived and defined was one of the goals of the present study.

Aggression plays a critical role in perception of challenging behaviors. When discussing behaviors that led to expulsion or other disciplinary strategies, all the teachers who had experienced expulsions defined the student's behavior as aggressive or violent. Ivy, who had a student who was expelled described the student's behaviors, saying, "They [the student] ended up really being violent with the kiddos so we ended up having to ask them to leave the school, because every day it was at least four kids were getting their hair, getting yanked to the ground by their hair, they were getting bruised. Like it was just too much-it was too, it was something that we as teachers aren't qualified [for]..." When asked what behaviors make it more likely that a student would be asked to leave their school, nearly all teachers responded with varying descriptions of aggressive behavior. Gabby stated that, "It would be the aggressiveness [that makes it likely to be expelled or sent home]. It's usually just if they're being harmful to others. That's the biggest thing, that they obviously don't want them there beating other kids." Similarly, Ivy described the behaviors that were more likely to lead to expulsion, saying, "...major violence and the consistency of it happening."

Aggression was similarly important to teachers' own perceptions of what warrants expulsion, and their perception of what behaviors especially contribute to their stress levels. Commonly mentioned stressful behaviors were biting and hitting. Much of the dislike of aggressive behaviors seemed to stem from fear of other students being injured and the disruptiveness in the classroom as a whole. Holly stated that the most stressful behaviors were, "When other kids hit other kids- aggressing toward other kids- and spitting." Some teachers mentioned that aggression against peers was significantly worse than aggression against them or

other adults. For example, Barb explained that, "I think the most stressful for me is when a child would hurt another child. Because, if a child hurts me, I can deal with it on my own time…" Only Caroline did not include violent behaviors when asked what behaviors were especially stressful for them as the teacher, instead citing when a child refuses to eat their lunch or take their nap.

Support and Training Opportunities

It was extremely common for teachers to feel that their institution did not provide them with adequate or sufficient training to manage and improve challenging behaviors in their classrooms. When asked about training or resources to aid them in improving challenging behaviors, some teachers mentioned training that were required or provided by their school, but only Barb's Head Start center had training specifically devoted to behavior management.

Thirty percent of teachers mentioned that they were required to complete training by the Professional Development Information System (PDIS) through Colorado Shines, part of the Colorado Office of Early Childhood. Many PDIS trainings are gratuitous to preschools, and are part of licensing, but other types of training may be used as well. It is likely that other teachers have completed PDIS training as well, because of these licensing requirements, even if they did not mention them. PDIS covers a variety of topics and is not specifically dedicated to challenging behaviors; instead it focuses on licensing requirements, such as health and safety, and child development (Colorado Shines). These trainings were required to be completed on their own time; teachers were not completing any training during paid hours.

Barb, who worked at a Head Start program, was trained on Conscious Discipline and had access to these trainings when she needed them. She described Conscious Discipline as a social-emotional based curriculum and disciplinary method. Barb was the only teacher who received

training specifically focused on challenging behaviors. The same Head Start program also used professional development days, and Barb was able to suggest a training on challenging behaviors specifically. Holly, who worked at a district preschool, was required to take a Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training every three years with annual refresher courses. However, she stated that this training was not particularly applicable to preschool students, saying, "I've taken the training in the past and there's not a whole lot that's really applicable for the little guys, so I'm hoping either they've changed it or are adding some strategies, something, because that would be nice."

Thirty percent of teachers did not mention any specific training opportunities given by their school that could potentially aid in managing challenging behaviors. All of these teachers who did not receive training or resources directly from their school discussed how their administration advertised outside training, like Pyramid Plus courses, but that these were on their own time and their own money. Only Juliette said that her school occasionally provided some funding for these trainings, but they were still completed on her own time. Some of these outside trainings were specifically tailored to challenging behaviors, but they were often advertised for the reason that teachers could be qualified to be lead teachers or receive a pay raise. For example, Caroline said that, "It [external training] was on my own time but I got paid more because of it. It was highly encouraged… It was the difference of me being an assistant teacher versus a lead teacher, was taking that class." Teachers who had engaged in these outside trainings found them to be helpful, but Abby stated that she would be unable to implement many of the strategies because of the rules specific to her corporately-owned preschool.

