

# Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Examining Preschool Teachers' Workplace Experiences and their Influences on Exclusionary Discipline



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*The following is an excerpt from a longer piece. For full text, please visit [https://scholar.colorado.edu/concern/undergraduate\\_honors\\_theses/q811kk96s](https://scholar.colorado.edu/concern/undergraduate_honors_theses/q811kk96s)*

## 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.