



Who stays, who goes, who knows? A state-wide survey of child welfare workers[☆]



Austin Griffiths^{a,*}, David Royle^b, Kalee Culver^a, Kristine Piescher^c, Yanchen Zhang^d

^a Western Kentucky University, College of Health and Human Services, Department of Social Work, 1906 College Heights Blvd. #11039, Bowling Green, KY 42101, United States

^b University of Kentucky, College of Social Work, 619 Patterson Office Tower, Lexington, KY 40506, United States

^c Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota, 205 Peters Hall, 1404 Gortner Ave., St. Paul, MN 55108, United States

^d Department of Educational Psychology, University of Minnesota, Room 250 EdSciB, 56 East River Parkway, Minneapolis, MN 55455, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Child welfare
Turnover
Retention
Urban
Rural
Job satisfaction

ABSTRACT

Child welfare workforce turnover remains a significant problem with dire consequences. Designed to assist in its retention efforts, an agency supported state-wide survey was employed to capture worker feedback and insight into turnover. This article examines the quantitative feedback from a Southern state's frontline child welfare workforce (N = 511), examining worker intent to leave as those who intend to stay employed at the agency (Stayers), those who are undecided (Undecided), and those who intend to leave (Leavers). A series of One-Way ANOVAs revealed a stratified pattern of worker dissatisfaction, with stayers reporting highest satisfaction levels, followed by undecided workers, and then leavers in all areas (e.g., salary, workload, recognition, professional development, accomplishment, peer support, and supervision). A Multinomial Logistic Regression model revealed significant (and shared) predictors among leavers and undecided workers in comparison to stayers with respect to dissatisfaction with workload and professional development, and working in an urban area. Additionally, child welfare workers who intend to leave the agency in the next 12 months expressed significant dissatisfaction with supervision and accomplishment, and tended to be younger and professionals of color.

1. Introduction

In the federal fiscal year of 2014, an estimated 1580 children died due to child maltreatment. In the same year, an estimated 3.6 million child abuse and neglect referrals were made involving about 6.6 million children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016). Child welfare workers are responsible for responding to these referrals to ensure that children, our most vulnerable population, are living in a safe and healthy environment. Turnover within the child welfare system threatens the ability to respond effectively. It is critical to have a stable, competent, and committed child welfare workforce so that services are properly provided to children and families in need (McFadden, Campbell, & Taylor, 2015). However, families are facing many negative consequences due to high rates of turnover within the child welfare system (Schudrich et al., 2013). For example, when turnover is high, the cases of families continuously pass from one worker to another (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). There are also not enough staff to meet performance standards required for effective child welfare

service provision (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007). Child welfare workers have a difficult time completing investigations in a timely manner and are limited in their ability to perform family visits (Government Accountability Office, 2003). Additionally, employee turnover can be costly in terms of recruitment, the training of new workers, and the loss of productivity (Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, 2007); the estimated cost for every child welfare worker that leaves the agency is \$54,000 (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2016).

The turnover rate within the child welfare system has been estimated to be between 30 and 40% each year (GAO, 2003), and according to Fernandes (2016), the majority of child welfare workers look for a different job every few months. However, inconsistent definitions of turnover create difficulty in determining accurate percentages (Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & Lane, 2005). Intention to leave does not guarantee actual turnover (Gonzalez, Faller, Ortega, & Tropman, 2009) and polarizing those who intend to stay vs. those who intend to leave omits one very important group of child welfare workers – those who are undecided about their intentions. This study seeks to enhance the field's

[☆] This research was not supported by any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: austin.griffiths@wku.edu (A. Griffiths), droyse@uky.edu (D. Royle), kalee.culver805@topper.wku.edu (K. Culver), kpiesche@umn.edu (K. Piescher), zhan4388@umn.edu (Y. Zhang).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.04.012>

Received 5 January 2017; Received in revised form 12 April 2017; Accepted 12 April 2017

Available online 14 April 2017

0190-7409/© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

understanding of child welfare workforce turnover by assessing and comparing satisfaction levels of child welfare workers who intend to leave the field, those who intend to stay, and those who remain undecided. Focusing on, and better supporting, those who are undecided may be a more efficient and effective strategy for reducing workforce turnover than focusing on those who have already made the decision to leave the agency.