Aside from purely addressing challenging behaviors, teachers were also asked to discuss their perceived level of overall support from their school and administration to meet the demands of their job. Most of the teachers interviewed mentioned at least some difficulties in receiving

support or perceived inadequate levels of support. As discussed previously, many teachers found their administration to be inaccessible or lacking follow-through, which made it difficult for them to feel supported in their jobs. Holly reported that she felt she had enough resources, except when she had especially challenging students. In that case, she had to be very proactive to advocate for necessary resources, saying "But generally it's fine, but if you get one of those pretty challenging kiddos with a lot of needs... They do listen when you advocate but there's hoops to jump through and lots of them." Debra stated that, "Mostly the reason I didn't feel supported was because it felt like the management was always so busy, and so swamped, and so understaffed." Several teachers, when stating that their school did provide enough support and resources to meet their job's demands, talked about physical resources (books, equipment, etc.) or that they felt cared about by their administration. For example, in response to being asked about if she had enough resources to meet her job's demands, Ivy said, "We had, like every month, we'd make a supply list and the directors would go and order that and get that.…Which was really awesome that you're not, like, using your own paycheck, which is really nice." Close, positive personal relationships were commonly cited by those who felt they did have enough resources and support. Gabby reported that she felt very close with her administration and that she felt supported, but still reported high levels of stress. She said that, "We're all really close [her and her administration]… We even spend time outside of work together." Juliette, who reported low stress levels, voiced appreciation for a highly available administration that has, "helped me with me struggling in my classroom. I can send a text and be like: okay I need a break because I'm about to have a meltdown. And they come right in, and after I have my moment, they come right in with several ideas on how to help me and how to help my kids." Elizabeth, who had recently started working at a new school that she felt was more supportive,

stated that while both schools required PDIS training, her new school had a more available administration and more collaboration between teachers, saying that, "We do a lot of trainings on PDIS and if it's something that we can't get through, we talk as a group and try to get through it that way [her and co-workers]."

External Attributions

This study seeks to understand the perceptual mechanisms that guide disciplinary decision making by teachers since prior research has illuminated perceptual steps taken by teachers in arriving at exclusionary discipline decisions such as expulsion. To do so, teachers were asked about their assumptions and ideas regarding the root causes of challenging behaviors. All teachers interviewed attributed challenging behavior to causes external to the classroom, and most attributed it to causes external to the student (in other words, they did not attribute the behavior to innate qualities of the individual student). The majority (60%) of teachers mention that behavior could be caused by any number of things, but their specific referenced attributions were parents or home-life in some regard. For example, when asked what she assumed the underlying cause of challenging behavior was, Elizabeth said, "That there could be change going on at home, and they're [the child] just not used to it." In regard to parental action or inaction, Ivy theorized that, "If they are the middle child, that's one where they're not getting enough attention at home (and that's never intentional by the parents but it does happen), so they're getting ignored, so they act out at school because they want more attention from us." Juliette mentioned that challenging behaviors were difficult when parents weren't helping to support school progress at home. Many teachers also referenced children's unmet needs or inability to cope with change at home or properly manage and express strong emotions. For instance, Caroline said that she would attribute the behavior to, "Attention-seeking. Trying to, you know,

get our attention… Attention seeking or not knowing how to cope with whatever emotion they're feeling, just poor coping mechanisms." In essence, teachers attributed the challenging behaviors they experienced in the classroom to experiences by students outside of the classroom.

Social Support

Social relationships were not the primary focus of the present study, but many teachers did mention professional collaboration opportunities, and they were often associated with reduced stress or increased ability to perform professionally. Most (80%) of the teachers interviewed mentioned collaborating with others to try to manage and improve challenging behaviors. A few of these included working with or communicating with parents to try to approach the behavior at home. For instance, Fiona described her procedure when students have challenging behaviors, saying, "So if they've [the student] had an off day, or an off two days… I like to communicate with the parents, so they're in the loop. Sometimes parents are aware, sometimes we're seeing something that they've never seen, and then you maybe want to pursue further with them. Maybe they can talk to their child, their child can tell them something that's bothering them at school and then share with you or vice versa." Several teachers stated that they relied on collaboration amongst teachers or with administration to help them manage challenging behaviors in the moment or to brainstorm solutions. As previously mentioned, Elizabeth found her new school environment, with better opportunities to collaborate with her co-workers, to be less stressful. Juliette, who reported low levels of stress, mentioned that when experiencing classroom difficulties, teachers at her school were often referred to coworkers who had experienced similar issues for advice. Barb, who worked at a Head Start program, mentioned the collaborative environment between herself and several specialists who especially helped with challenging behavior or special-education students. She also discussed a mentor coach, " whose

whole job is to support the teachers and coach them," as the best way her center supports her, saying, "It's huge to have that resource who's always there." This team environment clearly seemed to be a great benefit to her.

