



# Early Childhood Educators' Wellbeing Project (ECEWP)

ISSUE 10 – JUNE 2023

## Introduction

Hello and welcome to the tenth ECEWP newsletter. This newsletter comes to you in a time when many early childhood services are facing ongoing workforce challenges. Educators are leaving the sector, making it increasingly difficult for services to engage ongoing and casual staff. We want to let you know that we hear of these challenges and do all we can to advocate for better conditions to sustain educators.

In this edition we provide you with some updates on our research, including our pilot of using hair cortisol to measure educator stress; our work with colleagues from across the world; and information about how you could contribute to a PhD project. Enjoy!

*We pay our respects to the Traditional Owners, past and present, of the lands where we live and work.*

## ECEWP website launch

We are pleased to launch [our website](#)! All of the information about our early childhood educators' wellbeing project is now in one place on this site.

## Australian Research Council update

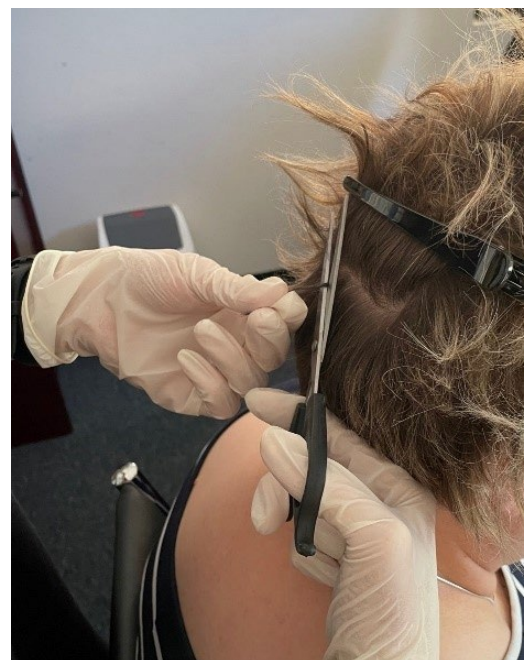
Starting with some not so good news! Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful with our Australian Research Council Linkage Project application. While it is a time when one might think that early childhood workforce issues should be the focus of research, these funding applications are highly competitive, with only about 20% being funded – and of these only one study related to education (not early childhood).

But have no fear! We will continue to seek funding from other sources to enable us to continue our research into the important issue of educator wellbeing.

## Hair cortisol pilot update

We recently completed a pilot study examining the use of hair cortisol to measure stress. We know that stress levels among early childhood educators can be high, but the tools that researchers have used to measure this stress (like questionnaires) tend to be subjective.

To objectively measure educator stress, some researchers, including the ECEWP team, have collected saliva samples from educators to test cortisol levels. Cortisol is a steroid hormone linked to stress response. However, the collection of saliva and the use of salivary cortisol is problematic, especially in the context of COVID-19.



*Collecting a hair sample for analysis of cortisol levels*

## International news

Our growing group of international researchers has continued to meet monthly to collaborate on early childhood educator wellbeing in different country contexts.

Wellbeing of Early Childhood Educators: An International Research Alliance (WECARE) currently includes researchers from Australia, Canada, China and Macau SAR, Finland, Iceland, Indonesia, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Singapore.

Our discussions are currently centred around five provocation questions:

1. How is educators' wellbeing situated in current curriculum, guidelines or statements?
2. What parts of existing work health and safety laws/rules could be amplified to improve attention to/support of educator wellbeing?
3. Are there existing policy mechanisms/levers that could be expanded to improve attention to and support for wellbeing?
4. Are there any current interventions in place to support educator wellbeing?
5. What are the current 'hot topics' for early childhood education in your country?

We also plan to present at the [12th OMEP Asia-Pacific Conference](#) to be held in Sydney on 6–8 December 2023. OMEP is the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education.

### Thrive@Work

Community Connections Solutions Australia (CCSA) have partnered with ECEWP to support wellbeing in early childhood services. Our collaboration aims to provide examples of initiatives that services have undertaken to support the wellbeing of early childhood professionals. We anticipate that this project will share practical ideas that services can adopt to support wellbeing within their service and community.

<https://ccsa.org.au/thrivework-supporting-wellbeing/>

Another way to measure cortisol is through hair samples, but we didn't know if collecting hair samples would be acceptable to educators. Consequently, we conducted a pilot study with educators to: (i) help us determine if educators would be willing to provide a small sample of hair; and (ii) trial the collection and analysis of hair samples from educators. To answer these questions, we conducted a short survey (with 58 participants) and collected hair samples (from 25 educators).

The findings from the pilot were very positive. We found that overwhelmingly participants considered that it would be "highly likely", if we were to do a larger study, that educators would provide hair samples and necessary health information. An example comment from an educator was:

*"I think educators would welcome the chance to demonstrate that our jobs are stressful due to administrative workload."*

Early childhood educator

There was also strong – but less – agreement that educators would "not wash their hair for two days prior to the hair collection".

Participants were very thoughtful in their responses in the survey. For example, one participant reminded us of the need for researchers to be alert to the cultural sensitivities of hair:

*"Hair has particular significance in Indian culture, so you might find Indian educators will be less likely to participate which would be a shame. It may also be problematic for Muslim educators who wear the hijab."*

Early childhood educator

We were also pleased to discover that the techniques used to extract the cortisol from hair worked well and provided useful results. Together, these findings give us confidence for using hair cortisol in future studies. We sincerely thank all the educators who participated in this pilot study.