2. Factors influencing turnover and retention

Empirical research has documented factors that contribute to worker retention and turnover in the child welfare system. Some factors are considered individual level factors while others occur at the organizational level. For example, individual level factors contributing to retention include a child welfare worker's sense of accomplishment, professional commitment, and job satisfaction (Williams, Nichols, Kirk, & Wilson, 2011). Organizational factors that contribute to retention include reasonable workloads, better salary, and opportunities for advancement (Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; Ellett et al., 2007; Zlotnik et al., 2005). Coworker and supervisor support (Williams et al., 2011; Zlotnik et al., 2005; Kim & Kao, 2014) as well as recognition (Williams et al., 2011; Barth, Lloyd, Christ, Chapman, & Dickinson, 2008; Ellett et al., 2007) have also been found to be organizational factors that influence retention and turnover. While there has not been a generally accepted theory developed to explain turnover or retention specifically within the child welfare system, research consistently points to several key factors of worker satisfaction and dissatisfaction that are often associated with turnover and/or retention. These factors are the focus of the current study, and are described in detail below. Additionally, although research on the topic is scarce, it is possible that other factors, such as race/ethnicity and geographical setting (urban/rural) are associated with retention and turnover (Yankeelov, Barbee, Sullivan, & Antle, 2009).

2.1. Workload

Reasonable workloads have been found to contribute to the retention of child welfare workers (Zlotnik et al., 2005). However, many child welfare workers experience work overload (Ellett et al., 2007; Kim, 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2011). Some child welfare workers have reported assuming responsibility for twenty to thirty cases at a time, which forces them to work abnormally long hours (Ellett et al., 2007). These large caseloads often lead to emotional exhaustion (Kim, 2011), low self-esteem (McFadden et al., 2015), and turnover (Gonzalez et al., 2009).

2.2. Salary

Low salary has been identified as a factor that negatively affects worker retention and creates turnover in child welfare (Zlotnik et al., 2005). In a study by Williams et al. (2011), only 3% of the Georgia child welfare workers surveyed reported satisfaction with their salary. Non-competitive salaries can often lead to low self-esteem (McFadden et al., 2015) and turnover (Ellett et al., 2007).

2.3. Recognition

Child welfare workers often feel undervalued; this factor can contribute to turnover (Ellett et al., 2007). Feeling undervalued and receiving little to no recognition from supervisors or the child welfare organization has a major negative influence on job satisfaction for these workers (Cahalane & Sites, 2008; Barth et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2011). Child welfare agencies experience higher levels of scrutiny than other social service organizations (Blome & Steib, 2014) which is just one reason why child welfare workers need to feel valued and recognized by the organization employing them. Providing recognition

may help to abate the negative feelings associated with this scrutiny and have positive effects on worker retention, as an organizational focus on rewards and incentives significantly minimized intention to leave in a study of 781 child welfare workers in New York (Shim, 2010).

2.4. Professional development

Workers with little opportunity for advancement are typically less satisfied (Barth et al., 2008) which often leads to turnover (Ellett et al., 2007). Workers are more likely to stay in public child welfare when opportunities for advancement are present (Zlotnik et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2011) as well as opportunities to perform new tasks that encompass more of their talents and skills (Cahalane & Sites, 2008).

2.5. Accomplishment

The feeling of personal accomplishment can serve as a predictor of retention within public child welfare (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). However, public child welfare workers have reported feeling lower levels of accomplishment than social workers in other settings (Kim, 2011). Feelings of ineffectiveness can lead to turnover (Williams et al., 2011).

2.6. Peer support

Coworker support has been found to have a positive influence on retention of child welfare workers (Williams et al., 2011) in some studies, but in others it has not been found to be a strong influence (Boyas, Wind, & Kang, 2011; Kim & Kao, 2014). One study revealed that supervisor support is a stronger predictor of worker retention in child welfare than peer support (Chenot, Benton, & Kim, 2009). However, coworker support may be a predictor of retention when it comes to less experienced workers (Curry, McCarragher, & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2005; Chenot et al., 2009).

2.7. Supervision

Research has found that the quality of supervision that child welfare workers receive has a major impact on their level of job satisfaction (Barth et al., 2008); however, many workers feel a lack of respect from their supervisors (Augsberger, Schudrich, McGowan, & Auerbach, 2012). Higher levels of support from supervisors increases retention (Benton, 2016). Workers who receive guidance and have a secure relationship with their supervisors are more likely to stay (Yankeelov et al., 2009) whereas workers whose supervisors make tasks more difficult are more likely to leave (Faller, Grabarek, & Ortega, 2010). Child welfare workers that receive more than two hours of supervision a week have been found to be more satisfied (Barth et al., 2008).

2.8. Race and ethnicity

Community support may help to bolster a worker's sense of personal accomplishment, particularly for child welfare workers who come from underrepresented communities, such as communities of color (Smith & Clark, 2011). This may be particularly true because of the lack of diversity within the child welfare workforce (Barth et al., 2008). While urban settings often offer more diversity than rural settings (Aguiniga, Madden, Faulkner, & Salehin, 2013), research on the influence race and ethnicity have on retention and turnover is mixed. One study found no influence (Yankeelov et al., 2009) while another found that workers of color are less committed to staying in their child welfare positions (Faller et al., 2010).

2.9. Rural or urban location

Child welfare workers in rural settings have reported higher levels of job satisfaction (Barth et al., 2008) and a greater intention to stay at

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4936457>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4936457>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)