Co-teachers are an important aspect of preschool classrooms that differentiates them from K-12 education. Certain ratios of teachers to preschool students are expected to be maintained, and this necessitates more than one teacher in the classroom with students at a time. Co-teachers could be a source of stress or support for teachers depending on the quality of their relationship and compatibility. Some teachers mentioned their co-teachers were a source of stress for them because they were either inconsistent (i.e. the particular person who worked with them in the classroom was often changing), they lacked experience and/or training, or they had communication issues and/or different teaching styles, making a cohesive teaching experience difficult. Caroline stated that, "There wasn't a school-wide, like, this is how we handle a kid with this emotional problem. It was kind of classroom-by-classroom, teacher by teacher, experience and preference, and that was really difficult... So that was one of the stresses, we got along well, but our [her and her co-teacher] methods were just very different." Barb mentioned that she felt stressed until she received the support of additional co-teachers, saying that, "my level of stress was very different until February when I got [permanent] co-teachers."

Summary of Findings

One of the main findings of this study included the high levels of perceived workplace stress by preschool teachers, which is important because high levels of stress seemed to be associated with disciplinary strategies, with stressed teachers reporting less support from their school and generally using exclusionary discipline to deal with challenging behaviors. This stress predominantly stemmed from challenging behaviors, administrative inconsistencies, and

understaffing issues. Challenging behaviors were the most commonly stated stressor. Many teachers were frustrated with their administration because they felt that they were often difficult to access for help when needed or that the administration lacked organization and follow through. Center-wide norms regarding expulsion were most often considered to be neutral or slightly negative, with many teachers considering it to be more of a last resort when behaviors failed to improve. Personal norms regarding expulsion were not very strong, but most teachers felt that repeated aggression might warrant expulsion. Challenging behaviors were defined as violent or aggressive, and these aggressive behaviors were also cited as being more likely to lead to an expulsion. Aggressive behaviors were generally also the most stressful for teachers. Teachers who had experienced an expulsion described the behavior that prompted the expulsion as aggressive. All teachers, except one, lacked training specifically focused on challenging behaviors. This teacher worked at a Head Start program, and this center reported a great deal of support, not only a generally positive and supportive work environment, but training and resources that specifically helped her manage challenging behaviors. She also reported low stress, positive disciplinary strategies, and institutional norms that were greatly opposed to expulsions. While she was the only representative of Head Start programs in this study, her experience indicates that center-type may play a role in determining the level of support received by teachers and thus how teachers are able to respond to challenging behaviors. Several teachers had helpful outside training opportunities which did discuss behavior management, but they were on their own time and paid for with their own money. Many teachers felt inadequate levels of support from their institution. Those who did feel supported usually cited close personal relationships with supervisors, more available administration, and collaboration opportunities with co-workers or experts. Although some teachers described very close relationships with their

administrators, some of these teachers had still experienced expulsions or other instances of removing a child from a classroom, indicating that personal relationships may not be enough to overcome the difficulty of challenging behaviors. Almost all teachers attributed challenging behaviors to causes external to the classroom, usually parents or home life. Forty percent of teachers had a student formally expelled from their classroom or had requested that it happen but this request was not followed through by administration. Other disciplinary strategies were most often exclusionary as well, often sending students home or to the front office or removing children to the hallway to calm down. Finally, social support and collaboration with other teachers, mental health consultants, or administration was mentioned by nearly all teachers as being helpful in managing behaviors and was often associated with lower perceived workplace stress. These findings, including their importance to understanding the current preschool discipline situation and their relevance to potential solutions, warrant the following analysis.

Discussion

The present study set out to investigate factors that influence teacher decision making regarding preschool expulsion and discipline. In the course of doing so, the study discovered that the preschool teachers interviewed generally reported high levels of workplace related stress. This stress was often attributed to challenging behaviors from students, administrative inconsistencies, understaffing, and a lack of support from their school, especially in regard to managing challenging behaviors. Institutional norms included a general lack of formal expulsion policies, and schools had neutral or slightly negative perceived attitudes toward expulsion, without clear institutional opinions on the practice. The respondents indicated that the preschools where they worked were seen to be somewhat disorganized, the administration was largely unavailable and inconsistent in that they lacked uniformity across the school and in their

