Coping with Occupational Stress among Early Childhood Educators
Factors of Occupational Stress, Coping Strategies and Factors of Wellbeing at Work: A Case Study in the Netherlands and Germany

Master Thesis
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Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... 5
Chapter 1 – Introduction ............................................................................................... 6
Chapter 2 – Theoretical Background ......................................................................... 10
  2.1 Occupational Stress ............................................................................................. 10
  2.2 Coping with Occupational Stress ....................................................................... 11
  2.3 Wellbeing at Work .............................................................................................. 12
  2.4 The Early Childhood Education and Care System ................................................ 12
    2.4.1 The Dutch Early Childhood Education and Care System .............................. 13
    2.4.2 The German Early Childhood Education and Care System ....................... 14
    2.4.3 Comparison of the Dutch and the German ECEC System ............................ 16
Chapter 3 – Methodology ......................................................................................... 16
  3.1 Research Philosophy ......................................................................................... 16
  3.2 Research Design ............................................................................................... 17
  3.3 The Case Organizations .................................................................................... 18
  3.4 Data Collection ................................................................................................. 20
  3.5 Data Sources .................................................................................................... 21
  3.6 Data Analysis ................................................................................................... 22
  3.7 Reliability and Validity ...................................................................................... 24
  3.8 Research Ethics ................................................................................................. 25
Chapter 4 – Results .................................................................................................. 26
  4.1 Results of a Childcare Center in the Netherlands .............................................. 26
    4.1.1 Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies ............................................. 26
      4.1.1.1 Factors of Occupational Stress ....................................................... 27
      4.1.1.2 Strategies to Cope with Occupational Stress .................................. 29
    4.1.2 Wellbeing at Work and Coping with Occupational Stress ....................... 34
  4.2 Results of a Childcare Center in Germany .......................................................... 37
    4.2.1 Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies ............................................. 37
      4.2.1.1 Factors of Occupational Stress ....................................................... 37
      4.2.1.2 Strategies to Cope with Occupational Stress .................................. 41
    4.2.2 Wellbeing at Work and Coping with Occupational Stress ....................... 46
  4.3 Comparison of the Results of both Childcare Centers ....................................... 50
    4.3.1 Factors of Occupational Stress ............................................................... 50
    4.3.2 Strategies to Cope with Occupational Stress ............................................ 51
    4.3.3 Factors of Wellbeing at Work and Coping with Occupational Stress .......... 52
Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Coping with Occupational Stress and Wellbeing at Work among Early Childhood Educators

5.2 Practical Implications

5.3 Methodological Implications

5.4 Conclusion

References

Appendices
Abstract

This study contributes to the sparse scientific knowledge on the work lives of early childhood educators (ECEs). Prior studies found that occupational stress is a timely issue in this relatively new profession. Nevertheless, little is known on how ECEs cope with occupational stress. Also, there is a lack of in-depth information on the experiences of wellbeing at work among ECEs. This study investigates factors of occupational stress and wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs. Furthermore, it examines the strategies that ECEs use to cope with occupational stress and the role of wellbeing at work in this context. The study is a qualitative and comparative case study conducted in two childcare centers; one situated in the Netherlands and one in Germany. In total, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed. The findings of the study reveal several factors of occupational stress and of wellbeing at work as experienced by the ECEs. ECEs of the case organization in the Netherlands experienced lower levels of stress compared to the ECEs of the case organization in Germany. Factors causing either occupational stress or wellbeing at work are grouped as: ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, ‘organizational factors’, and/or ‘personal factors’. ECEs of both childcare centers experienced wellbeing at work resulting from all the four factors. Occupational stress experiences of the ECEs of the childcare center in the Netherlands only resulted from ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, and ‘organizational factors’; while ECEs of the childcare center in Germany also experienced occupational stress as a result of ‘personal factors’. Moreover, the study found that ECEs of both case organizations employ various individual and collective coping strategies. When ECEs of both childcare centers cope, they either manage occupational stress after it occurred, or they minimize and/or avoid occupational stress before it spreads or occurs. Results of this study found that ECEs of both childcare centers employ an individual coping strategy that refers to the experience of wellbeing, either at work or in general. Besides, the analysis detected overlaps of factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs and their coping strategies. Thus, it can be concluded that wellbeing at work positively influences ECEs’ abilities to cope with occupational stress.
Chapter 1 – Introduction

Today, the majority of young children who live in economically advanced countries spend a large part of their early years in care outside their own homes and families (Rusby, Backen Jones, Crowley, & Smolkowski, 2013; UNICEF, 2008). For centuries, caring for young children has been a family matter and care has traditionally been provided by mothers who stayed home and looked after their offspring (Raaijmakers, 2013; UNICEF, 2008). During the last decades, beliefs and norms about role patterns, parenthood and childrearing have changed (Raaijmakers, 2013). The number of mothers who participate in the labor market has increased over the last 30 years (OECD, 2011). Accordingly, fewer mothers stay home full-time to take care of their children. Instead, governments as well as private organizations play a major role in offering care for young children (UNICEF, 2008). Consequently, the profession of early childhood educators (ECEs) has emerged (Royer & Moreu, 2016).

Research examining the work lives of this relatively new profession is still sparse (Royer & Moreu, 2016; Faulkner, Gerstenblatt, Lee, Vallejo, & Travis, 2016). Therefore, this study contributes to the scientific knowledge of the work lives of ECEs. It examines the work lives of ECEs who work in childcare centers and educate as well as take care of very young children between age zero and compulsory school age. With regard to early childhood education and care (ECEC) services the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2013) explains the distinction between education and care. Early childhood education includes “all forms of organised and sustained centre-based activities ... designed to foster learning and emotional and social development in children” (p. 1); it applies to children from age three. Early childhood care means that an employee of a childcare center or a qualified/registered child minder i.e. in-home provider “looks after the child” (p. 1). Early childhood care applies to children from birth. A childcare center is one possible setting that offers education and care for young children.

The children’s development can best be influenced by education provided in their early years (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014) and therefore, the quality of education and care that young children experience is important. Prior research studies also emphasize the importance of high quality childcare as it can positively influence the children’s wellbeing and it might also have positive long-term effects on children’s lives (e.g. De Schipper, Riksen-Walraven, Geurts, & Derksen, 2008; Vandell, Burchinal, Vandergrift, Belsky, & Steinberg, 2010). For instance, Vandell and colleagues (2010) investigated that higher quality of childcare predicted higher cognitive-academic achievement at age 15. De Schipper and colleagues (2008) found that positive mood factors of ECEs,
especially positivity and optimism, were associated with higher quality caregiving behavior and subsequently with higher children’s wellbeing.

In order to offer high quality ECEC, it is not only necessary to assure adequate education of the employees who work in the ECEC profession, but also to promote and ensure their mental and personal wellbeing at work (Corr, Davis, LaMontagne, Waters, & Steele, 2014). The wellbeing of ECEs at work might be threatened by occupational stress. Groeneveld, Vermeer, van IJzendoorn, & Linting (2012) explain that occupational stress can negatively influence an employee’s physical and psychological wellbeing. Scholars have found that childcare work in general can be seen as being stressful, difficult as well as mentally and emotionally exhausting (Corr et al., 2014; McGrath, 2007; Wagner et al., 2013). This is mainly because ECEs face several challenging working conditions (Faulkner et al., 2016; Corr et al., 2014; Curbow, Spratt, Ungarett, McDonnell, & Breckler, 2000). Stressful working conditions are for example the following: noise, physical demands, reduced privacy, and isolation from other adults (Baumgartner, Carson, Apavaloae, & Tsouloupas, 2009; Curbow et al., 2000). Besides, employees who work in childcare face increasing bureaucratic tasks, and at the same time decreasing and limited financial resources, as well as shift work and long working hours (Schreyer & Krause, 2016; Caulfield & Kataoka-Yahiro, 2001; Curbow et al., 2000). Also, a lack of public appreciation and low status of the profession are described as being perceived to increase feelings of stress (Faulkner et al., 2016; Caulfield & Kataoka-Yahiro, 2001). Consequently, the experience of occupational stress seems to be a current issue among ECEs.

To ensure the quality of ECEC services and the wellbeing of ECEC professionals, it is important to know how occupational stress might be reduced or even prevented. Baumgartner and colleagues (2009) outline that “the early care and education profession has been left with broad explanations rather than a true understanding of how to prevent or cope with work (occupational) stress among childcare providers (ECEs)” (p. 240). Therefore, Baumgartner and colleagues (2009) did a qualitative study in which they identified several occupational stress factors among ECEs and coping strategies used by ECEs to relieve occupational stress. To my knowledge this is the only qualitative study comprising occupational stress factors and coping strategies in the ECEC sector. However, scholars have criticized the study of Baumgartner et al. (2009). Corr and colleagues (2014) argue that the description of sampling, analysis, results and interpretation is limited or even absent.

This study contributes to the sparse literature on coping with occupational stress among ECEs. Similar to the study of Baumgartner and colleagues (2009), the current study is
also a qualitative one and it examines factors of occupational stress as experienced by ECEs and how ECEs cope with occupational stress. But, the methodology, the results, and the interpretation are explained more precisely to address the concerns of Corr and colleagues (2014).

Furthermore, this research also investigates the factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs. This is of interest to find out whether ECEs experience wellbeing at work and to receive knowledge on possible influences of wellbeing at work on coping with occupational stress. Even though, the ECEs’ physical and psychological wellbeing at work might be negatively influenced by occupational stress, Royer and Moreau (2016) found evidence for high levels of psychological wellbeing in their quantitative study. And, according to Maslach, Schaufeli, and Leiter (2001), it might be possible “that people who are mentally healthy are better able to cope with chronic stressors” (p. 406). A holistic definition of wellbeing includes a psychological (mental), physical, and social dimension (Grant, Christianson, and Price, 2007). In order to gain a broad picture of the ECEs’ experiences of wellbeing at work, this study considers the overall wellbeing of ECEs and it does not focus on only one dimension. On the one hand, knowing more about the ECEs’ experiences of wellbeing at work might help to better understand how ECEs cope with occupational stress. On the other hand, it also contributes to the small body of literature on wellbeing at work among ECEs. Faulkner and colleagues (2016) especially emphasize the scarcity of in-depth information on ECEs’ wellbeing.

Concluding, previous studies have already contributed to the field of occupational stress among ECE, but there are still gaps which need to be addressed. The objective of this research is to extend the scientific knowledge on the work lives of ECEs, especially by gaining in-depth information on coping with occupational stress and wellbeing at work. This study is a qualitative and comparative research (case-study approach) carried out in two European childcare centers, one based in the Netherlands and one in Germany, which gives insights into employees’ perspectives and understandings on how to cope with occupational stress. A comparison of data from different countries helps to achieve a better understanding of the research topic (Anderson, 2013). Further, this study examines the research topic from an employee’s perspective. This seems plausible as ECEs themselves do experience feelings of occupational stress and wellbeing at work, and therefore, they can provide accurate information.
The research question of this study is:

*How do early childhood educators who work in childcare centers in the Netherlands and Germany cope with occupational stress?*

In order to gain an in-depth understanding on how ECEs cope with occupational stress and the role of wellbeing at work in this context, I will answer the following sub-questions:

1) Which factors of occupational stress do early childhood educators experience and which strategies do they use to cope with stressors?

2) Which factors of wellbeing do early childhood educators experience at work and how do these influence their strategies to cope with occupational stress?

Summarized, this study contributes to the literature in the following ways. First, it identifies factors of occupational as experienced by ECEs and strategies they use to cope with stressors. Second, this research explores factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs and it analyzes the role of wellbeing at work in the context of coping with occupational stress. Third, the study also enhances international research as it is conducted in two childcare centers that are located in two European countries.

In addition, the study also has societal and managerial relevance. Precise knowledge on coping with occupational stress might help ECEs to reduce or prevent the sources and negative consequences of occupational stress in the future. Besides, a reduction of occupational stress might help to increase and ensure the wellbeing at work among ECEs, which can also have positive impacts on the children’s wellbeing. As explained above, this may be possible as the wellbeing of ECEs might increase the quality of care which they provide to the children. As occupational stress can also lead to turnover (Todd & Deery-Schmitt, 1996), decreasing ECEs’ experiences of occupational stress might reduce turnover rates. This might in turn lead to a cost reduction for the childcare organizations.

The thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 comprises a theoretical background and gives an overview of the Dutch and the German ECEC system. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and chapter 4 outlines and analyzes the results. Chapter 5 discusses the main results, provides practical as well as methodological implications and a conclusion.
Chapter 2 – Theoretical Background

Sections 2.1 until 2.3 of this chapter explain and link the core concepts and theories which will be used to examine the research topic. Section 2.4 comprises an overview of the Dutch and the German early childhood education and care (ECEC) system. Background information on the ECEC systems is relevant as the study will compare data from both countries.

2.1 Occupational Stress

The phenomenon of stress has been studied for decades, but still there is no consistent definition (Chandler, Barry & Clark, 2002, p. 1055, drawing on Brown, 1986). This research focuses on stress which individuals experience at work (occupational stress). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2017) defines that “work-related (occupational) stress is the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope”. Also, the WHO explains that occupational stress can increase particularly when employees feel that they receive little support from supervisors and colleagues and as well when they feel that they have limited control over their work activities.

Occupational stress might negatively influence a person’s physical and psychological wellbeing (Groeneveld et al., 2012). Scholars also found that more occupational stress increases employees’ experiences of health problems, fatigue as well as negative moods (Groeneveld et al., 2012; Äkerstedt et al., 2004; Repetti, 1993). Quick and Henderson (2016) explain that in order to investigate protection, prevention and intervention alternatives to occupational stress one needs to understand the epidemiology or the life history of the problem which causes occupational stress. This is an interesting approach for the current study as it examines coping with occupational stress which intends to reduce or prevent occupational stress. Quick and Henderson (2016) refer to three stages concerning the epidemiology of occupational stress: (1) the causes of stress, known as risk factors, (2) the stress response, as a reaction to environmental demands or internal pressures, and (3) the consequences, either distress (unhealthy) or eustress (healthy). This study aims to find out the occupational stress factors (stage (1): causes of stress) experienced by ECEs. Also, this research aims to explore strategies to cope with occupational stress (stage (2): stress responses). Stress responses are especially investigated regarding the possibility to reduce or even prevent negative consequences (distress).

Coping strategies might help employees to reduce or prevent the causes and negative consequences of occupational stress. The following section explains the concept of coping with stress.
2.2 Coping with Occupational Stress

I adopt the definition of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) who define coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141). Cognitive appraisal plays an important role in the stress and coping processes. Through cognitive appraisal a person evaluates the possible consequences for his or her wellbeing (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). A stressful appraisal means that the individual evaluates his or her wellbeing as being threatened, challenged or harmed in some way (Dewe, Cox, & Ferguson, 1993; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Dewe and colleagues (1993) point out that cognitive appraisal is linked with the desire to resolve a problem and therefore, it motivates and directs a person’s coping. They clarify that coping follows the recognition of a stressful encounter and that coping includes cognitions as well as behaviors used by individuals aiming to deal with the encounter and its consequences. As this study investigates coping with occupational stress the stressful encounters can be described as work or work-related encounters (Dewe et al., 1993).

Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Harding Thomsen, & Wadsworth (2001) point out that previous research has discussed several dimensions of coping. They emphasize that there is only little consensus in the literature regarding dimensions of coping. Two dimensions frequently used in research are problem- and emotion-focused coping (Compas et al., 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), these dimensions are the two main functions of coping. Problem-focused coping means to manage or alter the problem that causes stress for instance by taking action to change the circumstances that evoke stress (Compas et al., 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Emotion-focused coping regulates the emotional response to the problem for example by expressing emotions and searching for social support (Compas et al., 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Although these dimensions of coping are commonly used in research, scholars criticize them as being overly broad and grouping too many disparate types of coping into only two categories, thus failing to distinguish between more distinct subtypes of coping (Compas et al., 2001; Coyne & Gottlieb, 1996).

As previously mentioned, a person’s wellbeing might play a role in his or her strategy to cope. The following section elaborates on the phenomenon of wellbeing at work and outlines the intertwining with occupational stress and coping.
2.3 Wellbeing at Work
Occupational stress might negatively influence an employee’s physical and psychological wellbeing (Groeneveld et al., 2012). As explained above, through coping a person follows two aims: to deal with a stressful encounter and to assure his or her wellbeing. Feelings of wellbeing might support a person’s ability to cope. For instance, Maslach and colleagues (2001) emphasize that a mentally healthy person may be better able to cope with stress. Further, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) state that the way a person copes is partly influenced by his or her own resources including for example health and energy.

In the context of employee wellbeing (i.e. wellbeing at work) I adopt the definition by Grant and colleagues (2007) who refer to Warr (1987) and explain that wellbeing is “the overall quality of an employee’s experience and functioning at work” (p. 52). Grant and colleagues (2007) derive three core dimensions of wellbeing: psychological, physical, and social. “Social well-being refers to the quality of one’s relationships with other people and communities” (Grant et al., 2007, p. 53, drawing on Keyes, 1998). According to Guest (2017), social wellbeing also depends on levels of social support as well as perceived trust and fairness of treatment. Physical wellbeing includes “physiological indicators of health or illness in the workplace and is typically explored through subjective feelings of health, including positive indicators such as a sense of energy and negative indicators such as exhaustion and stress” (Guest, 2017, p. 27). When defining psychological wellbeing, prior research mainly focused on two perspectives: hedonic and eudaimonic (Grant et al., 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryan and Deci (2001) explain that the hedonic approach mainly comprises pleasure attainment and pain avoidance, whereas the eudaimonic approach focuses on self-realization and considers the degree to which a person is functioning. Guest (2017) summarizes that hedonic wellbeing is “typically represented by job satisfaction” and eudaimonic wellbeing “is more concerned with fulfillment of potential and finding meaning and purpose in work” (p. 27).

The current study will gather in-depth information on ECEs’ wellbeing at work. In doing so, it pursues two goals. First, it aims to find out the factors of wellbeing at work as perceived by ECEs. Second, it will investigate how these factors might influence a person’s way to cope with occupational stress. In order to gain a broad overview, this research will pay attention to the psychological, physical and the social dimension of wellbeing.

2.4 The Early Childhood Education and Care System
The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that “early childhood education and care (ECEC) includes all arrangements providing care and
education for children under compulsory school age, regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or programme content” (OECD, 2016a, p. 3, citing OECD, 2001). Generally, there are two broad types of childcare: formal and informal. Formal childcare refers to the education and care of children offered by ECEC staff working in daycare centers, pre-schools and as licensed child minders i.e. in-home providers, while informal childcare might be provided by relatives, friends, or neighbors (OECD, 2016a). This thesis focuses on formal childcare. In particular, it examines the experiences of occupational stress among ECEs who work in childcare centers and the strategies ECEs use to cope with occupational stress. Also, it investigates the ECEs’ experiences of wellbeing at work.

Thereby, the current study uses a comparative research strategy and it compares data of two childcare centers in two European countries: one is situated in the Netherlands and one in Germany. A comparison of data of ECEs who work in these two countries seems appropriate due to the following reasons. First, a review of the main literature shows that many studies on the working lives of ECEs, especially on occupational stress and wellbeing, have been conducted outside of Europe e.g. in the USA or Australia (e.g. Corr et al., 2014). Thus, by providing insights into the current situation of ECEs’ working lives in two European countries, the present research study will contribute to the international research discussion. Second, the ECEC systems of both countries show similarities and differences (OECD, 2016a, 2016b), and therefore, they provide two different national contexts which are worth being compared as they allow a meaningful comparison (Anderson, 2013).

Section 2.4.1 presents the Dutch ECEC system and section 2.4.2 depicts the German ECEC system. Section 2.4.3 concludes by summarizing the main differences and similarities of both systems.

2.4.1 The Dutch Early Childhood Education and Care System
According to the OECD (2016b), the Dutch ECEC system includes all types of settings, which provide care and early education for children under age four. The following three ECEC settings can be distinguished: (1) private daycare centers (kinderdagverblijven), available for children between birth and four years of age; (2) in-home providers, also known as child minders (gastouderopvang) who care for children between birth and compulsory school age; (3) public pre-kindergartens or playgroups (peuterspeelzalen), caring for children between the ages two and three (OECD, 2016b, drawing on OECD). In the Netherlands, the compulsory school age is five (OECD, 2006b).

Akgunduz and Plantenga (2014) point out that the Dutch Childcare Act 2005 led to the current institutional framework for the ECEC system. They also emphasize that the Act on
Childcare changed the system towards a demand-driven financing system in which there is no public provision for the childcare organizations. Consequently, the organizations “have to sustain a healthy business and ’sell their services’” (Hol & Vaes, 2012, cited by Raaijmakers, 2013, p. 88). Parents are now free to choose the organization they want and competition among the settings is enhanced (Akgunduz & Plantenga, 2014). But, the OECD (2016b) states that the Dutch government still monitors the quality of care; there is a strict legal quality framework.

ECEC services are partly supported by a legal entitlement: working parents have access to daycare centers or playgroups, and most parents receive governmental subsidies (OECD, 2016b). The OECD (2016b) states that in the Netherlands the participation in formal care of very young children, between birth and age of two, is very high (55%) compared to the OECD average (33%). Also, the OECD report indicates that in the Netherlands participation in pre-primary education of children between three and five years is higher than the OECD average. The OECD report names the following rates as an example: 3-years-olds rates in the Netherlands were 81%; the OECD average was 71%. The caregiver-child ratio differs regarding the age groups of the children. In the Netherlands, the ratio among the two- and three-year-olds is eight children per staff member, which is quite usual compared to the OECD average that is seven (OECD, 2012, cited by OECD, 2016b). Whereas, the Dutch caregiver-child ratio (excluding auxiliary staff) for children between the age of three and five is rather high with 16 children per caregiver; the OECD average is 14 children per caregiver (OECD, 2016b). The minimum qualification for Dutch ECEC staff working with children until the age of four is upper vocational education, which varies between two and three years of training (OECD, 2016b, 2006b). Possible degrees of vocational education are: SPW-3, MBO, and SPH (OECD, 2006b). The SPW-3 degree is a vocational training in social-pedagogic work, the MBO degree is a senior secondary level vocational qualification, and the SPH is a vocational training specified on developmental challenges as well as family dysfunction (OECD, 2006b).

2.4.2 The German Early Childhood Education and Care System
In general, the educational goals of the German ECEC system refer to children from birth until the end of primary school (OECD, 2016a). But the OECD report (2016a) points out that the training of ECEC staff has focused on children from birth up to compulsory school age, which differs between five and six years, depending on each German federal state. The following ECEC settings are available: (1) center-based crèche (Krippe) as well as (2) home-based providers i.e. child minders (Tagesmütter), available for very young children between
birth and age three; (3) kindergartens (Kindergärten) i.e. childcare centers. Kindergartens are the main service, some care for children between three- and six-year-olds and some are mixed-age childcare centers, available for children between birth and six-years of age (OECD, 2006a; OECD, 2016a). There are three different types of providers: public/municipal, church affiliated (mostly catholic and protestant), and non-church as well as non-public providers (Schreyer & Krause, 2016).

According to the Schreyer and Krause (2016), the German ECEC system is highly decentralized. They explain that this is due to the 16 federal states (Bundesländer) of Germany. They point out that each federal state implies its own regional government, which is responsible to formulate state-specific ECEC laws and to provide a framework for the ECEC service provision, quality and financing.

In Germany, legal entitlement to a place in a center- or home-based setting includes children from age one until school entry (OECD, 2016a). Governmental funding is available and parents only need to pay a certain contribution, which varies in each federal state, mainly depending on the income (OECD, 2006a). The OECD (2016a) report states that in Germany participation in formal care among children between birth and two years of age is lower (29%) than the OECD average (33%). Furthermore, the report indicates that in Germany participation in pre-primary education of children between three and five years is very high (97%) and significantly above OECD average (84%). According to the report, the German caregiver-child-ratio differs among federal states: for instance, in childcare services in North Rhine-Westphalia it is comparatively low; it is fewer than four children per caregiver and in Thuringia it is eight. However, the OECD report underlines that the ratio is higher for care provided for children between the age of three and six, namely about 10 children per educator; the OECD average is 14 per ECEC staff.

The OECD report indicates that the level of formal qualification among German ECEC educators is lower than in most other OECD countries. In Germany, the majority of employees working in childcare are qualified as state-recognized pre-primary educators (Erzieher/innen), who did three years of vocational training (OECD, 2006a, Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017). The second largest group of the workforce in daycare are childcare assistants (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2017); they received two years of vocational training, followed by an internship in the field (OECD, 2006a). Although there are Bachelor and Master programs available that qualify to work with young children in daycare, only 5.3% of the ECEs working in German childcare centers held a university degree in 2014 (Statistisches
Bundesamt, 2017). The OECD (2006a) points out that ECEs who hold a university degree, do mainly work as directors in large daycare centers or with children with special needs.

2.4.3 Comparison of the Dutch and the German ECEC System
Summarizing the data discussed in sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2, the main similarities and differences of the German and the Dutch ECEC system can be found in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of the System</th>
<th>The Dutch ECEC System</th>
<th>The German ECEC System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal Entitlement</td>
<td>Partly (for daycare centers and playgroups)</td>
<td>For children between 1 and 6 years (for center- and home-based daycare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmental Subsidies</td>
<td>Available</td>
<td>Available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation of Children (Ages 3 – 5)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caregiver-Child Ratio (Ages 3 – 5 or 6)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications of Staff</td>
<td>ECEs have vocational qualifications</td>
<td>The majority of ECEs have vocational qualifications; a very few ECEs hold a university degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Comparison of the Dutch and the German ECEC System (own presentation, 2017).

Chapter 3 – Methodology
This chapter explains the methodology that was used in this research in order to investigate the research questions and its objective. The following sections describe the methods used and they provide reasons why the methods are appropriate for this study.

3.1 Research Philosophy
Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009) explain that research philosophy is associated with the development of knowledge and its nature. Besides, they emphasize that research philosophy includes assumptions about how one views the world.

This study was conducted using an interpretivist approach. The interpretivist approach applies a “socially constructed world-view” and knowledge is “affected by the meanings and experiences of different people in different situations” (Anderson, 2013, p. 55). Further, the interpretive tradition indicates that the world cannot be seen objectively but by interpreting human experience (Anderson, 2013). Also, the researcher influences the knowledge by being a part of the research process (Anderson, 2013). I conducted the interviews and thereby I was involved and I influenced the situations. Besides, knowledge was mainly gained through interviews in which respondents expressed their individual opinions and experiences.

Criticisms of the interpretivist approach might be a potential loss of direction as well as time and resource constraints (Anderson, 2013). A potential loss of direction might occur
due to the huge volume of data that was collected through the interviews; it might be challenging to balance flexibility and focus (Anderson, 2013). To avoid a loss of direction this research includes a comprehensive literature review which served as a guide to identify the research gaps, aims and the objective. The process of contacting case organizations was difficult as time was limited and interviews needed to be conducted in a certain and short period of time. Also, the case organizations are situated in two different countries and interviews were conducted at the organizations. Consequently, I needed to travel to collect the data what consumed extra time and resources. In order to handle time and resource constraints only two organizations participated in the study.

3.2 Research Design
This study used a comparative research strategy based on a case study research. Data were conducted from two case organizations.

“Comparative research involves examining data from different countries or cultures or organisations to achieve a better understanding through comparing meaningfully contrasting cases or situations” (Anderson, 2013, p. 62). By using a comparative research strategy the research topic can be examined more deeply in different contexts and it is possible to explain similarities and differences (Anderson, 2013 referring to Hantrais, 1996 and Bryman and Bell, 2007). When case study data are compared it is particularly important that the cases include sufficient common and sufficient distinguishing aspects, so the comparison is meaningful (Anderson, 2013). In this study, data were collected in two case organizations in two different countries. The case organizations are both childcare centers; one is situated in the Netherlands and one in Germany. The ECEC systems of both countries (see Table 1) as well as the case organizations themselves (see Table 2) indicate sufficient similarities and differences enabling a comparison that is worthwhile.

A case study can be defined as: “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context (Yin, 2014, p. 16). This study investigates an understudied research topic in its real-world context. In doing so, a qualitative research approach is used. A qualitative data approach “seeks to find out how people understand a situation and how their understanding influences their actions.” (Anderson, 2013, p. 159, referring to Neuman, 2011, and Jankowicz, 2005). Using a case study research as well as a qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this research as the aim is to examine how ECEs cope with occupational stress and how coping is influenced by wellbeing at work. Thereby, the research investigates factors of occupational stress and wellbeing at work as experienced and perceived by the ECEs who work in the two case
organizations. Consequently, in line with the research objective, the study provides in-depth information on the research topics; it shows the work experiences of the respondents of the two case organizations. Therefore, findings cannot be generalized to the wider population (Anderson, 2013; Bloor & Wood, 2006).

As this research compares data of two case organizations, one situated in the Netherlands and one in Germany, it ultimately identified factors of occupational stress and wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs who work in two different European countries. Also, strategies which these ECEs use to cope with occupational stress could be identified. Further, the influence of wellbeing at work on the coping strategies was investigated. The study’s findings contribute to the existing research.

3.3 The Case Organizations
The research was conducted in two case organizations. These two case organizations are two childcare centers: one is situated in the Netherlands and one in Germany. The management of the childcare center located in Germany wished that the study does not mention the center’s name. In order to keep the research study clear and consistent I decided to do not mention both organizations’ names. They are distinguished by mentioning the country in which they are located.

First, an overview is given on the childcare center that is situated in the Netherlands. Like all childcare centers in the Netherlands, the center is a private organization i.e. a company. The manager of the organization is also the employer. The center is an international, English-speaking daycare center. The researcher decided to contact an English-speaking childcare center to participate in the study as the interviews needed to be conducted in English. By interviewing ECEs who work in an English-speaking organization, it was assured that all interviewees could understand and speak English. The daycare center offers childcare as well as afterschool care. This research examines experiences of employees who work in the childcare section. There are three different groups in the childcare section: the baby group (2 months – 1 year), the toddler group (1 – 2.5 years), and the pre-schooler group (2.5 – 4 years). So, children in care in the case organization in the Netherlands are between 2 months and 4 years old. In the Netherlands, the compulsory school age is 5 years (OECD, 2006b). In the case organization in the Netherlands the ECEs work with a different number of children, depending on the children’s ages. In the baby group the staff-child ratio is 1:4, in the toddler group it is 1:6 and in the pre-schooler group it is 1:8. ECEC staff is regularly supported by interns and students. When necessary, staff is also supported by the manager.
Currently, the case organization in the Netherlands employs 16 employees of whom 14 are women and 2 are men. All employees of this childcare center are employed part-time.