## Visiting Scholar – Mari Saha

The ECEWP team have appreciated spending face-to-face time with Mari Saha, a member of our WECARE research alliance. Here is an update from Mari on her recent visit to Australia:

“I am Mari Saha, an assistant professor of early childhood education at Tampere University, Finland. Most of my research focuses on children’s and educators’ wellbeing in ECEC settings, as well as additional support needs of children in early years.

Recently, I had a great opportunity to spend five months in Sydney to work together with colleagues at Macquarie University. I am collaborating with the ECEWP team on a project focusing on educators’ work-related wellbeing and turnover.

We are especially interested to explore the organisational factors related to educators’ wellbeing and further potential links to turnover. During my visit, I learnt a lot about the local ECEC system and gained important insights on practices in Australia.

I was extremely impressed by my visits to ECEC centres and discussions with educators about their work in the field. I really enjoyed my stay in beautiful Sydney and will come back again!”



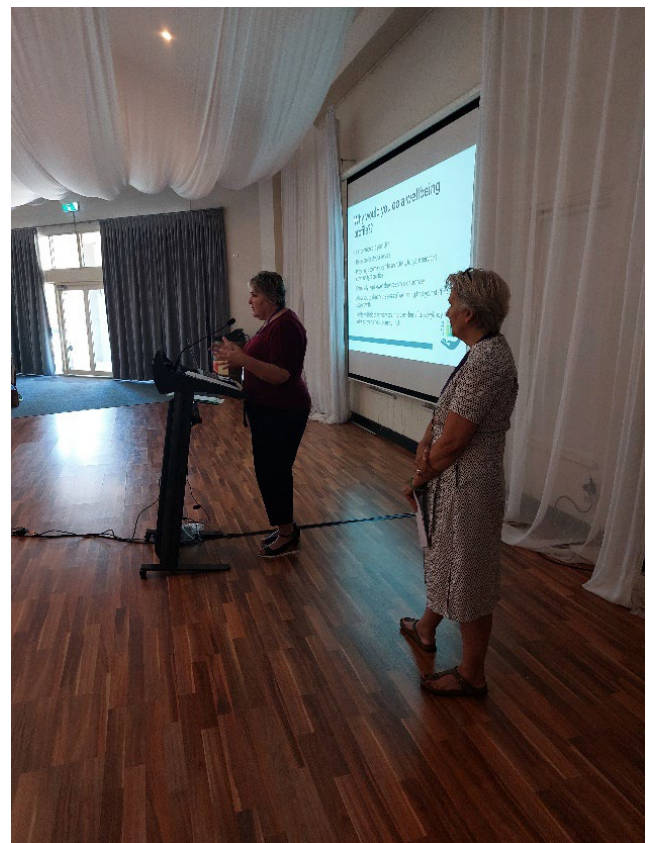
## Recent presentations

In March, Tamara Cumming and Sandie Wong were invited to the Community Connections Solutions Australia Rural and Remote Forum in Mudgee to present a workshop on wellbeing initiatives for early childhood professionals.

Sandie and Tamara have also recently presented findings from our research to the Victorian Department of Education. These presentations focused on building a quality workforce by supporting educator wellbeing.



*Tamara and Sandie presenting a workshop on educator wellbeing in Mudgee*



## Recent publications

Since the last newsletter, we have had two new articles published on early childhood educator wellbeing:

Wong, S., Cumming, T., MacQuarrie, A., Bull, R., Robertson, C., Saha, M., McFarland, L., & Logan, H. (2022). Holistic measurement of early childhood educators' well-being: A protocol. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2022.2128746>

Cumming, T., Wong, S., McFarland, L., & Bull, R. (2023). Please don't go! Sustaining educators' well-being during challenging times. *Every Child*, 29(1), 24.  
<https://shop.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/product/ec2301/>

### Be You educator well-being resources

Be You has some excellent resources available for educators, including the downloadable *Beyond Self-Care: An Educator Wellbeing Guide*.

You can also access other educator wellbeing resources here:

<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/educator-wellbeing>

## ECEWP website

[Our website](#) was launched in April 2023! All of the information about our project is now in one place.

- About our project
- About our sub-projects
- About our pilot projects
- Key staff
- International collaboration
- Current news and events
- Resources
  - Project descriptions
  - Project timeline
  - Explainer video
  - Newsletters
  - Resource links

## Research participants needed

Early childhood educators are needed for a PhD study by Salima Yeung on the links between educator wellbeing and educator–infant interactions.

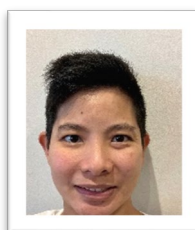


Are you interested in helping us understand whether educator wellbeing is associated with the interactions between educators and infants?

If you

- are a qualified early childhood educator (all qualification levels) who works exclusively with infants (aged 0–2 years)
- work in a long day care service which has a minimum of “meeting national quality standards”

then you are eligible to participate in this unique PhD study, which will be running from late April to end August 2023.



For further information please contact Salima Yeung.

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### MORE INFORMATION ON ECEWP

Web [ECEWP website](#)  
Facebook [ECEWP](#)  
Twitter [ECEWP Aus](#)  
Email [ecwp@mq.edu.au](mailto:ecwp@mq.edu.au)  
Video <https://youtu.be/QqfNX7f4XnQ>