responses to teacher needs. Respondents universally defined the most challenging student behaviors as aggressive ones, and aggressive actions were cited as behavior that would make it more likely for a student to be expelled. When regarding challenging behavior, nearly all teachers attributed that behavior to causes outside of the classroom, usually as a result of parental actions or situations at home. It was found that most schools had little training specifically tailored to providing teachers with skills to handle challenging behaviors, and only a few schools provided formal training for their teachers at all. Many schools advertised out-of-house training opportunities, however. To respond to challenging behaviors, the disciplinary strategies utilized by the participants were usually exclusionary in nature, even if they were not actual expulsions. For example, many teachers removed students exhibiting challenging behaviors to the front office or sent them home from school. Nearly half the teachers interviewed had expelled a student or requested it. Additionally, the only expulsions to be reported in the present study occurred at private centers. Several teachers cited soft expulsions as occurring in their school as opposed to hard expulsions. The soft expulsions included parents who voluntarily removed their child from the school after receiving a high number of regular incident reports regarding their child's behaviors. Teachers who had opportunities to collaborate with other teachers or experts stated that these were a source of support for them; they seemed to reduce stress or aid in their management of stress. Furthermore, the teacher who reported one of the lowest stress levels and no use of exclusionary discipline worked at a Head Start program and was provided training on challenging behaviors, as well as a great deal of collaboration opportunities; the abundance of a variety of resources for this teacher differentiated her from other participants.

Findings in the Context of Prior Research

Some of these results further support prior research, whereas others add new findings to prior studies in both psychological and sociological contexts. The primary novel discovery of this study was that preschool teachers rely on a variety of disciplinary methods, many of them exclusionary, but that there may be reduced reliance on expulsions compared to in the past. This usage of exclusionary discipline can be understood with a psychological perspective on the relationship between stress and decision-making. Using a sociological lens, it is clear that a variety of resources are needed to manage a demanding job, and teachers' access (or lack of access) to these resources may contribute to their stress and, thus, disciplinary choices.

Support for Prior Research

Teachers who reported less stress also had better support systems: they had strong, positive relationships with their administration or collaborative opportunities among colleagues, supporting prior findings that indicate that increased social support is associated with reduced workplace stress (Foy et al., 2019). Furthermore, because teachers mentioned that having these collaborative opportunities decreased their stress or helped them manage the challenging behaviors associated with stress, social support is implicated as a critical resource to meet job demands in the demand-resource model (Tausig, 2013). These findings indicate the importance of the social support and collaboration that has been mentioned in sociological and psychological literature in more broad terms. The present results illustrate that these theories are highly relevant in regard to preschool teachers' work environment specifically.

Also corroborating previous research are the findings that challenging behaviors are a primary source of stress for teachers, and that aggression is an important defining factor of challenging behaviors (Kaiser, Rogers, & Kasper, 1993; Perry et al., 2011; Zinsser et al., 2019). Teachers interviewed here who reported higher levels of stress tended to perceive less resources

from their school to manage both challenging behaviors and to succeed in their job in general, which relates to prior research showing that teacher stress can be somewhat reduced through resources like social-emotional learning supports, which explains why utilizing these supports reduce expulsion rates (Zinsser et al., 2019).

Support was also provided for prior research that shows that access to mental health resources decreases the likelihood of a teacher using expulsions as a disciplinary method (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). It was nearly universal among the teachers interviewed that they did not have specific supports for challenging behaviors. However, of the few teachers who perceived that they were adequately supported, some still reported expelling a student. These findings indicate that perhaps perceiving adequate support and having close personal relationships with administration are not enough to feel capable of managing and improving challenging behaviors. Specific challenging behavior training and support aimed toward positive discipline might provide better results in reducing expulsions and exclusionary disciplinary tactics.

New Findings Regarding Expulsion Prevalence

Some changes have clearly occurred since much of the predominant literature on the subject of preschool expulsions was written. Expulsions seem to be losing prevalence as a disciplinary tactic in American preschools. When Walter Gilliam published his initial study in 2005, he cited that 6.67 preschoolers per 1,000 were expelled nationally (0.667%) in state-funded preschools (Gilliam, 2005). Currently, the latest data by the Civil Rights Data Collection (2018) reports that 2.1 preschoolers per 10,000 were expelled nationally (0.021%) in public preschools, and a great majority of these were concentrated in certain states, such as Georgia. Clearly, there have been changes in the nearly two decades since Gilliam's study in the

frequency of preschool expulsions in the United States. With a growing body of research on the negative consequences of expulsions and more societal attention being brought to this phenomenon, it may be becoming increasingly taboo. Although this study is based on a small sample, most teachers perceived a neutral or negative attitude toward expulsions in their school; no teachers or schools openly approved of expulsions. There hasn't been any federal legal action on this topic, but many states, including Colorado, have taken it upon themselves to write legislation that prohibits or limits expulsions and suspensions in preschools and early elementary years (Loomis et al., 2021). However, because the laws in all of these states only apply to district, public, or charter schools, many of the private programs, such as those in this study, would be exempt from these prohibitions (Loomis et al., 2021).

