

Understanding the Experiences of Frontline Workers

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Background: Frontline Workers in Massachusetts

- In-person during pandemic (often to deliver a service)
 - More likely Hispanic/Latinx, speak languages other than English, and low income
- Pandemic experiences
 - More likely to report testing positive
 - Disruption to work hours or job loss
 - Poor mental health (self-reported)
- Compounding stressors
 - Undervalued and underpaid workforces

About 5 in 10 (49%) **accommodation and food services workers** experienced 15 or more days of poor mental health in the last 30 days



About 3 in 10 (31%) of **childcare workers** experienced 15 or more days of poor mental health in the last 30 days.



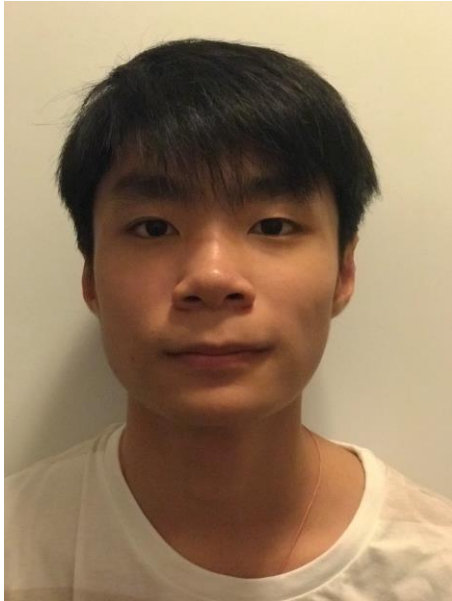
Project Focus

- How the pandemic affected workers (personally, financially, professionally, etc.)
- How experiences and needs have changed since fall 2020
- Experiences with health and safety protocols and policies
- Supports or benefits received during the pandemic
- How MDPH can tailor its response to specific groups and industries

Frontline Worker Communities:

- Restaurant workers of Chinese descent (eastern Massachusetts)
- Childcare workers (ages 0-5):
 - Directors & Teachers (Boston)
 - Teachers (Springfield)

Community Evaluator Team



Angel Chen Ma
Malden, MA
Community Evaluator
Restaurant Worker & Student



Joy Umeh
Milton, MA
Community Evaluator
Childcare Worker & Student



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Chicopee, MA
Community Evaluator
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& Student

Restaurant Workers: Project Design

My Sample:

- 4 participants of Chinese descent living in MA
- All restaurant workers in eastern MA
- All young adults

Method: Interviews

- Chosen to gather more qualitative data
- To understand participants' unique experiences more in-depth

Major Themes:

- Restaurant Changes
- Importance of Community
- Uncertainty

ATTENTION
**TAKE PART IN A
TUFTS STUDY**

LOOKING FOR
CHINESE IMMIGRANTS THAT
WORKED IN RESTAURANTS
DURING THE START OF THE
COVID PANDEMIC

THROUGH ZOOM OR IN PERSON
TAKE PART IN A TUFTS
UNIVERSITY STUDY

MUST BE

- Between 18-25 years old
- Worked in a position that requires interaction with customers during March 2020 - March 2021. Ex. (Waiter)

MORE INFO

The interview will be focused on the experiences of Chinese Immigrants or children of Chinese immigrants that worked in restaurants during the start of the pandemic and how it has affected you.

The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and you will receive a \$50 Giftcard as compensation.

Interviews will be held in English.

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Theme: Restaurant Changes

- Safety protocols followed throughout pandemic.
 - Examples:
 - Proper distancing in restaurant seating
 - Masks required anywhere in restaurant
- Change in restaurant profits.
 - Personal income at similar levels for people working.
- Switch from primarily dine-in to takeout and delivery services.

“We had a huge loss of profit, I would say in our restaurant we could only do takeout, and that definitely impacted us.”
- Restaurant Worker (Family Owned Restaurant)

“We will provide it to the customers, and if the customers were to get up to go to use the restrooms or anything there is like mask required, and sanitary required.”
- Restaurant Worker

Theme: Importance of Community

- Media coverage
 - Discrimination shown more online
- No participants experienced harm based on their race.
- Positive atmosphere towards servers in restaurants
- Boston compared to NYC
- Large Asian community in Boston.