Second, information is provided on the childcare center that is located in Germany. Similar to around 50% of the childcare centers in Germany (EKD, 2017), the center is church-affiliated. Consequently, the church is the employer of the manager and the employees. The language of the center is German and it offers childcare for children before they enter school. There are four different groups: two groups for younger children (4 months - 3 years) and two groups are for older children (3 - 6 years). Generally, children in care in the case organization in Germany are between 4 months and 6 years old. In Germany, the compulsory school age varies between 5 and 6 years (OECD, 2016a). Similar to the childcare center in the Netherlands, employees in the case organization in Germany work with a different number of children depending on the children’s ages. The staff-child ratio in groups of younger children is 3:15 (1:5) and in groups of older children it is 2:22 (1:11). The staff is regularly supported by one ECE who works in all groups. This employee holds a position particularly for this function; she always works in one of the groups which needs support. Interns can also support the ECE teams. Further, the manager supports the staff when necessary. The manager’s work mainly focuses on management tasks. But she has 10 working hours per week available to work with the children and therefore to support staff in this field of work. Currently, the case organization in Germany employs 12 employees who are all women. Employees of this childcare center are employed either full- or part-time.

The similarities and differences of the case organizations make them worthwhile to compare. An overview of the similarities and differences of both case organizations can be found in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Organization in the Netherlands</th>
<th>Case Organization in Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Center</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Private</td>
<td>-Church-affiliated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- International</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- English-speaking</td>
<td>-German-speaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Groups of Children in Childcare and Corresponding Staff-Child-Ratios</strong></td>
<td><strong>Groups of Younger Children</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 Baby Group (2 months – 1 year); 1:4</td>
<td>- 2 Groups for Younger Children (4 months – 3 years); 1:5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 Toddler Group (1 – 2.5 years); 1:6</td>
<td>- 2 Groups for Older Children (3 – 6 years); 1:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1 Pre-schooler Group (2.5 – 4 years); 1:8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECEC Staff Is Supported By</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Interns</td>
<td>- 1 ECE who works in all groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Students</td>
<td>- Interns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Manager</td>
<td>- Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of ECEs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Comparison of the two Case Organizations (own presentation, 2017).

| and the Compositions of Women | -Women: 14 | -Women: 12 |
| and Men | -Men: 2 | -Men: 0 |

3.4 Data Collection

This study used a triangulation of methods, which means that different data collection techniques were used to ensure that the researcher understood the research findings correctly and also, it increases the credibility of the findings (Saunders et al., 2009). The study used two different data collection methods. Mainly, data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Additionally, a document analysis was carried out.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main source to collect information because they are appropriate to examine perceptions and opinions on sensitive issues (Barriball & While, 1994). Individual experiences related to occupational stress and wellbeing at work can be considered sensitive issues. Besides, semi-structured interviews enable probing in order to receive more information and clear answers (Barriball & While, 1994). The order of semi-structured interview questions can vary in each interview depending on the flow of the conversation (Saunders et al., 2009). Also, it is possible to omit certain questions as well as to add questions that might help to explore the research questions and objectives (Saunders et al., 2009). Nevertheless, a semi-structured interview is based on a list of themes and questions that aim to be covered during the interviews (Saunders et al., 2009). In line with this, the interview guide of this research consists of several themes which include a small number of questions and backup questions. Questions were asked depending on the flow of each interview. The pre-specified questions helped the researcher to concentrate and to cover all main themes of this research. Moreover, the opportunity to vary the order of the questions and to omit or add questions helped the researcher to gain detailed and clear information. The interview guide can be found in the appendix. The interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes.

Further, a document analysis was carried out to complement and re-examine the information gained through the interviews. Internal documents of the case organizations were analyzed. In particular, it was examined whether the information of the documents correspond with the information from the interviews or not. Besides, the documents were used to gain a better understanding of the general working environments and conditions of the respondents. Both case organizations gave their pedagogical concepts to the researcher on condition that they remain confidential. Therefore, the documents are not attached to the appendix. The pedagogical concepts comprise specific information on the childcare centers. The concepts are individually formulated by each center. Information includes for instance: the ethos and
3.5 Data Sources

In total, 13 respondents have been interviewed: 11 employees and two managers. In each case organization one manager is employed and both were interviewed. Besides, five of the employees interviewed work in the childcare center situated in the Netherlands and six in the childcare center in Germany. Next to the management tasks, a part of both managers’ job is to work with the children together with the employees. Consequently, both managers are qualified to work in the ECEC profession, they know about the daily routine of working as an ECE and also they work very close with the employees. Thus, receiving information from them seemed of high interest to get further information on the research topics and also on the childcare centers in general. In comparison to the employees, the managers were asked fewer questions on the three main topics, but instead, additional questions were asked on the staff management. These questions are included in the semi-structured interview guide and marked ‘managers only (staff management)’. The (employee) respondents were selected by the managers. The selection was mainly based on the personal interest of the respondents to participate in the study and on the available time. All respondents (managers and employees) are women. The employees’ qualifications that enable them to work in the ECEC profession are the following. The respondents who work in the childcare center in the Netherlands either hold a MBO vocational qualification or they are still studying in order to gain this qualification. Three of the respondents who work in the childcare center in the Netherlands already hold a MBO vocational qualification. Next to university qualifications in International Marketing and Mathematics, the manager of the center in the Netherlands also holds the MBO qualification that allows her to work as an ECE. Two of the respondents of this center currently hold an intern position and next to this they study to gain the MBO vocational qualification. Five respondents who work in the childcare center in Germany are qualified as state-recognized pre-primary educators, which is also a vocational qualification. The manager of the center in Germany also holds this qualification. One respondent who works in this center holds a vocational qualification that allows her to work as a childcare assistant. It can be summarized, that in both case organizations the managers as well as the employees hold or will soon hold qualifications based on vocational training.

\[1\] When the term ‘respondent’ (or ‘interviewee’) is used in the following it refers to employee respondents. When information is used that was provided by the manager respondents this is specifically emphasized.
3.6 Data Analysis
The data analysis proceeded as follows. First, all recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Second, all transcripts of the interviews with employees were analyzed. Besides, the transcripts of the managers and the internal documents of the organizations were analyzed. Seven interviews were conducted in the case organization situated in Germany. These interviews were carried out in German. Quotations used for the analysis were translated in English with the utmost care to make sure that the meaning remains the same as in the original statement. The analysis is based on an inductive and a deductive approach. The data were coded in an emergent way (inductive approach); texts were read carefully and memos were written (Anderson, 2013). Transcripts of the employee interviews were analyzed for each case organization separately, but the same following steps were applied. The analysis of the transcripts was done using Microsoft Word.

This research, including its research questions, is based on a literature review (deductive approach) that identified the following three themes that are understudied among ECEC professionals: occupational stress, coping with occupational stress, and wellbeing at work. These core themes are reflected in the research questions as well as in the interview guide. Moreover, the three core themes present the focus of the data analysis.

First, all fragments in the transcripts that can be associated with these three main topics were marked in different colors. Consequently, these broad fragments present an overview of all data that is related to one or more of the three core themes of this research.

Second, within these core themes data were analyzed doing open coding. Thereby, I looked for specific terms and formulations that provide information on what is causing occupational stress and wellbeing at work. Besides, I searched for information on how respondents cope with occupational stress. Terms and formulations that include any relevant information were marked and codes were attached.

Third, I wrote memos which are “notes to self” (Anderson, 2013, p. 248). The memos resulted in an overview of all codes grouped regarding the three core themes. Saunders and colleagues (2009) explain that when doing open coding, the various codes need to be compared and organized in broader, related categories in order to allow having a more manageable and focused research project and to evolve the analytical process. Therefore, codes were compared and the ones that comprised the same or a similar meaning were grouped in the same broader category (e.g. ‘multiple tasks’). The names for the categories emerged from the data and from terms that were used by respondents (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 509 referring to Strauss and Corbin, 2008). Consequently, a great number of categories
emerged. Then I looked for categories that were mentioned by at least two respondents. To allow a manageable and meaningful research project, further analysis was only carried out on the categories that recurred in the memos (were mentioned by at least two respondents).

Fourth, I analyzed the transcripts of the managers and the organizational documents with regard to the three main topics. The categories that emerged from the data of the employees’ transcripts were cross-checked with the information provided by the managers and the documents. Thereby, I received more information on the general ECEs’ work tasks and the organizational conditions in each center. As a consequence, it seemed plausible to further group the categories related to the experiences of occupational stress and wellbeing at work regarding four different factors, namely: ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, ‘organizational factors’, as well as ‘personal factors’. These four factors allow noticing the sources that cause either occupational stress or wellbeing at work.

The categories that show how ECEs cope with occupational stress (coping strategies) could also be further grouped to have a better overview. Based on the explanations found in the employees’ and the managers’ transcripts it could be noticed that in order to cope ECEs either manage or minimize and/or avoid occupational stress. Further, ECEs carry out their coping strategies either on their own (individually) or together with other people (collectively). An overview can be found in the coding structure below (Table 3).
-International experience
-Positive atmosphere
-Fully-staffed

-Own Personality
-Personal wellbeing
-Personal Factors

Main Topic 3: Coping with occupational stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Strategies to Cope with Occupational Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| -Support from colleagues/manager
-Communication with and support from colleagues/managers | -Communication with colleagues/manager/children’s parents/external advisors/supervisors/own families
-Communication with and support/advice from colleagues/manager/children’s parents/external advisors/supervisors/own families | Manage Occupational Stress: Collectively |
| -Acceptance | -Acceptance
-Own coping procedure
-Verbal expressions
-Take action | Manage Occupational Stress: Individually |
| | -Relaxing activities in leisure time | Manage Occupational Stress: Collectively/Individually |
| -Communication with and support from colleagues/manager
-High staff rate | -Communication with and support from colleagues | Minimize and/or Avoid Occupational Stress: Collectively |
| -Personal wellbeing at work
-Personality
-Work experience | -Personal wellbeing in general | Minimize and/or Avoid Occupational Stress: Individually |

Table 3: Coding structure.

3.7 Reliability and Validity
Saunders and colleagues (2009) state that, “reliability refers to the extent to which your data collection techniques or analysis procedures will yield consistent findings” (p. 156). Anderson (2013) underlines that reliability includes the assessment of the extent to which other researchers would gain similar results on similar occasions. Further, Bloor and Wood (2006) point out that reliability in qualitative research might be impossible as every researcher sees the (social) world differently. Nevertheless, reliability of this research was increased due to the following reasons. The methodology of the research project was explained in detail, so other researchers would be able to reproduce. Other researchers can see which data collection techniques and analysis procedures were used. The semi-structured interview guide that was used to collect the data is also available to others; it can be found in the appendix. Due to the use of the semi-structured interview guide respondents were asked the same questions to some degree. Also, I carried out three pilot interviews with family members and friends to ensure that the questions of the interview guide are understandable.
Validity in qualitative research can be understood as: “the extent to which the research produces an accurate version of the world.” (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 148). Thus, validity refers to the extent to which the findings of the research are about what they assert to be about (Anderson, 2013). Validity can be increased by using triangulation (Bloor & Wood, 2006). This study used a triangulation of methods. Data were gained through semi-structured interviews and a document analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to add questions where necessary and therefore, detailed and precise information could be collected. Further, managers and employees were interviewed and allowed a broader perspective on the research topics. Data from the interviews were cross-checked with information gained from the document analysis. Information from the document analysis could underpin research findings from the interviews and also, additional information could be received. Further, data were collected from two case organizations located in two different countries. Thereby, the research topic was examined in different situations which also allowed a broader perspective on the topic.

3.8 Research Ethics
Saunders and colleagues (2009) underline that research ethics are vital for the success of a research project. Further, they explain that ethical concerns occur throughout the research process: while planning the research, contacting organizations, as well as when collecting, analyzing and reporting data. Saunders and colleagues (2009) define ethics in the research context as follows: “ethics refers to the appropriateness of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it.” (p. 183-184).

In order to assure the rights and the wellbeing of the respondents, the research especially considered transparency, anonymity and confidentiality. To assure transparency the researcher acted as follows. When the case organizations were first contacted, I introduced myself and the thesis topic briefly and asked whether the organizations were interested to participate in the given period of time. As the managers of the two case organizations agreed to participate in the study they were further informed about the overall aim of the research study and how the research would proceed. Before the actual interviews, all respondents received an information document which informed them about the use of the interview data, the general procedure, and the main topics of the interviews. Also, the document informed the interviewees on the duration of the interview, it explained why the interviews needed to be recorded, that respondents will stay anonymously, and that the data will be dealt with confidentially. The information document can be found in the appendix. At the beginning of the actual interviews these information were briefly repeated and I asked for the permission to
record the interviews. Besides, it was pointed out that no questions need to be answered when interviewees do not feel comfortable. Furthermore, I started the interviews with a very brief personal introduction of myself. Pilot interviews showed that respondents feel more comfortable to talk while being recorded when the researcher talks first. After the interviews respondents were offered to check the transcripts before the researcher would start to work with them. All respondents friendly rejected to check the transcripts. Moreover, both case organizations receive the final report.

To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, the organizations were asked whether they would like to be named in the research study or not. One case organization decided that they do not want to be named. All respondents were informed twice that the data stays anonymously and is dealt with confidently. Furthermore, the organizations received a formal data privacy statement that was signed by the researcher and includes information on ethical issues. The data privacy statement can also be found in the appendix.

**Chapter 4 – Results**

This chapter presents the results of the research study. Section 4.1 includes the results based on the data collected in the childcare center that is situated in the Netherlands. Section 4.2 comprises the results based on the data gained in the childcare center that is located in Germany. Section 4.3 compares the results of both childcare centers.

**4.1 Results of a Childcare Center in the Netherlands**

This section shows the results of the analysis of the data collected in the case organization in the Netherlands. Section 4.1.1 presents the factors of occupational stress as experienced by ECEs and their strategies to cope with occupational stress. Section 4.1.2 presents the factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs and the influence of wellbeing at work on coping with occupational stress.

**4.1.1 Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies**

In this section I will answer the first sub-question of this research: *Which factors of occupational stress do early childhood educators experience and which strategies do they use to cope with stressors?* In order to answer the sub-question, the next section describes the results of the data analysis which examine the factors of occupational stress as experienced by ECEs who work in a childcare center in the Netherlands. The subsequent section examines the strategies which the ECEs of this childcare center use to cope with stressors.
4.1.1.1 Factors of Occupational Stress

The factors of occupational stress can be understood as being the causes for experiencing occupational stress (stress at work). The data analysis showed that most respondents of the childcare center in the Netherlands experience only little occupational stress. One respondent explained throughout the whole interview that she experiences no stress at all (Respondent 8). Nevertheless, the analysis resulted in five different factors of occupational stress which recurred during the interviews of the other respondents (Respondents 9-12). These factors of occupational stress are grouped as: ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’ and ‘organizational factors’. These groupings aim to provide a clear overview of the different factors.