It seems that these prohibitions have put a great deal of limitation on schools to utilize expulsions and suspension, and that is reflected in the recent national statistics and in the results of this study. Whereas 40% of teachers in this study had at least requested to expel a student, only two teachers had personally witnessed or participated in an expulsion at their institution. However, teachers in this study cited soft expulsion practices more often than is reflected in historical literature on this topic. Additionally, nearly all teachers interviewed in this study utilized exclusionary disciplinary practices in response to challenging behaviors. These findings indicate that institutions are relying on other methods to achieve similar results to expulsions: they are still removing the child and their challenging behavior from classrooms, but are instead relying on parents to make this removal permanent. If not, they will simply send children to the office or home whenever challenging behaviors arise.

Findings in the Psychological Context

The fact that expulsions are being replaced by other exclusionary disciplines integrates well with prior psychological research surrounding teachers' perceptions of challenging behavior and disciplinary decision-making. This study illustrated that teachers tend to attribute challenging behavior to external causes, especially parents. This, in conjunction with the fact that challenging behaviors frequently lead to expulsions, can be understood with the Preschool Expulsion Risk Measure (PERM) developed by Gilliam and his colleagues (Gilliam & Reyes, 2018; Perry et al., 2011). Because teachers tend to perceive challenging behavior as coming from factors outside of the classroom and thus outside the control of the teacher, they may not feel optimistic about their ability to improve the behavior personally. Combined with the finding in this study (and many others) that challenging behaviors are a source of stress for teachers, already two of the four PERM factors that mobilize teachers to seek expulsion have been met. Furthermore, the factors that teachers identified in this study as the cause of challenging behaviors indicate that they may be likely to pursue expulsion. Perceptions that focused on parents, specifically parents as unwilling or unable to improve the child's behavior, represented the final perceptual step on the path to expulsion outlined in prior research (Martin, Bosk & Bailey, 2018). Because many of the attributions of problematic behavior made by teachers in the present study were to at-home or parent related factors, they were likely in this perceptual stage, meaning that they were expecting a parental response that takes responsibility for the challenging behavior and its improvement. With institutions expressing increasingly negative views toward expulsion, and with legislation limiting its utilization, teachers may be arriving at a psychological state of stress that would normally trigger an expulsion without being able to. They are relying instead on other exclusionary discipline strategies to mitigate the stress and disruption that they report challenging behaviors causing. Because teachers do report stress at

work, especially in response to challenging behaviors, they are likely operating on a decision-making pathway altered by stress, as illustrated in research establishing the stress induced deliberation-to-intuition (SIDI) model. In this model, stressed individuals tend to utilize their prefrontal cortex less than unstressed individuals (Yu, 2016). Reduced prefrontal cortex operation means that teachers are relying on intuitive fight-or-flight pathways and heuristics, and thus may feel inclined to "flee" the stressful trigger (challenging behavior) by removing it the only way they can (Yu, 2016). In this case, they would remove the stressor through expulsion, or may instead be relying more and more on other exclusionary discipline to remove the stressor when expulsions are no longer a viable option.

Findings in the Sociological Context

A sociological perspective on work, and the demands and supports associated with determining levels of workplace stress, also helps explain this apparent reliance on other exclusionary discipline practices in replace of expulsions. According to sociological models of workplace stress, including the demand-control-support model and the demand-resource model, sufficient resources are critical to mitigate the psychological distress that accompanies demanding jobs (Tausig, 2013). Because so many of the teachers interviewed in the present study cited that they did not perceive an adequate level of support from their institution, and because almost none of the teachers reported having support or training specifically designed to improve their ability to manage and improve challenging behaviors, it seems that preschool teachers are experiencing a resource deficit. Teachers are lacking social support and knowledge or feedback about challenging behavior management, which are resources deemed to aid in managing job demands (Tausig, 2013). This deficit is particularly important because it is a dearth of support directly related to one of the primary workplace demands. Teachers need resources

provided by their institution that address their main cause of stress: challenging behaviors. Although some teachers did have access to outside trainings, they were on their own time and money, making them less accessible and potentially even more stressful. This sociological perspective aids understanding as to why teachers undergo the psychological stress and perceptual experiences found in this study.