“Not for me, because coming to the restaurant everyday with the same customers that I know we always treated the same way even though there is 2 other co-workers that I work with, and their English was not efficient, as I do. They still treated the same.”
- Restaurant Worker

Theme: Uncertainty

- No participants received aid as a restaurant worker
- Information overload
 - Not knowing which information to trust
 - Made working hard due to unknown effects
- Trying to keep a distance to be safe
 - Worried about family

“There was so much information coming from all different like sources so it’s like it feels chaotic because like every day there’s like new information coming out but not from the same sources and sometimes it’s saying different things and it’s very confusing for anyone in general and you don’t really know what’s true or not like it was broad but you don’t know if it’s accurate or not.”

- Restaurant Worker (Family Owned)

“So as I came back to work as a server. There was a lot of a concern for us as well, so there is like a really close contact with the customer and then you’re pretty really like afraid, if you do get caught with the COVID thing or not. So that was the hard part with working in the front.”

- Restaurant Worker

Project Design

Method: Interviews

- 3 early childhood educators
- 3 early childhood directors

Sample: Qualitative data

- To listen and learn from their experiences

Major themes:

- Safety, Effects of Covid, Uncertainty, and Support



CHANGE STARTS WITH YOU



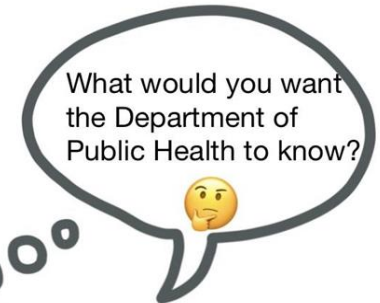
Our team at Tufts University wants to hear about your experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic as a child care worker.



If you are interested in participating, you need to:

- Be 18 years or older
- Have to be a early childhood worker
- Be willing to be interviewed for 45-60 minutes in-person or virtual

IT'S TIME TO TAKE ACTION !!



For more information please call (617)-259-8031 or email: Joy.Umeh@tufts.edu



Safety

- Worried about their personal safety and others
- Implemented different guidelines and protocols
- Safety guidelines: Mask wearing, dividing classes into smaller groups, and vaccination policies for staff
- Some centers, provided teachers with weekly COVID test and one center offered vaccination clinics in the school gym
- Teachers felt the government just wanted people to go back to work

"I didn't believe in the policy, because the policy just wanted everyone to get back to work as soon as possible" -Teacher

"So what we did was we gave each child their own little bin and in their bin was all of the materials paint, paper, glue, scissors, crayons, markers. And that that really was their tool kit for when they wanted to do any kind of those activities. So it was a sense of their own." -Director

Effects of COVID-19

- COVID has effected all the participants view on viruses, sickness, and spending quality time with family
- Teachers/ Schools have opened the eyes of the world to the value of educators
- Some centers lost teachers and Teachers lost their job, lost family members
- The use of technology
- Delays are increasing in child development
 - For example: children have increased the use of electronic books instead of page turning

“I think people forget how much people lost during COVID. So it wasn't just about the work, but it was around. As a director, dealing with a lot of personal losses, not only my own, but my whole entire staff, we had a number of staff that lost family members to COVID or other related sort of illnesses and the impact that being in an environment where you couldn't always see your family was pretty difficult.” -Director

“Like it's two sides of the same coin. I think there's a lot of great potential and possibility in what we learned we can use technology for. And also we have to remind ourselves that technology cannot replace the in. Close proximity physical contact kind of learning that especially young children need.” -Teacher

Uncertainty

- Each participant stated that they had mixed emotions about what was happening.
- Schools and businesses were closing
 - Virus caused a lot of anxiety about seeing family, returning to work, and helping children
- Uncertainty about the Vaccination:
 - Some were people were happy and encourage others to get vaccinated
 - Others were afraid and questioned the effects of this unknown solution

"I cried a lot during this pandemic"
-Director

"I'm handling all of the unknowns. Make sure you have as much information as you can do and then try to use your own judgment to make the safest decision possible. Early on, there was a lot of misinformation going on. And you have to really find accurate sources of information and use that to the best of your ability to keep everybody safe"
-Director

Support/ Unsupported

Support

- Teachers received masks, weekly Covid test, Covid pay, and updates on symptoms and ways to protect themselves.
- A director received grants, paycheck protection, PPE masks, dry goods, and Covid pay that support their workers for months.