The analysis revealed that grouping the factors of occupational stress with regard to their work is adequate. The interviewees explain that their main task is to take care of the children and to educate them (Respondents 8-12). Interviewees outline that this also includes the provision of food as well as carrying out housekeeping tasks. The pedagogical concept of the case organization in the Netherlands also provides this information (Pedagogical concept, 2017). The concept includes information on ECEs’ work tasks referring to care and education. Also, the concept explains that there is a main focus on dietary habits and that sitting down and eating together several times a day in the dining room is part of the daily routine. Such work tasks show that one part of the ECEs’ work is related with ‘education and care’. Further, the pedagogical concept (2017) states that next to providing education and care to the children, talking to the parents during drop off and pick up times is also part of the ECEs’ jobs. The communication and cooperation with parents are an example that shows that the ECEs’ work also includes other work tasks next to providing education and care (‘further work’). ‘Organizational factors’ are related to conditions dependent on the organization.

The analysis found two different ‘education and care work factors’ that cause experiences of occupational stress. One factor is the performance of multiple tasks at the same time. Half of the respondents sometimes experience occupational stress when they have to do several tasks at the same time. One interviewee explains: “And you need to clean, you do diaper from a child, and then you got three babies (...) and some start crying or want do something else and yeah, then you need to split your attention. And that's sometimes difficult” (Respondent 11). This factor might occur as a result of work overload or because work tasks are not clearly and/or meaningfully divided among staff. The second factor refers to the preparation of food. The food is partly brought to the childcare center by the parents and partly provided by the center (Pedagogical concept, 2017). The food brought by the parents
needs to be heated up by the ECEs and other snacks need to be prepared. Half of the respondents experience the snack or lunch times as being stressful. One respondent states:

“Interviewer: (…) And what exactly is stressful for you when you need to prepare lunch? Respondent 10: Eh, you need to prepare it in a short time. And it is so many kids and the kids they are all getting grumpy because they are hungry. And then I think aaaaahh, and this, and that, and that.”

Experiencing the preparation of lunch as stressful seems to be related to time pressure. This may indicate that not enough time is calculated for the preparation of lunch. Or it might be possible that the number of staff involved in the task is not sufficient.

The analysis also resulted in two different ‘further work factors’. One occupational stress factor is associated with the children’s parents. Half of the interviewees sometimes experience feelings of stress due to the interaction with parents, as the following quote shows:

“Yeah, well, the other day there was a parent who was, she came in and she was complaining, (…) you could see that she was really upset about this. So then you try to calm her down, and you know, then I can feel a bit stressed, that I can feel my heartbeat going like eheh (…) I want this lady to calm down” (Respondent 12)

This factor might imply that there are not enough rules on how to handle issues or complaints related with parents. It might help to have one person in charge for such issues or to offer separate appointments to resolve issues. The second factor of occupational stress relates to the cooperation with colleagues. The pedagogical concept of the case organization outlines that ECEs always have to take care of a group of children together with at least two employees (4-eyes-principle) (Pedagogical concept, 2017). Therefore, the cooperation with colleagues is part of the ECEs’ work. Most respondents sometimes experience stress due to their colleagues. One respondent points out that she feels stressed when she has to work with one colleague who has a general negative attitude: “she is always nagging about everything and I don’t like that” (Respondent 10). Another ECE explains: “If I have stress it’s more because of my colleagues are stressed” (Respondent 12). This factor shows how close ECEs work together and how much they can influence each other through negative behaviors. It also shows how important it is that ECEs who work in the same group get along well with each other.
Further, the analysis identified one ‘organizational factor’ that causes experiences of occupational stress: a shortage of staff. Interviewees emphasize that a shortage of staff is extremely rare in the organization they work for, as they usually work with many employees and often they are even over-staffed (e.g. Respondent 9, 11, 12). The pedagogical concept is in line with this information: “we have a much higher staff-child ratio than is required by Dutch law. The staff:child ratio is at least 3:16, most day-parts 4:16” (Pedagogical concept, 2017, p. 2). Nevertheless, in case there is a shortage of staff, half of the respondents experience this working condition as being stressful. One interviewee points this out: “But if you need to do it all by yourself then it’s stressful” (Respondent 9). A shortage of staff might occur when many employees are on vacation at the same time (Respondent 11). Therefore, it is linked with scheduling employees’ vacations. A shortage of staff leads to a work overload.

4.1.1.2 Strategies to Cope with Occupational Stress
The analysis showed that ECEs of the childcare center in the Netherlands cope with occupational stress by either managing occupational stress factors after they occurred or by minimizing or avoiding occupational stress factors before they spread or occur. Therefore, the coping strategies are grouped in two categories: (1) manage occupational stress, and (2) minimize or avoid occupational stress. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that ECEs cope either on their own (individual coping), and/or together with other people (collective coping). Consequently, individual and collective coping strategies are distinguished.

The first category ‘manage occupational stress’ includes in total three strategies of how ECEs cope with occupational stress. The analysis identified two collective coping strategies and one individual coping strategy. More than half of the respondents who sometimes experience occupational stress, point out that they manage occupational stress collectively by communicating their experiences of occupational stress and/or receiving support from different people who belong to their working environment: their colleagues and their manager. One respondent explains that she manages her feelings of occupational stress by accepting the support from colleagues. “But normally there are teachers, colleagues they want to do that. That’s what I’m happy about” (Respondent 10). Another interviewee reports that she communicates her feelings of occupational stress to her colleagues and that they support her by enabling her to take a little break: “if I get really frustrated about something, I just tell a colleague, like I am going to walk around or I go to the toilet (...) and then I come back and then it is okay” (Respondent 9). Also, this respondent explains that she manages feelings of occupational stress by directly asking colleagues for support: “you can ask colleagues” (Respondent 9). Consequently, it can be noticed that receiving actual support
from colleagues helps ECEs to manage experiences of occupational stress. ECEs provide support to each other when they notice that a colleague experiences stress or because they are directly asked to do so. Noticing that a colleague needs help or being very open and ask for help indicates that the team is well-functioning. One has to pay attention to notice that a colleague needs support. Also, one needs to trust each other to admit needing help and/or to directly ask for support.

Moreover, the analysis found that respondents manage occupational stress by communicating it to the manager. In return, they receive support from the manager.

“Interviewer: And how does the employer help you to better deal with stressful situations, or the manager?
Respondent 9: (...) With meetings, just have appointments (...) And then ehm, you can go, all individually, go to her and then just tell her your problem. And if she can help you, she will help you.”

Another ECE also agrees that the manager offers support when you talk to her: “if we ask her something, she tries to do that” (Respondent 11). This collective coping strategy outlines how important it is to the ECEs that the manager is reachable and that she provides individual support.

The analysis showed that two respondents use one strategy to manage occupational stress which they carry out through individual coping, namely: acceptance. One ECE says that she copes with a stressful situation by just letting it happen and accept it. “I just let it be” (Respondent 9). Another respondent states: “I can make more stress for myself or just do it” (Respondent 10). Acceptance might be related to a certain lack of control or influence. Some work tasks may be fixed and thus unable to be influenced or changed by the employee.

The second category ‘minimize/avoid occupational stress’ comprises five coping strategies. The analysis found that two are carried out through collective coping and three through individual coping. One collective coping strategy to minimize/avoid occupational stress is the communication with and the support from colleagues and the manager. This collective coping strategy is basically the same as the one explained above; the only difference is that it aims to minimize/avoid and not to manage experiences of occupational stress. The analysis revealed that all respondents use this collective coping strategy to avoid occupational stress. Respondents say that they communicate their problems to their colleagues, and that the colleagues help them in return, which consequently avoids
experiencing occupational stress. In particular, ECEs emphasize that the teamwork is functioning well (e.g. Respondents 10, 11, 12). One respondent explains this precisely and she compares the support among colleagues to the one you might find in a family:

“We are, I think we are a good team. Because if someone has (...) I give one example, has a back problem and they don’t can lift the kids, then you need to say it and then someone goes oh then I can do it. And then you do something else what you can do. So it’s really I think really team (...) I think maybe family. You take care of each other.” (Respondent 10)

ECEs describe again the importance of an open communication and of receiving actual support. When explaining how this coping strategy helps them to avoid occupational stress, they point out the teamwork is well-functioning. Also, one ECE compares the way they treat and help each other like you do in a family. Thus, positive feelings like trust and affection among group members are indicated.

Further, the analysis identified that the communication with and the support from the manager is a collective coping strategy employed by the respondents that aims to minimize/avoid the experience of occupational stress. Respondents say that they have a good relationship with the manager and that they can talk to her very well about all kinds of things, also about problems. One ECE reports:

“you can tell her (manager) anything. If you feel there is something going on, you think should be changed, you can tell her. And she will see if she has to handle something around it or if she can just, eh, talk with you and that’s fine. Or if she yeah, takes major actions. Yeah, she listens.” (Respondent 12)

Also, this respondent underlines that she finds the appreciation that the manager communicates to the employees very supportive and it helps her to experience little occupational stress.

“Interviewer: (...) And how does the employer or the manager help you to experience not that much stress?
“Respondent 12: (...) She (manager) appreciates us. Everyone. (...) She is just really happy to have us here. And she shows that. She tells us that she is really happy and comfortable having us here. And I think that is really important.” (Respondent 12)

Another employee explains that the manager helps her to experience no occupational stress as the manager supports her ideas and helps her to implement these ideas. “I asked [the manager] then, if she can go to print me something out, and she print me that out and then I can do it” (Respondent 8). The statements of the employees are in line with the information received from the manager. The manager explains that her human resource management includes to communicate with her employees and to support them. “I listen to the teachers (employees), and ask them what do you need, how can we improve things” (Respondent 13). Besides, the manager also outlines: “people (employees) know they can talk to me anytime, anywhere. And that’s what they all do” (Respondent 13). This collective coping strategy also underlines the importance of a management style that allows and fosters the direct contact with the manager, open communication, and individual employee support. The manager does not only support ECEs when they experience problems like feelings of occupational stress, but she also supports personal ideas of the ECEs and she communicates appreciation.

Another strategy to minimize/avoid occupational stress is a high staff rate. Due to a high staff rate there are always enough employees in the workplace, so employees can rely on the support from each other. Therefore, it is a collective coping strategy. The analysis found that two respondents feel only little occupational stress due to a high staff rate in their organization. One interviewee explains:

“[The manager] does more staff in the group. Sometimes, eh, more than necessary. So then you can always tell a colleague, like please, can you do that or please, can you do that. And we have also internships. (...) I can say, like if you do this, then I will do that. (...) it is a little bit of planning. But then it is less stress.” (Respondent 9)

A high staff rate might be particularly helpful for ECEs, as it seems to avoid work overload.

Three strategies to minimize/avoid occupational stress are carried out by the employees individually. The analysis showed that two respondents experience no occupational stress due to feelings of personal wellbeing at work. The respondents say that they do not feel occupational stress as they like their work a lot and they feel comfortable at work. One ECE states: "I love my job and this, yeah. My heart is being here” (Respondent 8).
Another ECE says: “I not really got stress at work. I am really comfortable here” (Respondent 11). These statements show that experiencing personal wellbeing at work can influence the experience of occupational stress i.e. the ability to cope with it. Further, the analysis found that two respondents do not experience occupational stress or only very little, because they have a calm and relaxing personality in general. One interviewee explains: “I think it is just my personality that’s just, it’s relaxed or something (laughs). I don’t know. If I think about it this way, I’m like, wow I’m really not stressed” (Respondent 12). Consequently, the way a person experiences or copes with occupational stress might be influenced by his or her personality i.e. the person’s general attitude/tolerance towards stress. Besides, the analysis showed that two interviewees are able to minimize/avoid feelings of occupational stress due to their work experiences. Respondents explain that they have this ability either as they have a lot of work experience or only a little. One employee states that she does not feel a lot of occupational stress because she has many years of work experience in the childcare profession. “I think because of the experience I have now, in all these years, I don’t feel a lot of stress” (Respondent 12). Another ECE reports the opposite. She does not feel occupational stress as she is new in the childcare profession, meaning that she has not a lot of work experience. “I don’t know if I have stress already here. Not yet. I think because I am new, it is my first year, I see everything opened and nice still” (Respondent 10). On the one hand, this individual coping strategy implies that a person might be better able to cope with occupational stress when he or she has more work experience. This implies a longer tenure in the professional field and a higher age. Due to what this person has experienced over a longer period of time, he or she learned to cope with certain stressful situations at work. On the other hand, this individual coping strategy implies the opposite: a person might be able to better cope with occupational stress when he or she has not a lot of work experience. This might be as the person has not as many tasks as a person with more work experience, or because the person receives more support from colleagues to first get to know certain work tasks. Actual responsibilities and also feelings of obligations in the job might be lower for a person who does not have much work experience.

Summarized, the first sub-question of this research can be answered as follows. The majority of the respondents of the childcare center in the Netherlands experiences occupational stress sometimes. Various factors of occupational stress were identified and grouped as ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’ and ‘organizational factors’. Respondents use various individual and collective coping strategies that aim to
manage, minimize and/or avoid occupational stress. ECEs of the childcare center in the Netherlands focus on minimizing and/or avoiding occupational stress.

4.1.2 Wellbeing at Work and Coping with Occupational Stress

In this section I will answer the second sub-question of this research: Which factors of wellbeing do early childhood educators experience at work and how do these influence their strategies to cope with occupational stress? In order to answer the sub-question, the section describes the results of the data analysis which examine the factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs who work in a childcare center located in the Netherlands. Also, it examines the influence that ECEs’ experiences of wellbeing at work might have on their strategies to cope with occupational stress.

The factors of wellbeing at work can be understood as being the causes for experiencing wellbeing at work. The analysis resulted in eight different factors of wellbeing at work which recurred during the interviews. These factors of wellbeing at work are grouped as: ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, ‘organizational factors’ and ‘personal factors’. Except ‘personal factors’ the factors of wellbeing at work are grouped like the factors of occupational stress. This is due to the work tasks of the ECEs and the organizational conditions (see section 4.1.1.1). ‘Personal factors’ refer to personal attitudes and circumstance of the ECEs.

The analysis revealed three ‘education and care work factors’ that cause experiences of wellbeing at work. One factor refers to the work with children in general. The analysis found that all respondents feel good at work because of the children. One educator explains that she likes working with children as they give love back in return:

“If you help the kids it’s really, they are giving you love back, you know. You feel how exciting they become, you see it on the smile. That’s, yeah, that’s the reason I do this work. It’s really, it feels good, you know?” (Respondent 11)

Wellbeing at work refers to “the overall quality of an employee’s experience and functioning at work” (Grant et al., 2007, p. 52 referring to Warr, 1987). When employees explain that they like or enjoy certain work tasks or situations at work this indicates that they experience positive feelings and that they feel well. Thus, liking or enjoying certain aspects of one’s work contributes positively to the overall quality of the experience and functioning at work.

Another educator says that she likes taking care of and educating children because she just loves children and she enjoys being around them. “I always babysitted a lot of kids. So
that’s the main thing I like. Educating them, making sure they feel comfortable, being around them. Yeah, I love kids” (Respondent 12). This factor shows that the work with children is characterized by (positive) emotions. Through the contact with children ECEs feel well. This is an internal reward and it may also be associated with a personal fulfillment. The second factor of wellbeing at work is the children’s development. The analysis found that more than half of the respondents like to see how the children develop and grow. One respondent states that she likes a lot to help the children with their development and also, to notice that development. “See how they (children) develop. (...) you are really learning them to walk, and stand, and crawl. So I really like that” (Respondent 9). As ECEs enjoy noticing the progress that children make in their care; this factor also brings internal reward. Further, it may be associated with recognizing purpose in work. The third factor of wellbeing at work is related to the diversity of the work. The analysis revealed that two interviewees like about their job that it includes different tasks and activities. One interviewee states: “I love my job. It is every day different” (Respondent 8). The different work tasks which are part of the ECEC profession bring pleasure and thus, may enhance job satisfaction.