Without adequate training for teachers to feel capable of dealing with this critically important workplace demand, they will continue to be highly susceptible to the psychological stress of someone who does not have enough resources to balance their job's demands. Further, they will be likely to continue relying on exclusionary discipline in one form or another to alleviate this stress. Historically, this relief had come from expulsions, but with changing societal and institutional contexts, teachers are changing to rely more on other exclusionary strategies. These disciplinary strategies are deemed necessary because they are the only avenue left for teachers to escape the overwhelming stress inherent in their unsupportive workplace context. Because of the limiting nature of the general educational context and institutional norms regarding expulsions, and because of the lack of available training to preschool teachers for challenging behaviors, teachers are forced to rely on exclusionary discipline to mitigate their stress.

Implications

The present study and its findings have many important implications not only conceptually in the realm of scientific understanding, but practically in terms of policy. Firstly, there are implications for interventions and resources in early childhood care centers to promote more effective responses to challenging behaviors that would benefit both students and teachers. With the noted changes in expulsion primacy and a new reliance on alternative strategies to

achieve a similar result (soft expulsions, other exclusionary discipline methods), legislative bodies or other groups interested in reducing the negative outcomes of expulsion may be inspired to turn their attention to these new strategies and seek to provide methods of terminating exclusionary discipline of any kind. More readily available training opportunities and resources specifically devoted to challenging behaviors and their management are a sensible first step. Districts and institutions would be wise to implement in-house, paid, mandatory training on these topics to reduce the stress of unpaid time spent on external training, and make this information more accessible. Legislative bodies should seriously consider increasing funding to early childhood education, both public and private, to make these training opportunities possible. Funding should go directly to specific experts on challenging behavior management to provide trainings, or to schools for the specific purpose of hiring experts and hosting in-house training days. If direct funding is not possible, scholarships to fund the attendance of preschool teachers at external trainings could ease the monetary burden on teachers who would benefit from this information.

Furthermore, a focus on the availability of team members like mental health consultants and providing opportunities for peer collaboration and social support would be prudent. Budget concerns may become an issue regarding specific mental health consultant positions, but they should be hired when possible. Inter-teacher collaboration should be encouraged and facilitated, perhaps with specific meeting times or in-service days devoted to collaborative learning and sharing of strategies or experiences. Legislation should consider greater funding opportunities for all types of early childhood education centers to make all of the supports mentioned here more attainable. In some states, legislation against expulsions and suspensions are making some

headway, but the types of opportunities and education presented here would attack the issue of preschool expulsions and exclusionary discipline at the root cause.

Moreover, there are significant implications from this study regarding the importance of center type when it comes to preschool teacher's experiences and disciplinary strategies relied upon. There are meaningful differences between private, public, and Head Start centers indicated in these findings. Perhaps because they are not state funded, private centers seem to have more flexibility in how they respond to challenging behaviors and thus are more free to utilize exclusionary discipline tactics. Head Start centers seem to have the greatest access to resources and supports specifically designed for challenging behaviors, and, arguably, their teachers experience lower levels of stress. State funding may play a role, but it seems more likely that this is due to an expectation, whether true or not, that Head Start students, because of their low-income backgrounds, may require more support or display more challenging behaviors. This is not only troubling because of its classist and racist implications, but also leaves other programs without these supports that seem to greatly assist teachers. Public schools lay somewhere in between Head Start and private programs, but the teachers here reported more restrictions in regard to expulsions and exclusionary discipline. For example, students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) can never be removed from a district preschool. As the ability to rely on expulsions becomes even more rare, increased deviations between center types and their primary disciplinary strategies may emerge.

Perhaps the most important implication of this research is into the future of disciplinary strategies and expulsion rates in United States preschools. If the current trajectory continues, preschool expulsions will likely become a relatively rare phenomenon. This is an important success supported by research and advocacy in the past two decades, which illustrated the

negative outcomes of such practices. However, the findings from this study indicate that soft expulsions and other exclusionary discipline tactics may be surging to replace expulsions. Whereas some of the consequences of hard expulsions may be avoided, these strategies still fail to directly address and improve challenging behaviors. This is still a significant issue, as unaddressed behavioral challenges have been shown to have many similar consequences to expulsions including negative peer interactions, punitive adult interactions in the future, academic difficulties, delinquency and violence (Fox & Smith, 2007; Thompson et al., 2011). Adequate resources and knowledge to encourage teachers and help them feel capable of addressing challenging behaviors with positive discipline or other productive methods will be necessary to avoid a trajectory toward other exclusionary disciplinary practices becoming the new expulsion.