“We have about 50 employees who count on us for income to support their families and support themselves. And you want to make sure that they have a job to come back to as well. very pressure filled, stressful time during that time.”
-Director

Unsupported

- Teachers had more roles on top of daily duties such as a school cleaner and nurse
- No incentive or high pay
- The need for additional support

“COVID is the reason why I left that job was like after I saw how unsupported, and how undervalued not only me, but other people were like they just did not care, so I was like no like. I have other options that I can take. I can leave this field, or I can just go to another job. And so that's what I did.” -Teacher

Childcare Teachers : Project Design

Method: Focus Groups (Qualitative Data)

- 3 Focus Groups
- This allowed me to better collect responses and analyze my findings by speaking with the participants and hear their personal experiences.

My Sample:

- 8 participants (teachers)
- Work in Western MA (Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton)
- Represent 4 centers
- 7 have been in the field for 10+ years

Thematic Analysis

Our team at Tufts University wants to learn about what it has been like to be a childcare worker during the COVID-19 pandemic



We want to hear from YOU!!



YOUR VOICE MATTERS!



The criteria to participate:

- o Worked in a childcare center with children ages 0-5 during the pandemic since March 2020
- o Worked in the Springfield or Holyoke, Ma
- o At least 18 years old

What's in it for you? A \$50 Amazon gift card



To sign up or if you have further questions please call:
617-627-1016 or [email: Diannette.Marrero@Tufts.edu](mailto:Diannette.Marrero@Tufts.edu)

Lack of child developmental and other supports impacted teachers' interaction with their students

"They didn't know how to use these tools. So, we had to show them. Because we have 15 kids. I can't feed 15, 3, 4, 5 year-olds."

"Children were not the same, the kids don't have the same amount of language, children only know about 5 words, lack self-help skills."



"It kind of seemed like the kids didn't know what to do. They're on tablets and computers all day when I'm like, oh, here's some toys there like blocks like, what do I do with these? So, then you have to kind of teach up. You build with blocks."



Pivoting guidelines impacted teachers, children, and families

“We had to send you home if you had a running nose. But then, the next week no, you can stay with everybody, but you need a note from your doctor, saying you have allergies. But then the next week you're going to be sent home again. It was just a lot to keep up with. We almost kind of came in on Mondays, and we're like, okay, what? What are the rules now?”



“Oh, well, she can't pick him up like that. And I was like. How am I going to explain to this child. No, I can't hold you right now, because you know there's a pandemic going on like that's all that child needed was to be held, and I think those are the unrealistic things, especially in an infant classroom”



Industry Crisis

"I couldn't get unemployment because I'm working full time, but people are getting unemployment, and they're making more money than I am for unemployed."

"We had someone lie about it and then it came out that they weren't vaccinated."

"So, we keep getting sniped by the public schools. We've lost so much staff to the public schools because they're expanding their preschool programming. Our staff is going over to the public school, so they are trying very, very hard for staff retention where we are."

"I left for more money and a different job."



Key Takeaways from Childcare sub-Projects

- Teachers and directors are prioritizing children above all else in the midst of a pandemic.
- Pandemic had negative impacts on child development, that impacted how teachers interacted with their students in the classroom.
- Teachers faced safety concerns during COVID, and worried for their families and others (including children's families).

Overall Recommendations

1. Support and respect the field

- Support teachers through compensation, recruitment, and training

2. Make supports more accessible to workers

- Make information and resources more accessible (e.g., 211 resource line, other resources)
- Not all workers or businesses (restaurants, centers) could access benefits

3. Share important information, but address misinformation

- Not only on government websites
- Translating official government notices (& making sure people know where to access them)

4. Improve communication for current/future public health emergencies

- Agencies (e.g., city, state) need to be on the same page
- Develop a flow chart to better guide industries on frequently changing protocols/guidelines

5. Recognize that each setting/worker group (e.g., restaurant, childcare) has different needs

- Understand the needs of each restaurant and how they will accommodate staff, customers
- Understand each field's realities: *“Not one rule is always right for the population”*