The analysis resulted in one ‘further work factor’ that causes wellbeing at work. This factor refers to the communication with and the support from colleagues. The analysis found that all respondents experience that their colleagues enhance their wellbeing at work. In particular, respondents emphasize that the communication and the support among each other is very good and helps to feel well at work. One interviewee explains how positive the communication is and that her colleagues care about her wellbeing and offer her help. “But also with other colleagues, I can talk good with them. (...) And also the colleagues come to me and ask if it is okay, how they can help me. So, I also like that” (Respondent 9). Another respondent reports that she feels well at work as she and her colleagues help each other and have fun together: “We have fun together, we help each other out. I think that’s the best thing you can have in a job” (Respondent 10). This factor of wellbeing at work shows that ECEs have positive relationships at work with other colleagues and that they provide each other with support. This is also a collective coping strategy which shows overlap between wellbeing at work and coping with occupational stress. Thus, wellbeing at work positively influences the ECEs’ abilities to cope. Further, one factor of occupational stress was also related to colleagues (see section 4.1.1.1). In this case, occupational stress was caused through negative behaviors and interpersonal differences. Consequently, one has to notice that as ECEs work together very closely they can have a major influence on each other’s work experiences; either in a positive or in a negative way.
The analysis revealed four ‘organizational factors’ that cause wellbeing at work. One factor of wellbeing at work is related to the management style. The analysis found that interviewees feel well at work due to the support and openness of the manager. ECEs especially appreciate the support and close contact with the manager. One respondent states: “if we not got enough staff here she (manager) is always coming over for us. So, yeah, it is always good” (Respondent 11). Another respondent says that they all, the manager and the employees, always help each other and she compares the mutual support to the one in a family. “We are one big, happy family here. We are helping each other anytime” (Respondent 8). The analysis showed that this respondent (Respondent 8) is the only one who does not experience any occupational stress. Her statement underlines the importance of positive relationships with colleagues and the manager, and mutual support in the workplace. This factor of wellbeing at work also overlaps with a collective coping strategy. Therefore, it indicates as well that wellbeing at work positively influences the ECEs’ abilities to cope. Another ‘organizational factor’ of wellbeing at work is related to the international experience. As the case organization is an international childcare center, the children and their families as well as the employees are from different countries worldwide. The analysis revealed that almost all interviewees, except one, especially like to work in an international surrounding. Respondents say that they enjoy meeting different people, learning some words in another language, and getting to know a different way of living. One interviewee says: “I love the international experience, environment because it’s so different. So many, I get to know so many different people from so many different countries, and it is really nice to see their (…), you know their way of living” (Respondent 12). Another ECE states: “I think it is always positive [to work with people from different nationalities]. You learn some words of the other languages, you learn the, ehm, the religions of it, I think it is beautiful to know some things” (Respondent 10). One further factor of wellbeing at work refers to a relaxing atmosphere in the workplace. Two interviewees state the following: they can work best when “it is not too busy” (Respondent 9) and when there is “no stress” (Respondent 12). A relaxing atmosphere may be fostered by a well-structured work schedule including a sufficient number staff to avoid work overload and occupational stress. A high staff rate is a strategy to cope with occupational stress. Thus, this factor of wellbeing at work also positively influences the ECEs’ abilities to cope.

The analysis resulted in one ‘personal factor’ that causes wellbeing at work. The majority of the interviewees feel generally well at work because of their personality. Interviewees report that they have an easy-going and calm personality. One respondent says:
“I really do think that my personality is just really calm, you know. I’m just a really calm person” (Respondent 12). This factor indicates that wellbeing at work is also dependent on a person’s overall personality or personal attitude.

Summarized, the second sub-question of this research can be answered as follows. All respondents of the childcare center in the Netherlands experience wellbeing at work. Various factors of wellbeing at work were identified and grouped as ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, ‘organizational factors’ and ‘personal factors’. Overlaps of the factors of wellbeing at work and the ECEs’ coping strategies were noticed. These overlaps show that the ECEs’ experiences of wellbeing at work positively influence their abilities to cope with occupational stress.

4.2 Results of a Childcare Center in Germany
This section shows the results of the analysis of the data collected in the case organization in Germany. Section 4.1.1 presents the factors of occupational stress as experienced by ECEs and their strategies to cope with occupational stress. Section 4.1.2 presents the factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs and the influence of wellbeing at work on coping with occupational stress.

4.2.1 Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies
In this section I will answer the first sub-question of this research: Which factors of occupational stress do early childhood educators experience and which strategies do they use to cope with stressors? In order to answer the sub-question, the next section describes the results of the data analysis which examine the factors of occupational stress as experienced by ECEs who work in a childcare center in Germany. The subsequent section examines the strategies which the ECEs of this childcare center use to cope with stressors.

4.2.1.1 Factors of Occupational Stress
This section presents the factors of occupational stress as experienced by ECEs who work in a childcare center situated in Germany. The analysis resulted in eight different factors of occupational stress which recurred during the interviews. These factors of occupational stress are grouped as: ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, ‘organizational factors’ and ‘personal factors’.

The analysis revealed that grouping the factors of occupational stress with regard to their work is adequate. The interviewees commonly explain that their work includes different fields. They mention the education and care of the children, writing reports (especially on children’s developments), talking to and meeting with parents, participating in regular team
meetings, and preparing as well as participating in church activities and celebrations (Respondents 1 – 6). The pedagogical concept of the case organization in Germany also states that these different fields are part of the work of all pedagogical staff (Pedagogical concept, 2016). The document points out that the education and care of the children is the main task, but it also underlines the importance of the communication among colleagues, regular team meeting (once a month: a general and a pedagogical meeting), the preparation and evaluation of meetings with parents and writing reports. Besides, housekeeping activities are also part of the work (Pedagogical concept, 2016). Consequently, one notices that the main work tasks are related with the ‘education and care’ of the children. And, next to these tasks the ECEs’ work also includes other work tasks (‘further work’). ‘Organizational factors’ are related to conditions dependent on the organization. ‘Personal factors’ refer to personal attitudes and circumstance of the ECEs.

The analysis resulted in two ‘education and care work factors’ that cause occupational stress. One factor is the work with children who show a difficult behavior. The analysis showed that half of the respondents experience this factor as causing occupational stress. One respondent explains that the period when children are first settling in can be stressful due to difficult child’s behavior: “last year, we had one child who cried a lot and extremely loud over a period of several weeks” (Respondent 1). She also adds: “this has been a strong burden. Yes, and it also stressed me out”. Another respondent states that children who need a lot of attention and negatively influence other children by their behavior cause feelings of stress. “Within a short period of time, this child brings chaos” (Respondent 5). Besides, she emphasizes: “for example this child needs one of us solely [taking care of him]” (Respondent 5). This factor of occupational stress might be related to the staff-child ratios. The ratios might be too low, in particular within stressful periods (e.g. settling in period). Also, it might be that ECEs need more knowledge (further training) on how to deal with children who show a very difficult behavior. Another factor is related to high noise levels in the workplace. The analysis found that less than half of the respondents sometimes feel stressed by high noise levels caused by children’s voices or other activities carried out by children. “Well, screeching and eh, screaming. Or ehm, the sound level of ehm, yeah musical instruments or ehm, when Lego falls down. This is awful. (...) that stresses me every now and then” (Respondent 3).

The analysis revealed three ‘further work factors’ causing occupational stress. One factor is related to further work activities in general. The analysis found that the majority of respondents mention stressful work activities which can be summarized together in this factor. Several respondents feel stressed by events and meetings that take place consecutively in the
evening or on weekends. One respondent explains: “When there are many meetings in a row that take place in the evening, that is what I experience as personal stress” (Respondent 6). Another interviewee states:

“Where you do need a break again, and ehm, Christmas season is starting, and many meetings are coming up, you know. We still need to do this, we need to do arts and crafts for that, and this meeting with the parents. (...) Sankt Martin, and eh, this can cause some stress.” (Respondent 1)

The case organization is a church-funded childcare center and as explained by employees preparing and participating in church-related events and activities is also a part of their work. This is in line with information provided in the pedagogical concept which says that manager and the employees mutually prepare and carry out activities, events/celebrations, and projects (Pedagogical concept, 2016). Besides, writing reports, taking notes, filling in documents which mainly include information on children’s developments are experienced as being stressful. One interviewee states:

“Stress are these extra things. (...) the ‘BaSik-Bogen’ (a document to collect information on a child’s language development) is new now. And we also always have to do, let’s call it paperwork. (...) That means we have to take notes regarding the children. We need to prepare meetings with parents that take place in the afternoon or during the day. And then we need to write reports.” (Respondent 5)

Another educator reports that she perceives extra work like unexpected housekeeping tasks as causes for stress. She says: “when a machine that you need is broken, like a dishwasher (laughing). That’s also stressful” (Respondent 4). Summarized, this factor is related to multiple ‘extra’ work tasks of the ECEs next to the ‘main’ education and care work tasks. These tasks consume a great amount of time and energy of the ECEs and they are clearly seen as a burden. This might also indicate that the number of staff employed is too low leading to a work overload. Also, it might imply a lack of auxiliary staff (e.g. interns, students) which could provide support or undertake for instance the preparation of church-related events or activities which do not necessarily need to be carried out by professional ECEs. The second ‘further work factor’ is related to the children’s parents. The analysis found that the majority of the respondents experience the work with parents as causing stress. The ECEs have contact
with the parents on a daily basis when they drop off and pick up their children. Besides, there are further regular meetings with the parents or special meeting when a problem needs to be discussed. The analysis showed that the reasons why the contact with parents causes feelings of stress are diverse. One respondent, for example, finds it stressful to talk to the parents several times a day during drop off and pick up times while watching the children in her care. “That is causing stress because you have to do two things at the same time. You are talking very briefly to a mother or a father and with one eye you need to watch the group (laughs)” (Respondent 2). Another interviewee explains that she feels stressed when parents do not meet agreed arrangements and when educators and parents do not work as a team (Respondent 4). This factor might also indicate that more staff is needed or that tasks should be divided differently for drop off and pick up times. It might be helpful when one ECE takes care of the children and one talks to the parents. Besides, it might be necessary to introduce further regulations to improve the teamwork of ECEs and parents. The third ‘further work’ factor that causes occupational stress is the experience of communication problems with colleagues. The analysis showed that half of the respondents refer to this factor. One respondent explains that it might come to a misunderstanding when a colleague is stressed out and the communication is not as friendly as usual (Respondent 6). Another respondent points out that she sometimes misinterprets the communication of a colleague and as a consequence, she sometimes thinks that there is a problem even though everything is fine. She explains: “the other person then says eh, no, eh, that is absolutely not how I meant it. So, sometimes I do get wrong signals” (Respondent 1). This factor shows how important a friendly and clear communication is among colleagues.

The analysis revealed two ‘organizational factors’ that lead to the experience of occupational stress. One factor is a shortage of staff which is mainly due to sick leaves and a lack of substitutes. More than half of the respondents report a shortage of staff as being a cause for experiencing occupational stress. One respondent states: “Stress always emerges when someone is absent.” (Respondent 6). Another respondent experiences the same feelings: “When there is an epidemic (many colleagues are sick), that is (...) stressful for us” (Respondent 2). A shortage of staff brings extra work. Sick leaves are the main reason for a shortage of staff and they might be related to the age of the employees. The manager explains that the childcare center in Germany currently employs mainly senior ECEs (Respondent 7). Besides, the manager reports that getting a substitute for an ECE who is sick for a longer period of time is difficult. Due to regulations and limited financial resources a substitute can only start to work after the actual employee has been absent for six weeks. Furthermore, she
points out that there is a general shortage of ECEC staff in the market so that she often cannot find an adequate substitute. The second factor refers to the facilities of the center. The analysis found that two respondents feel stressed out because of fire escape doors which can be opened by employees as well as children at any time. Therefore, the educators need to watch these doors so no children go outside unattended. One educator points out: “this is also stressful because you have two doors that you need to check. In one room” (Respondent 2).

The analysis revealed one ‘personal factor’ that causes occupational stress. In the narrow sense, this factor is not an occupational stress factor as the feelings of stress result from personal, non work-related issues. The analysis found that this factor refers to problems at home. As several respondents explain that this factor influences their perceptions and experiences of occupational stress, the factor is included in the analysis. Half of the interviewees name problems involving other family members, especially their own children, as a cause of experiencing occupational stress. One interviewee states: “[When] there is trouble at home. (…) With the children or something made me really upset. Then I am stressed out more quickly or I get annoyed more often” (Respondent 1).

4.2.1.2 Strategies to Cope with Occupational Stress
This section presents the strategies to cope with occupational stress which are used by the ECEs of the childcare center in Germany. Similar to the results in the Netherlands, the ECEs’ strategies to cope with occupational stress can be grouped in two categories: (1) manage occupational stress, and (2) avoid occupational stress. Moreover, like the coping strategies used by ECEs of the childcare center in the Netherlands, individual and collective coping strategies are distinguished.

The first category ‘manage occupational stress’ includes seven coping strategies. The analysis showed that all respondents employ two collective strategies to manage occupational stress. These collective coping strategies are to communicate the experiences of occupational stress and/or to receive support/advice about it. ECEs outline that they communicate with or receive support/advice from different people who belong either to their working, or to their social environment. People who belong to the ECEs’ working environment are: colleagues, manager, children’s parents, and external advisors/supervisors. People from their social environment are members of the ECEs’ own families like their husbands or children. Respondents report that they find communication in general helpful in order to manage problems that are linked with occupational stress. One respondent says: “Actually, it doesn’t matter what situation, I do, I (…) try to have a calm conversation” (Respondent 4). She also
points out: “People who talk can get help.” (Respondent 4). Another interviewee underlines the importance to communicate with colleagues:

“Interviewer: “(...) How do your colleagues help you to better deal with stressful situations? Respondent 5: Well, that you talk about it. This is the most essential thing”.

One educator explains that she finds it helpful to talk about experiences of occupational stress with her husband (Respondent 6). Another one discusses the stressful experiences with her son which also helps her to manage occupational stress. “Then it is often really helpful to me, eh, I can talk about it (occupational stress) to him (son), (...) yeah, he listens to me, I listen to him.” (Respondent 1). When educators experience occupational stress with the children’s parents, the analysis found that communication is also the strategy to manage it. Respondents explain that they either talk to the parents during drop off or pick up times or that they make an appointment (e.g. Respondent 2, Respondent 4). Having a conversation with other people and discussing experiences of occupational stress seems to be a fruitful solution for the ECEs to manage experiences of occupational stress. To be able to have a conversation it is required that one has the motivation to start the conversation and that the other person is willing and interested in listening/communicating. In the workplace this might indicate that open communication about problems is part of the organizational culture.