Limitations & Future Directions

As with all scientific research, the limitations of the present study must be considered when analyzing its findings and design. A major limitation to the external validity of the study is the limited geographic area. All participants teach in a relatively small geographic area in a state with only moderate racial diversity (U.S. Census Bureau). Future research should focus on racial diversity, among both teachers and students, in their investigations of preschool discipline, especially considering previous findings that students of color are more likely to be expelled than white students (Meek & Gilliam, 2016). Furthermore, previously cited data about expulsion legislation and rates show that different geographic places have different rates of expulsions and legal approaches regarding them (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2018; Loomis et al., 2021).

In addition, this was a small study conducted with relatively limited resources. There was one researcher, without a team and without funding. This means it was limited to a small sample

size, and the coding was all done by one person. The limited sample size makes externalization and generalization more difficult. The presence of only one coder also means it was more difficult to double-check coding results.

This study was also limited by the fact that the sample may have been skewed based on the kind of teachers who would agree to participate in an interview. Teachers who are willing to conduct an interview with a stranger discussing their workplace and disciplinary strategies may not be representative of the personalities, experiences, and disciplinary strategies of all types of preschool teachers. Furthermore, because expulsion and discipline can be sensitive topics, many of the teachers who participated may have been willing to do so because they had not expelled a student. This study was based on a convenience sample, and because it used a small and accessible portion of the population wishing to be interviewed, its generalizability is limited.

A fourth limitation of this study was the method of data collection. Virtual interviews were necessitated for the safety of both subjects and researcher due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the brevity of the participants' responses (20-40 minute interviews) may have been due to this interview format. Perhaps respondents did not feel as committed to giving the most information possible because they expended less effort to participate in the study, or perhaps it was more difficult to develop rapport with teachers and have them open up fully during online interviews. This interview format has both benefits and detriments, and it is unclear how they may have affected data collection.

Relatedly, there could have been issues of accuracy with the self-reported data utilized in this study. Self-reported data is more difficult to verify, as it may be subject to inaccurate memories, and with a sensitive topic like discipline, expulsion, and perceptions of schools, there may have been some social desirability bias.

Future research should take these limitations into consideration and make efforts to avoid them. Future research should also conduct larger studies with larger sample sizes, and with a research team to ensure inter-rater reliability for results. New studies may want to consider carefully the benefits and costs of in-person interview techniques for qualitative research. Although it would be more difficult, few studies investigating preschool discipline have spanned multiple states or countries; a trans-national investigation would provide interesting comparisons and regional insights.

Additionally, studies should better examine soft expulsions, which are barely mentioned in the literature and have not been scientifically studied in their own right. Investigations should attempt to scientifically test hypotheses about their prevalence, including the reasons teachers and institutions may want to rely on them, to better explain this one type of exclusionary discipline. As previously mentioned, future studies should consider investigating the differences between various types of preschool programs and how some have more exclusionary disciplinary strategies and different amounts or types of supports. Understanding what types of programs provide the best outcomes for students and the most support for their teachers can provide valuable information for teachers, parents, and administrators as they engage in their day-to-day practices, and for legislators as they continue to try to guide the educational sector to function optimally.

Finally, future research should consider not only the psychological experiences of teachers as they engage in expulsions and exclusionary discipline, but the psychological consequences for students who experience them. Although academic and life trajectories have been noted in the literature, little has focused on the psychological impacts for the students. Future research could investigate stress levels, self-concept and self-esteem, and perceptions and

attitudes about academic experiences or life in general to better understand the more personal experiences that may contribute to life trajectories already noted in the literature.

Conclusion

In summary, the present findings lend support for the hypotheses proposed at the outset. It was hypothesized that teachers would feel inadequately supported to handle challenging behaviors by their institution or other entities. A further hypothesis stated that teachers would experience high stress, due to lack of support and challenging behaviors. A final hypothesis predicted that teacher decision-making, unless it followed institutional guidelines regarding discipline, would be relatively intuitive rather than rational, due to the stressful context. The first hypothesis was supported because many teachers indicated that they felt ill-supported by their institution, and only one teacher received training specifically tailored to challenging behaviors. However, many teachers did feel supported overall but still struggled to respond to challenging behaviors, indicating that supports specialized for stressors like challenging behaviors would be more productive at reducing expulsion and other exclusionary discipline. The second hypothesis was supported because most teachers reported relatively high levels of stress, and two of the primary causes of stress identified in this research were issues with their administration and the behaviors exhibited by students. Finally, the last hypothesis was supported by the finding that teachers take whatever steps possible to remove stressors (like students exhibiting challenging behavior) from their classrooms; almost all teachers engaged in some form of exclusionary discipline as their primary response to challenging behaviors.