Further, the analysis found that several respondents communicate experiences of occupational stress to people from their working environment and that this communication ultimately results in receiving support/advice from the people they talk to. So, the communications itself as well as the actual support/advice help them to manage occupational stress. Respondents explain that they can openly communicate with their colleagues about experiences of occupational stress and that they get support/advice in response. One respondent outlines: “Yes, we have a problem-solving approach as we communicate with each other and assist each other” (Respondent 5). Another educator says: “I let my colleagues know (...) that I am experiencing stress with something. And then we often talk about it in our group. (...) And then often there also is only a shift of work” (Respondent 6). Open communication and receiving actual support/advice in return seems to be a common approach to handle problems in this childcare center. It may be related to the overall organizational culture that fosters such a behavior. The ways ECEs talk about their colleagues and how they collectively manage occupational stress indicates that the teamwork if well-functioning.

Also, the analysis revealed that interviewees talk to their manager openly and honestly about experiences of occupational stress. The manager is always reachable and offers
individual advice and support. For instance, she reflects on the individual issues and/or offers support by taking action (e.g. rescheduling working hours (Respondent 2)). One ECE reports:

“With her (manager) I always have the feeling I can come with anything, with anything I have. (...) I always feel being in very good hands there, because she can just reflect very well. (...) And I actually feel being in good hands with her, because I think that she also sees everyone individually. Ehm, with his plus and minus what everyone has. (...) And [she] also notices when someone has too much and then also speaks about that.” (Respondent 6)

This statement is in line with information received from the manager. The manager explains that her human research management focuses on seeing each employee individually and on providing each employee with the individual support that is needed. The manager explains: “human resource management always has to do with seeing each employee individually and ehm, yeah, support for that one employee has to be like this and for the other employee, most certainly, totally different” (Respondent 7). In line with the results of the childcare center in the Netherlands, one recognizes the importance of a management style that allows and fosters a direct contact with the manager, open communication, and individual employee support (see section 4.1.1.2).

Further, one respondent gives an example in which she talks about an issue she and her colleagues experienced with a child which caused feelings of occupational stress. To manage the problem they talked to an external advisor and received advisory support: “they (external advisors) just look at it from the outside and then they make us think about how we can handle it differently, you know. And that was what we did back then and that really worked out, you know” (Respondent 1). This strategy shows that drawing on external knowledge of a neutral third person might be helpful to manage occupational stress.

The analysis revealed four individual coping strategies that respondents use to manage occupational stress. One individual coping strategy to manage occupational stress is acceptance. All interviewees report that, in some cases, they manage occupational stress by simply accepting it. One respondent explains that there are just some things at work that cannot be changed and because of her work experience she is able to accept them. She says that at times younger colleagues struggle to accept difficult situations because “there is sometimes just a lack of routine, where I say then, after 27, 28 years, it is what it is. You cannot change it, you know” (Respondent 6). Another interviewee says: “sometimes you have
“to go through the stress” (Respondent 4). Acceptance is also an individual coping strategy used by ECEs of the childcare center in the Netherlands. As explained in section 4.1.1.2, acceptance might be related to a certain lack of control or influence as some work tasks cannot be influenced or changed by employees. Respondent 6 explains her ability to accept things that cannot be changed resulting from her work experience and therefore, this coping strategy might also be related to age. The analysis found another individual coping strategy to manage occupational stress which is the use of an own coping procedure; half of the respondents developed such a procedure. One educator explains her coping procedure: “first, I try to figure out what stresses me out and why it stresses me out. And then I just try to change it” (Respondent 4). This coping strategy seems to be well-reflected, structured and solution-oriented. Further, the analysis revealed another coping strategy that seems to be in contrast with the previous one: the use of verbal expressions. Less than half of the interviewees report that they sometimes use verbal expressions to manage occupational stress. One educator says that she sometimes raises her voice in response to a stressful situation (Respondent 5). Another respondent states that she sometimes swears to relieve negative feelings due to occupational stress (Respondent 6). This coping strategy seems to be rather impulsive and not solution-oriented. The analysis revealed one other individual coping strategy to manage occupational stress which is to take action. The analysis found that two respondents use this strategy. One ECE says that she takes immediate action when a child shows a problematic behavior. “So, when a child flips out a little (laughs). (...) Eh, then I have to take immediate action in that moment” (Respondent 2). Another respondent explains that in order to find a way to handle a difficult child’s behavior that causes occupational stress, she takes action in doing some internet research. “Well, sometimes I also check the internet at home (...) sometimes there are some new pedagogical approaches” (Respondent 1). This coping strategy is also solution-oriented. Checking the internet for information shows the ECE’s motivation and her ability to work independently. But, it may also indicate a need for further training on how to deal with children who show a difficult behavior.

The analysis found one coping strategy that manages occupational stress which can be carried out individually or collectively. This coping strategy is used by half of the respondents and it refers to do relaxing activities in the leisure time. Respondents say that they do some activities individually and some collectively. Individual activities are for example: doing sports, listening to relaxing music, sleeping early, going for a walk, gardening (Respondents 6 and 5). One educator outlines that she spends time with her husband to distract herself from experiencing negative feelings due to occupational stress. “Or actually, also distraction.
Sometimes cinema (...) or sometimes going out for dinner only with my husband without the kid” (Respondent 6). This coping strategy points out the linkage of a person’s private and work life. It indicates the importance of a work-life balance.

The second category ‘avoid occupational stress’ comprises two coping strategies. One is carried out collectively and one individually. The collective coping strategy that aims to avoid occupational stress is the same as the one that ECEs use to manage occupational stress: the communication with and the support from other people. But in the context of stress avoidance only colleagues are involved. The analysis revealed that the majority of the respondents use the communication with and the support from their colleagues in order to avoid the experience of occupational stress. One educator explains that she and her colleagues divide tasks in a way that occupational stress is avoided from the beginning (Respondent 1). For example, she says that when an educator does not get along with some parents very well, they decide together that another ECE who likes these parents better talks to them. “So that you can already avoid this stress factor, you know. Because sometimes it is just like that, that you just don’t like each other (educators and parents) that much” (Respondent 1). Another interviewee reports that she and her colleagues communicate frequently and that they give each other feedback (Respondent 3). She states that this helps her to avoid feelings of occupational stress. “We are communicating very often (...) We give each other a lot of feedback” (Respondent 3). Again, open communication and receiving actual support in return is found as being an important and successful coping strategy.

The analysis showed that the individual coping strategy refers to the person’s wellbeing in general. More than half of the respondents explain that taking care of and assuring their personal wellbeing is a strategy to avoid experiences of occupational stress. Thereby, educators especially mention their psychological and their physiological wellbeing. One respondent outlines that she always watches her own emotions in order to avoid too much occupational stress (Respondent 6). Another interviewee says that she feels personally better when she can do things early in time and as a result avoid stress. “I am actually the one, who likes to start early, where I think then, well, then we have already done this” (Respondent 4). Further, one educator states that certain physiological and psychological exercises help her to avoid experiencing occupational stress. She explains:

“when I leave the childcare center, ehm, I ride my bike home. And on the bike I already do breathing exercises and, ehm, then I go in my head through the childcare
center and I say goodbye to all colleagues, to all rooms, ehm, to the gate, and then it’s gone.” (Respondent 3).

This coping strategy which avoids feelings of occupational stress through personal wellbeing shows the power of experiencing wellbeing. Feeling generally well influences the way the ECEs experience occupational stress.

Summarized, the first sub-question of this research can be answered as follows. All respondents of the childcare center in Germany experience occupational stress on several occasions. Various factors of occupational stress were identified and grouped as ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, ‘organizational factors’ and ‘personal factors’. Respondents use various individual and collective coping strategies that aim to manage and avoid occupational stress. ECEs of the childcare center in Germany focus on managing occupational stress.

4.2.2 Wellbeing at Work and Coping with Occupational Stress

In this section I will answer the second sub-question of this research: Which factors of wellbeing do early childhood educators experience at work and how do these influence their strategies to cope with occupational stress? In order to answer the sub-question, the section describes the results of the data analysis which examine the factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs who work in a childcare center located in Germany. Also, it examines the influence that ECEs’ experiences of wellbeing at work might have on their strategies to cope with occupational stress.

The analysis resulted in ten different factors of wellbeing at work which recurred during the interviews. These factors of wellbeing at work are grouped as: ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, ‘organizational factors’ and ‘personal factors’. The factors of wellbeing at work are grouped like the factors of occupational stress (see section 4.2.1.1).

The analysis revealed four ‘education and care work factors’ that cause wellbeing at work. One factor relates to the children’s development. The analysis found that half of the respondents feel well at work as they are a part of the children’s development. The educators are happy about contributing and noticing different kinds of developments, like language or motoric developments. One respondent states: “And now I am feeling very well. Here, I do have this, the language development which you notice, [and] the motoric development which you notice extremely well with the children” (Respondent 6). Another factor which causes wellbeing at work is related to the work with children in general. The analysis showed that
educators very much enjoy spending time with the children. Half of the respondents say that they have fun and laugh a lot while working with the children. One ECE outlines: “You can also laugh a lot with the clientele (the children) and have a lot of fun, too” (Respondent 2). Another factor of wellbeing is linked with the appreciation and approval of the children. For example, one educator emphasizes that she feels well when she notices that the children in her care like being around her. “It is nice, ehm, that the children feel well around me. (...) I enjoy that a lot” (Respondent 1). Another respondent says: “When children give you paintings as a gift. (...) This is (...) positive about the job” (Respondent 5). The previous three factors underline the important role of emotions when working with children. They show that ECEs feel highly attached to the children and that the children’s development and their behaviors can bring internal reward. This may also lead to a realization of purpose in the work and to feelings of fulfillment. A further factor of wellbeing at work is linked with creativity. One respondent outlines: “I find it also really great ehm, that I can bring in own ideas. Suggesting can we do these kinds of arts and crafts, can we cook this, [or] can we decorate the gym like that” (Respondent 4). Being creative as a part of the ECEC work can bring pleasure and may enhance job satisfaction.

The analysis resulted in two ‘further work factors’ that cause wellbeing at work. One factor refers to the children’s parents. The analysis found that two ECEs feel well when they feel appreciated by the parents. For instance, ECEs feel well when they receive positive feedback from the parents or when they recognize that parents trust them. One interviewee says: “That is what I also like, when parents clearly signalize, my child feels well here, this is why I also feel well here” (Respondent 2). Another educator reports: “Great parents who (...) just give us a lot of trust, trust in advance” (Respondent 6). Interestingly, the analysis showed that children’s parents can cause experiences of wellbeing at work as well as occupational stress (see section 4.2.1.1). Therefore, the relationship among children’s parents and ECEs can be seen as an important factor that may have a positive as well as a negative impact on the work experiences of ECEs. Another factor of wellbeing at work relates to the colleagues. The majority of respondents feel well at work because the communication among colleagues is functioning well, and because they support and complement each other. One educator says:

“the three of us is a team that is functioning very well, we know each other well, we very much appreciate each other (...) it is no problem for the three of us to say, yeah, she doesn’t like doing this, so I’ll do it.” (Respondent 3)
Another respondent says: “This is the best way of working that I’ve ever experienced during all the years of work, because we complement each other very well” (Respondent 5). Besides, respondents mention that they appreciate the real interest in each other and that some colleagues are like family to them. One ECE says: “Also, that you are really interested in the other one (colleague), you know. (...) And it is also that I do have the feeling, you are being very honest with each other, you know. That is important to me” (Respondent 4). Another respondent explains: “Sometimes, you can also say, talk about private things with my, with my team (colleagues) from the group, you know. This is a, practically like a second family” (Respondent 1). This factor underlines how positive and personal the relationships are among colleagues. A clear and harmonious communication seems to be very important. This factor of wellbeing overlaps with a collective coping strategy. Thus, it indicates that wellbeing at work positively influences the ECEs’ abilities to cope. Besides, it can be noticed that if the communication becomes more negative it results in occupational stress (see section 4.2.1.1). Thus, especially the way ECEs communicate may influence their work experiences and their abilities to cope with occupational stress.

The analysis revealed three ‘organizational factors’ that cause wellbeing at work. One factor of wellbeing at work refers to an absence of a shortage of staff, meaning to be fully-staffed. The analysis showed that the majority of the respondents can work best when all their colleagues are at work and when nobody is sick. Responding to the question “Under which conditions can you work best?” one educator responds: “Yeah, it is, of course, best when everybody (all employees) is here.” (Respondent 6). Another respondent answers: “Of course, when everybody (all employees) is in good health, that’s also important” (Respondent 4). A shortage of staff brings extra work and causes experiences of occupational stress (see section 4.2.1.1). Being fully-staffed is the opposite and it brings positive working conditions so ECEs feel like they can work and function at their best. Having the feeling to be at his or her best and work accordingly to the work schedule might lead to positive feelings regarding the overall job i.e. job satisfaction. Another factor of wellbeing at work is a positive atmosphere. The analysis found that half of the respondents feel well and can work best when the general atmosphere in the workplace is good and harmonious. One educator explains: “when there is a good mood among each other (colleagues)” (Respondent 4). Another respondent states: “When everything is harmonious. (laughs). When there are no troubles at the workplace, when there is no eh, no stress. (...) Yeah, this is actually the best time” (Respondent 1). This factor shows again how important a positive and harmonious relationship among colleagues is. Also, this factor of wellbeing at work enables to cope with occupational stress. One further
factor of wellbeing at work relates to the general organizational practices and policies. For example, two educators state that they feel well as the organization works together with external advisors or supervisors who offer support and give advice to the ECEs regarding general or specific issues they might experience at work. One employee states: “That there are (...) such external advice centers (...) for early childhood educators. I think that is really good” (Respondent 1). Another employee feels well at work due to family-oriented contracts, regular team meetings and the opportunity to participate in further trainings. She says: “I also like that I can work part time (...) So, that it works out with my family. (...) I like that we have team meetings (...) [and] that [the manager] finds it very important that we do further trainings” (Respondent 3). This factor shows again the importance of receiving support in case it is needed. Receiving support from other people is also part of the ECEs’ collective coping strategies. Therefore, it can be noticed that wellbeing at work positively influences the ECEs’ abilities to cope with occupational stress. Further, it seems to be important to ECEs that the general practices and policies of the organization are in line with personal interests (e.g. family orientation, further training).

The analysis revealed one ‘personal factor’ that causes wellbeing at work, namely: personal wellbeing. The analysis found that the majority of the respondents can work best when they are personally feeling well. Some educators refer to their physical wellbeing, like being in good health, relaxed and well-rested. One respondent states: “I can work best when, when I am in good health. (...) When ehm, I am well rested” (Respondent 3). Another educator mentions her psychological wellbeing. She explains: “Well, when you are feeling happy about yourself from the inside. (...) when you are having some sort of inner balance, I think it is always working well then” (Respondent 6). Consequently, ECEs experience that wellbeing at work is influenced by feeling psychologically and physically healthy.

Summarized, the second sub-question of this research can be answered as follows. All respondents of the childcare center in Germany experience wellbeing at work. Various factors of wellbeing at work were identified and grouped as ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, ‘organizational factors’ and ‘personal factors’. Overlaps of the factors of wellbeing at work and the ECEs’ coping strategies were noticed. These overlaps show that the ECEs’ experiences of wellbeing at work positively influence their abilities to cope with occupational stress. This is in line with the results of the data of the childcare center in the Netherlands.
4.3 Comparison of the Results of both Childcare Centers
This section provides a comparison of the results of the childcare center in the Netherlands and the childcare center in Germany.

4.3.1 Factors of Occupational Stress
A detailed overview of the factors of occupational stress as experienced by ECEs of both case organizations can be found in the following table. Same or similar factors are in bold letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors of Occupational Stress</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and Care Work Factors</td>
<td>-Multiple tasks</td>
<td>-Difficult behavior of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Prepare food</td>
<td>-High noise levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Work Factors</td>
<td>-Children’s parents</td>
<td>-Children’s parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Cooperation with colleagues</td>
<td>-Communication with colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Further work activities in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Factors</td>
<td>-Shortage of staff</td>
<td>-Shortage of staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Fire escape doors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Factors</td>
<td>(none)</td>
<td>-Problems at home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4: Comparative overview of factors of occupational stress (own presentation, 2017).*

When viewing the factors of occupational stress of both case organizations, one can notice that two ‘further work factors’ are the same or at least very similar. Besides, one ‘organizational factor’ is the same. All other factors of occupational stress do differ in both case organizations, which might be as the work tasks of the ECEs and the organizational conditions differ in both childcare centers. Therefore, it can be concluded that some of the occupational stress factors as experienced by ECEs are specific to the organization while others might be of a more general nature and related to the overall ECEC profession as they are experienced by ECEs who work in two different childcare centers in two different countries.

Further, one main difference can be recognized: respondents of the childcare center in the Netherlands did not mention any ‘personal factors’ causing occupational stress while ECEs of the childcare center in Germany did. This research did not find precise explanations for this finding. Generally, ECEs of the childcare center in Germany were older than the ECEs of the childcare center in the Netherlands. But the influence of age was not considered in this study. Another reason may be that interviews in the childcare center in Germany were conducted in the respondents’ native language. Therefore, respondents may have been able to express themselves more easily.
4.3.2 Strategies to Cope with Occupational Stress
A detailed overview of the various strategies to cope with occupational stress that are used by ECEs of both case organizations can be found in the following table. Same or similar factors are in bold letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies to Cope with Occupational Stress</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manage Occupational Stress: Collectively</td>
<td>-Support from colleagues/manager</td>
<td>-Communication with colleagues/manager/children’s parents/external</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Communication with and support from colleagues/managers</td>
<td>advisors/supervisors/own families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage Occupational Stress: Individually</td>
<td>-Acceptance</td>
<td>-Acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Own coping procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Verbal expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Take action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage Occupational Stress: Collectively/Individually</td>
<td>(none)</td>
<td>-Relaxing activities in leisure time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimize and/or Avoid Occupational Stress: Collectively</td>
<td>-Communication with and support from colleagues/manager</td>
<td>-Communication with and support from colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimize and/or Avoid Occupational Stress: Individually</td>
<td>-Personal wellbeing at work</td>
<td>-Personal wellbeing in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Personality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Work experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Comparative overview of strategies to cope with occupational stress (own presentation, 2017).

Summarized, several coping strategies are the same or at least very similar. A main similarity that can be emphasized is one collective coping strategy that ECEs of both childcare centers use to manage as well as to minimize and/or avoid occupational stress: the communication with and the support from other people from their working environment (colleagues and/or manager). This similarity might be an indicator that the strategy is of main importance when coping with occupational stress in the ECEC profession. This might be as ECEs work together very closely; they always take care of a group of children together with at least two educators.

A main difference is that the respondents of the case organization in the Netherlands mainly use coping strategies which avoid and/or minimize the experiences of occupational stress, whereby interviewees of the case organization in Germany focus more on managing occupational stress. This finding is in line with the overall occupational stress levels of the ECEs: respondents of the case organization in the Netherlands experience lower occupational stress compared to the respondents of the case organization in Germany. Respondents of the
childcare center in the Netherlands particularly outline that they do not experience a lot of occupational stress. One respondent even reports consistently that she does not experience any occupational stress whatsoever. This might be due to higher staff-child ratios (see Table 2). For instance, the manager of the childcare center in the Netherlands points out that ECEs can go home or change shifts very easily when experiencing personal or health problems (Respondent 13). She emphasizes that this is possible due to a sufficient number of staff (high staff-child ratios) that allows her to work as an ‘extra’ person i.e. substitute. Further, high staff-child ratios may enhance the opportunity to provide intensive mutual support in the workplace which ECEs state decreases the experience of occupational stress.

### 4.3.3 Factors of Wellbeing at Work and Coping with Occupational Stress

A detailed overview of the factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs of both case organizations can be found in the following table. Same or similar factors are in bold letters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors of Wellbeing at Work</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Germany</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education and Care Work Factors</td>
<td>- Work with children in general</td>
<td>- Work with children in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Children’s development</td>
<td>- Children’s development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Diversity of the work</td>
<td>- Appreciation and approval of children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Being creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Work Factors</td>
<td>- Communication with and support from colleagues</td>
<td>- Communication with and support from colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Children’s parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Factors</td>
<td>- Management style</td>
<td>- Organization’s practices and policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Relaxing atmosphere</td>
<td>- Positive atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- International experience</td>
<td>- Fully-staffed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Factors</td>
<td>- Own Personality</td>
<td>- Personal wellbeing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 6: Comparative overview of factors of wellbeing at work (own presentation, 2017).*

Summarized, the results show that many factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs of both childcare centers are the same or at least very similar. The ‘education and care work factors’ that are alike or similar seem to be of a more general nature and related to the overall ECEC profession. The ‘organizational factors’ are of course specific to each center. Nevertheless, the organization’s management and certain organizational practices and policies are factors that enhance experiences of wellbeing at work among respondents of both centers which show their importance. No major differences are found when comparing the factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs of both case organizations.

Interestingly, overlaps of the ECEs’ coping strategies and the factors of wellbeing at work could be recognized (see Tables 5 and 6). These overlaps indicate that experiencing
wellbeing at work helps to cope with occupational stress. This means that experiencing wellbeing at work positively influences the ECEs’ abilities to cope with occupational stress.

Chapter 5 – Discussion and Conclusion
This chapter comprises a discussion of the main research findings, both practical and methodological implications, and a conclusion. Section 5.1 discusses the main research findings and it also elaborates on the theoretical contributions of this study. Further, it provides a final answer to the main research question which is: How do early childhood educators who work in childcare centers in the Netherlands and Germany cope with occupational stress? Section 5.2 presents practical implications and section 5.3 gives methodological implications. Section 5.4 presents a conclusion.

5.1 Coping with Occupational Stress and Wellbeing at Work among Early Childhood Educators
The analysis of the data of this study showed that ECEs of both case organizations experience occupational stress, which is in line with the findings of previous studies (e.g. Faulkner et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2013; Baumgartner et al., 2009). The identified factors of occupational stress as experienced by ECEs of both childcare centers are grouped as: ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, and ‘organizational factors’. The groupings emerged from the data analysis of this study and they show the actual sources of occupational stress. Consequently, these groupings on the occupational stress experiences of ECEs who work in childcare centers in two different European countries provide new scientific knowledge and thus, they contribute to the existing international literature. Future studies might also employ these groupings to get a precise overview of the sources of occupational stress. Knowing about the actual sources is important to further examine how they could be reduced or prevented from the beginning; also with the help from the childcare centers’ managements and governmental regulations.

Next to the three groupings, the data analysis revealed that ECEs of the center in Germany also experience one ‘personal factor’ as causing occupational stress, namely: ‘problems at home’. Baumgartner and colleagues (2009) also identified ‘external factors’ in their study as causing occupational stress among ECEs; one factor of this category is related to ‘responsibilities from home’. Therefore, this study is in line with the finding of Baumgartner and colleagues (2009) who found that ‘external factors’ which are actually not part of the educator’s work can influence the experiences of occupational stress. No precise
explanations were found for this finding. Future research is encouraged to search for explanations.

Previous qualitative studies on occupational among ECEs found various occupational stress factors (e.g. Baumgartner et al., 2009; Faulkner et al., 2016). Besides, Corr and colleagues (2014) found that especially qualitative studies detected high stress among ECEs. Thus, it was expected that the current qualitative study would also identify high levels of occupational stress among ECEs. However, this study found that the overall occupational stress levels of the respondents of both case organizations are not as high as one might have expected. The occupational stress levels of the respondents of the childcare center in the Netherlands seem to be rather low, while the occupational stress levels of the respondents of the center in Germany are higher; but still moderate. These contrasting findings also add scientific knowledge. Further, this study found that one reason for the different occupational stress levels among ECEs of both case organizations may be different staff-child ratios (see Table 2). The staff-child ratios of the childcare center in the Netherlands are higher than the ones in the center in Germany. This finding is in line with the study results of Rusby and colleagues (2013) who found that a higher child-staff ratio (i.e. a lower staff-child ratio) increases the experience of occupational stress among caregivers who work in childcare.

The analysis showed that ECEs of both childcare centers use various strategies to cope with occupational stress. When ECEs of both centers cope, they either manage experiences of occupational stress after they occurred, or they minimize and/or avoid occupational stress experiences before they spread or occur. Consequently, in the context of this study on coping with occupational stress among ECEs, the definition of coping as provided by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) can be extended. Thus, coping can be understood as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage, minimize, or avoid specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person”. This extension represents an important finding that shows that coping among ECEs of both case organizations is not merely a response to manage occupational stress after it occurred, but it is also a planned and solution-oriented process that encourages ECEs to carry out work activities in a way that avoids the experience of occupational stress before it occurs, or at least keeps it to a minimum. This finding contributes to the existing scientific knowledge on coping with occupational stress among ECEs. Furthermore, the analysis showed that ECEs of the center in the Netherlands focus more on minimizing and/or avoiding the experience of occupational stress, while ECEs of the center in Germany focus more on managing the experience of occupational stress. This finding may also be related to the overall occupational
stress level that the ECEs experience: ECEs of the organization in the Netherlands experience a lower stress level than the ECEs of the organization in Germany.

Furthermore, the results of this study show that the ECEs of both case organizations cope with occupational stress either individually or collectively. Individual coping strategies are carried out by ECEs solely. Collective coping strategies are carried out together with other people, either from the ECEs’ working or social environments (see Table 5). Distinguishing between individual and collective coping strategies is of interest as one can especially notice the power of collective coping and the influence of other people in the overall coping process. These findings show the ECEs’ need for social support when coping with occupational stress. The distinction between individual and collective coping also contributes to existing scientific knowledge on coping with occupational stress among ECEs as it has not been focused on before. It also provides a basis for future research.

Interestingly, this study found that ECEs of both childcare centers use a collective coping strategy that aims to manage, minimize and/or avoid occupational stress: the communication with and the support from other people. When managing occupational stress ECEs of both centers refer to their colleagues and their managers. ECEs of the center in Germany also refer to children’s parents, external advisors/supervisors and family members. When minimizing and/or avoiding occupational stress ECEs of both centers refer to their colleagues. ECEs of the center in the Netherlands also refer to their manager. Consequently, the important role of the ECEs’ colleagues and managers when coping with occupational stress can be recognized. This collective coping strategy is in line with a finding from Baumgartner and colleagues (2009). Among other strategies they also identified what they call a ‘problem-focused’ strategy in which ECEs cope with occupational stress through sharing information and getting help from another educator or the manager. Therefore this finding is in line with the finding of Baumgartner et al. (2009).

Further, the data analysis of this study revealed that ECEs of both childcare centers experience wellbeing as an individual coping strategy to minimize and/or avoid occupational stress. ECEs either refer to wellbeing at work or in general. This finding shows that an ECE’s wellbeing (at work) can influence how he or she copes with occupational stress which provides new scientific knowledge.

Besides, the analysis showed that ECEs of the case organization in Germany use one coping strategy to manage occupational stress which they carry out individually or collectively: relaxing activities in their leisure time. ECEs name different hobbies which they do on their own or with a family member. This coping strategy might be linked with the
overall work-life balance of a person. Also, it is in line with a finding of Baumgartner and colleagues (2009) who also found that ECEs participate in a hobby to cope with occupational stress. All other coping strategies found in this study have not been identified before and thus, they provide new in-depth insights on the understudied topic of how ECEs might prevent or cope with occupational stress (Baumgartner et al., 2009).

Moreover, this study found that ECEs of both case organizations seem to experience rather high levels of wellbeing at work. The analysis showed that ECEs experience multiple factors of wellbeing at work on several occasions. This finding shows that ECEs can experience occupational stress and wellbeing at work at the same time. Due to its qualitative nature, the study provides in-depth information on the ECEs’ experiences of wellbeing at work and therefore, it contributes to the academic knowledge of a sparsely researched topic (Faulkner et al., 2016). Furthermore, the groupings of the factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs of both childcare centers emerged from the data of this study and they are the same as the ones that can cause occupational stress. Consequently, it can be noticed that ECEs’ experiences of occupational stress and wellbeing at work stem from the same sources. This finding underlines that work activities, organizational and personal conditions can have positive and at the same time negative influences on ECEs’ work experiences. Also, it shows that the sources of experiencing occupational stress and wellbeing at work can be summarized in four groupings which might be of interest for future studies as they enable a precise overview.

Further, this study revealed indicators for all three dimensions of wellbeing at work: the psychological, the physical and the social (Grant et al., 2007). The results of this study show that some factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs of both childcare centers might be related to pleasure and job satisfaction, as well as to fulfillment and recognizing a purpose in work (psychological dimension). Besides, the analysis found that ECEs of the center in Germany feel well at work when they feel physically healthy (physical dimension). The analysis also found that ECEs of both centers experience the communication with and the support from colleagues as causing wellbeing at work. This factor is related to a well-functioning communication and the provision of actual support; ECEs indicate that this is based on positive relationships among colleagues (social dimension). Finding evidence for psychological wellbeing at work is in line with the findings of Royer and Moreau (2016) who found high levels of psychological wellbeing among ECEs.

Besides, the data analysis of this study found overlaps between several factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs of both case organizations and their coping
strategies. These findings show that wellbeing at work can positively influence the ECEs’ abilities to cope with occupational stress.

Summarized, the main question of this research can be answered as follows. ECEs who work in childcare centers in the Netherlands or in Germany cope with occupational stress by managing, minimizing and/or avoiding occupational stress. When doing so, ECEs employ individual and collective coping strategies. People involved in collective coping strategies are especially the ECEs’ colleagues and managers. Experiences of wellbeing at work or in general have been identified as an individual coping strategy used by ECEs of both centers. Further, several factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs and their coping strategies overlap. Consequently, wellbeing at work can positively influence the ECEs’ abilities to cope with occupational stress.