This research gives incredible insight into the importance of properly supporting and training preschool teachers to deal with the major stressors that stem from their job and behaviors that have the potential for compounding consequences for students. With a growing

societal concern about early childhood education, reflected most prominently in President Biden's recent agenda including funding for universal preschool, a program which has already been passed by the state of Colorado and will begin 2023, it becomes increasingly necessary to understand what educational context is most effective (Brundin, 2021; The White House, 2021). This study contributes to a conversation about the teacher and workplace factors that may reduce detrimental disciplinary practices, and better support teachers to in turn support student development. Based on the findings of this research, focusing on adequate training for challenging behaviors, increasing workplace social support to decrease teacher stress surrounding challenging behaviors, and by better funding centers to accomplish these goals and increase teacher pay to reduce turnover, early childhood education programs in the United States may better aid both teachers and students to be successful.

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Appendix A

Table 1: Participant Background Information

Alias	**Gender**	**Program Type**	**Age Range of Students**	**Education**
Abby	Female	Private (Corporate)	3-5 year olds	Bachelor's
Barb	Female	Head Start	3-5 year olds	Bachelor's
Caroline	Female	Private	5-6 year olds	Master's
Debra	Female	Private (Corporate)	1.5-2.5 year olds	Bachelor's
Elizabeth	Female	Private	1-2.5 year olds	Some college
Fiona	Female	Private	4-5 year olds	25 hours toward Master's
Gabby	Female	Private	3-5 year olds	Some college
Holly	Female	Public	3-5 year olds	Master's
Ivy	Female	Private (Corporate, Goddard)	4-5 year olds	Master's
Juliette	Female	Private (Corporate)	1.5 year olds	Some college

Demographic details and relevant information about education, classroom size, student ages, and program type for all participants.

Appendix B

Pre-Prepared Interview Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender identity?
3. What is the highest degree or level of education you have completed?
4. What type of program or school do you teach at?
5. Where is the school located (what city)?
6. What age of preschoolers do you teach?
7. How long have you taught overall? What about in your current position?
8. How many students are in your classroom at a time? How long do they spend with you each day they come to school?
9. In the last 2-3 years, have you asked a student to leave your school or be moved to a different class for disciplinary reasons?
    a. What was the behavior that prompted you to ask the student to leave?
10. What is the attitude like in your school toward asking students to leave the school or move to a new classroom?
11. What is your school's policy on suspensions and expulsions? (If there is no official policy, are there any guidelines/ recommendations?)
12. What is your personal policy, aside from any institutional guidelines, that helps guide / would guide your decision to ask a student to leave the school or request they be moved to a new classroom?
13. What is the go-to disciplinary measure or strategy for dealing with challenging behavior?

14. What do you think or feel like for you is the main goal of these strategies/ discipline?
15. How often do you feel stressed or overwhelmed at work?
16. What emotions do you feel when you go to work? How would you describe your emotional state, besides stress, when you are teaching?
17. What would you say you consider the main cause of the stress you feel when teaching? The main cause of any overall stress in your life?
18. Could you describe how you feel this stress impacts your ability to do your job or how it affects the quality of your teaching? Does it hinder it, have no influence, etc?
19. Could you describe any specific negative behaviors from students that are especially stressful or upsetting for you?
20. What factors or defining characteristics make a behavior worth considering "challenging" or worth disciplinary action?
21. Are there any behaviors that would make you more likely to consider requesting a student to move to a different classroom or leave the school entirely?
22. When a child exhibits persistent challenging behavior, what do you think/ assume is the cause of this behavior?
23. How would you define the quality of your supervisory relationships?
24. What instruction or resources does your institution provide to aid you in dealing with and improving persistent challenging behavior from students?
25. In general, do you feel that your school provides you with enough resources to meet all of your job's demands and daily job tasks?

Appendix C

Table 2: Staff-Child Ratios from the Colorado Code of Regulations, Social Services Rules, 12 CCR 2509-8

AGES OF CHILDREN	NUMBER OF STAFF
6 weeks to 18 months (infants)	1 staff member to 5 infants
12 months to 36 months	1 staff member to 5 toddlers
24 months to 36 months	1 staff member to 7 toddlers
2-1/2 years to 3 years	1 staff member to 8 children
3 years to 4 years	1 staff member to 10 children
4 years to 5 years	1 staff member to 12 children
5 years and older	1 staff member to 15 children
Mixed age group: 2-1/2 years to 6 years	1 staff member to 10 children