5.2 Practical Implications
Practical implications can be presented based on the research findings. They mainly include recommendations for both organizations that participated in this study. With regard to ECEs’ experiences of occupational stress one can point out that respondents of both case organizations were able to name and specify several factors i.e. causes of occupational stress (see Table 4). Interviewees of the case organization in the Netherlands emphasized that they do not experience a lot of occupational stress; one ECE even stated that she does not experience any occupational stress. This study found that these rather low levels of occupational stress might be due to high staff-child ratios that enable a work environment which constantly provides a sufficient or even more than a sufficient number of employees (over-staffing). The high staff-child ratios are specific to the case organization in the Netherlands that offers international childcare. The analysis of this study found that ECEs who work in this childcare center can divide tasks and offer mutual support more easily compared to the case organization in Germany that has lower staff-child ratios. Although the education and care work activities of both centers are similar, the analysis revealed that further work activities differ (see sections 4.1.1.1 and 4.2.1.1). ECEs who work in the childcare center in Germany have to accomplish more ‘further work activities’. Consequently, their jobs include more work activities in comparison to the ones of the ECEs who work in the center in the Netherlands. Moreover, the employees and the manager of the center in Germany explained that a shortage of staff is experienced as being problematic and increasing occupational stress. This is especially when several employees are sick at the same time. The problem of a shortage of staff could be managed by increasing the overall staff rate. Or at least substitute regulations should be adjusted. Having access to a sufficient pool of substitute
ECEs in case several ECEs are sick might be helpful. A cooperation with other childcare centers might also be considered to keep down extra costs. Besides, the childcare center in Germany could consider reducing or reorganizing further work activities. This point especially refers to events and meetings that take place in the evening or on the weekends as they cause occupational stress (see section 4.2.1.1). A suggestion might be that events and meetings take place during the common working hours of the ECEs. Thereby, possible conflicts with the education and care of the children and with parents’ working hours need to be considered. Some events or meetings might take place on Friday afternoons; parents may then be able to take the afternoon off from work. Another suggestion might also be based on a higher staff rate; then employees who worked in the evenings or on the weekends could get the extra working hours off soon after the events or meetings. This might avoid experiences of occupational stress. Further, auxiliary staff could be employed to fulfill work activities that do not necessarily have to be carried out by ECEC professionals. For instance, work tasks related to the preparation of church activities and events. But, of course, increasing the overall staff rate of ECEs or employing auxiliary staff is a complex issue due to the limited budgets of the churches. Affordable auxiliary staff may be for instance students, interns or people doing a voluntary social year.

Considering the respondents’ strategies to cope with occupational stress, this study revealed the following. All interviewees of both case organizations seem to successfully employ various individual and collective coping strategies. The data analysis revealed that these coping strategies allow the ECEs to manage, minimize and/or avoid experiences of occupational stress. The study found that the communication with and the support from colleagues and managers is a major collective coping strategy employed by all respondents of both childcare centers. The communication with both the colleagues and the managers is based on openness and honesty. Further, ECEs receive individual support from their managers as a response to communicate (individual) problems. Respondents of both case organizations emphasized that a close contact with the managers helps them to cope with occupational stress. Support from colleagues is received and given mutually. The analysis showed that this coping strategy seems to be of high importance for all respondents. Besides, ECEs of the childcare center in Germany also find the communication with and the support from other people as for instance external advisors and supervisors helpful to manage occupational stress. Especially, when there is a specific problem with a child it was found helpful in the past. The childcare center in the Netherlands might also find it helpful to get in contact with external advisors or supervisors. So, if certain problems will occur in the future, a good and
professional way of handling them can be assured. Generally, it is highly recommended to both childcare centers’ management to maintain a work environment in which communication and support is facilitated and reinforced; may it be with colleagues, the managers or other people as for instance external advisors. With regard to the communication and support among colleagues, it is important to have a sufficient number of employees employed who also get along well with each other. When new employees are recruited, the managers might incorporate current staff in their decisions to enhance the possibility that employees get along well with each other. This procedure is successfully applied in the childcare center in Germany. Besides, team meetings do increase the communication among employees and the managers. The childcare center in Germany has regular team meetings for all employees. The childcare center in the Netherlands does only have regular team meetings with employees who work in the baby group. It is recommended that team meetings will be carried out regularly for all employees.

With regard to ECEs’ experiences of wellbeing at work, this study found that respondents of both case organizations feel well at work. Factors of wellbeing at work were often congruent in both case organizations (see Table 6). Also, the analysis identified overlaps between factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs and their strategies to cope with occupational stress. This finding shows that wellbeing at work can positively influence the ECEs’ coping strategies. It is highly recommended to the managements of both case organizations to further provide or implement practices and policies that enable these experiences of wellbeing at work to remain or get even stronger.

In conclusion, only a few recommendations could be given to both case organizations. With regard to the ECEs’ strategies to cope with occupational stress and their experiences of wellbeing at work, this study revealed rather positive findings in both case organizations. Even though ECEs of both childcare centers experience occupational stress, they seem to be aware of the occupational stress sources and able to cope with them by managing, minimizing and/or even avoiding them. Further, ECEs of both centers experience wellbeing at work which helps them to cope with occupational stress.

Other childcare centers might also learn from the results of this study. In order to reduce or prevent experiences of occupational stress among ECEs, other childcare centers’ managements should pay special attention to organizational policies and practices that allow ECEs to manage, minimize and/or avoid occupational stress. A work environment that allows and fosters the communication and support among colleagues and the manager is especially recommended. Further, all organizational practices and policies that enhance the ECEs’
wellbeing at work are important as the experience of wellbeing at work might help the ECEs to cope with occupational stress.

5.3 Methodological Implications
This study comprises several limitations. One aspect refers to the research topics. The study examines three main topics: occupational stress, coping with occupational stress and wellbeing at work. These are all sensitive topics. Therefore the answers of respondents might be biased. In order to minimize potential biases interviewees were informed twice that the information they provide remains anonymous and would be dealt with confidently.

A further aspect is that all participants are women. Men might experience different sources of occupational stress and also, they might employ different coping strategies. Prior studies found that women and men experience and cope with stress differently (e.g. Matud, 2004). Further studies are encouraged to include both female and male respondents. Generally, the ECEC profession is female dominated, so it might take more time to find male participants. Due to time constraints this research project did not pay attention to possible influences of gender.

This research is a case study examining two case organizations situated in two different European countries. As intended, the findings provide in-depth information on an understudied field of research. The study employed a comparative research strategy and therefore, the findings offer a broader perspective on the research topics. But a generalization of the results of this study is not possible. Further similar studies in similar case organizations are needed. This research provides an interesting starting point and future studies could be based on the findings of this study. In particular, the findings which were the same or similar in both case organizations could be examined in more detail to find out whether they also exist in other childcare centers. It would be interesting to develop a general overview of strategies to cope with occupational stress among ECEs. Thereby, it would be of high interest to adapt the extended definition of coping based on Lazarus and Folkman (1984) (see section 5.1), and to further examine the existence and potential influence of wellbeing at work. Such an overview could also be helpful for practice as it might serve as a guide for childcare centers in which ECEs are not able to cope with occupational stress due to a lack of wellbeing at work or other problematic conditions. Furthermore, respondents of this study have different ages, family and educational backgrounds, as well as tenures. It would be highly interesting to include the influence of such variables when doing further research in the field of study. Because of time constraints this research project could not investigate such possible influences.
A final limitation that needs to be underlined is that the interviews in the childcare center in Germany were carried out in German, which is my as well as the respondents’ (employees and manager) native language. Interviews in the childcare center in the Netherlands were carried out in English, which is neither my nor the respondents’ (employees) native language. As a consequence, it might have been easier for the respondents of the childcare center in Germany to express themselves. This might have influenced the results of this study. To keep possible influences to a minimum a childcare center in the Netherlands was chosen that is an English-speaking organization. Thus, it was assured that all respondents could understand and speak English.

5.4 Conclusion
This study found that ECEs of the case organizations in the Netherlands and in Germany experience occupational stress as well as wellbeing at work. The results reveal several factors of occupational stress and wellbeing at work. The factors are grouped as: ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’, ‘organizational factors’, and/or ‘personal factors’. A main difference is that ECEs of the childcare center in the Netherlands experience occupational stress only resulting from ‘education and care work factors’, ‘further work factors’ and ‘organizational factors’, while ECEs of the childcare center in Germany also experience occupational stress resulting from ‘personal factors’. Also, ECEs of the center in the Netherlands experience lower occupational stress levels than the ECEs of the center in Germany. Experiences of wellbeing at work of ECEs of both centers result from all four factors.

Furthermore, the study found that ECEs of both case organizations employ various individual and collective coping strategies. When ECEs of both childcare centers cope they either manage occupational stress after it occurred, or they minimize and/or avoid occupational stress before it spreads or occurs. ECEs of the case organization in the Netherlands focus more on minimizing and/or avoiding occupational stress, while ECEs of the organization in Germany focus more on managing occupational stress. As the analysis of the data shows, differences in both centers may especially stem from distinct staff-child ratios. The childcare center in the Netherlands has higher staff-child ratios than the center in Germany. The childcare center in the Netherlands is a private and international childcare center, while the center in Germany is church-affiliated. Therefore, the budget of the childcare center in Germany is more restricted and rigid. Consequently, a lower total number of staff can be employed. Also, substitute regulations are rather difficult so that it leads to a shortage of staff at some times.
Moreover, the study found that ECEs of both case organizations employ one individual coping strategy that is related to their experiences of wellbeing, either at work or in general. This individual coping strategy aims to minimize and/or avoid occupational stress. Subsequently, this finding indicates that the experiences of wellbeing (at work) of ECEs of both centers influence how they cope with occupational stress. Further, the study found overlaps between several factors of wellbeing at work as experienced by ECEs and their coping strategies. These findings show that wellbeing at work can positively influence the ECEs’ abilities to cope with occupational stress.
References


Appendices
Appendix 1: Interview Guide

First of all, I want to thank you very much again for your cooperation. I am conducting the interviews as a part of my master thesis about the topic ‘Occupational stress among early childhood educators’. One interview will last a maximum of one hour. And if you do not have any objections, I would like to record the interview. Before we start, I would like to point out again that all information we discuss will remain anonymous and will be dealt with confidentially. Besides, I want you to know that you do not have to answer any question if you do not feel comfortable; just let me know and I can go on and ask the next question. First, we can both introduce ourselves. Then I will ask some questions on your career and your current work. After that I will ask questions on the three main topics: stress at work, dealing with stress at work, and wellbeing at work. All questions refer to your individual experiences and it is your opinion that counts.

Do you have any questions?

I will now turn on the recorder and start with the introduction of myself and the interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Background and General Information</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Could you please introduce yourself briefly?</td>
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Backup questions:
-What is your educational background?
-What is your current position?
-How long have you worked in this position/childcare center?

-What are your main tasks in this position?

-Can you please describe briefly a regular day of work?

Managers only (Staff Management):
-How would you describe your human resource management?
-Can you give me some further information on the management of staff?
### Occupational Stress (Stress at Work)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- To what extent do you experience stress at work?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What makes you feel stressed?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If necessary (more details):
- Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- Do you know more examples?

- What other feelings do you experience as a result of that stress?

### Coping with Occupational Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- How do you deal with the stressful situations you just explained?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If necessary (more details):
- Do you know more examples?

- How do you deal with the (negative) feelings that you experience as a result of stress?

If necessary (more details):
- Do you know more examples?

- What do you do to prevent stress/stressful situations from happening again in the future?

- How do your colleagues help you to better deal with stressful situations?

- How does the employer/management/manager help you to better deal with stressful situations?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Wellbeing at Work</strong></th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-What do you like about your work?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Under which conditions can you work best?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-How do you feel when these conditions are given?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-What at work gives you energy?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Backup question:
-How do your colleagues contribute to your wellbeing at work?

Childcare Center in the Netherlands only:
-What do you like about working in an international childcare center?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Wellbeing at Work and Coping with Occupational Stress</strong></th>
<th>Comments</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Do these feelings of wellbeing/positive experiences at work help you to better deal with stressful situations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Why/why not, can you give examples?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Closing</strong></th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Are there any topics or ideas that you would like to add?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-If so, what would you like to add?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Data Privacy Statement

Data Privacy Statement

In this document you can find all information regarding the use of interview data in my master thesis. The thesis will be written in English and the topic is coping with occupational stress among early childhood educators who work in a childcare center. Besides, the thesis includes a comparison of the Netherlands and Germany. Therefore, data will be collected in one childcare center located in the Netherlands (Name of the childcare center) and a center situated in Germany.

Researcher: Katharina Behnke (k.behnke@student.ru.nl)
Supervisor: Channah Herschberg
Institution: Radboud University Nijmegen
Childcare Center in the Netherlands: (Name of the childcare center)
Study Program: Master of Business Administration: International Management specialized on Human Resource Management

Anonymity

All interview respondents will remain anonymous in the thesis, meaning that they will not be named in it. Instead, I will use terms such as ‘employee’ or ‘early childhood educator’ after quotations.
Each childcare center can decide individually, whether it wants the name of the center to be published in thesis or not. Please inform me about your decision.

Confidentiality

I will handle your data confidentially and with integrity, and I will under no circumstances share any information that you and your employees give with third parties. The thesis will be only accessible for (Name of the childcare center), the German childcare center, and the Radboud University.
Before conducting the interviews, I will ask all respondents whether they agree to record the interview data for the purpose of transcribing it afterwards. I will use a professional voice recorder for the recording, and the data will be deleted immediately after I secured it on an external hard drive.
The transcripts are primarily for my own usage to facilitate the analysis. They will not be attached to the appendix of the thesis. I will copy all transcripts on a CD and deliver it to my supervisor so that she can check that I transcribed all interviews. Afterwards, this CD will be marked as ‘confidential’ and will be stored at the Radboud University. According to the Radboud University, the retention period for research data is a minimum of ten years.
I will offer all respondents the opportunity to check the transcript. If they do not wish that certain statements will be used in the thesis, these are excluded from the analysis and will not be used as quotations.

Citations

In the thesis, I will only use short quotations from the transcripts to underline certain points in the analysis. I will only use quotes in my thesis of which I am sure that the person who said it cannot be identified.
Appendix 3: Information Document

Information Document

Researcher: Katharina Behnke (k.behnke@student.ru.nl)
Supervisor: Channah Herschberg
Institution: Radboud University Nijmegen
Organization: (Name of the childcare center)
Study Program: Master of Business Administration: International Management

Dear participants,

First of all, I want to thank you very much for your cooperation. I am very glad to have the opportunity to conduct the interviews with you. The interviews are a part of my master thesis. In this document, I will briefly introduce myself and my thesis topic. Besides, I will inform you about the use of the interview data, the general procedure, and the main topics of the interviews.

I study International Management specialized on Human Resource Management at the Radboud University in Nijmegen. My master thesis is about ‘Occupational stress among early childhood educators’. As my study includes a comparison of the Netherlands and Germany, I will conduct interviews with early childhood educators working in both countries.

One interview will last a maximum of one hour and if you do not have any objections, I would like to record it with a professional voice recorder. The recording is necessary for me to transcribe the interviews afterwards. The transcripts will help me to prevent information from being misunderstood and to achieve very precise results. You and all information you give will remain anonymous. This means that no names will be used in my thesis. I will only use titles like for instance ‘early childhood educator’ or ‘employee’. If you want to you can check the transcripts of your interviews and if necessary I will adapt quotes. The data will be dealt with confidentially; they will remain in possession of the Radboud University, and not be shared with third parties. I would be very happy to send you a summary of the research findings if you are interested.

The interviews will proceed as follows:
First, I will ask you to introduce yourself. Then I will ask you some brief questions on your career and your current work.
After that I will ask some questions on the following topics:
  • Stress at work (occupational stress)
  • Dealing with stress at work
  • Wellbeing at work

The questions refer to your individual experiences and perceptions. It is your opinion that counts.

I hope that the information above has aroused your interest and I am looking forward to meeting you soon and to conducting the interviews with you. Please feel free to send me an e-mail if you have further questions.

Best regards,

Katharina Behnke