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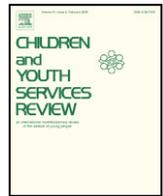


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Differential factors influencing public and voluntary child welfare workers' intention to leave

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ABSTRACT

Although several studies have explored personal and organizational factors impacting retention and turnover in *public* or *private* agencies, there are no studies comparing the similarities and differences between voluntary and public child welfare settings. The research reported here is designed to contribute to knowledge about the differential factors that may contribute to worker retention and turnover in the voluntary (private, non-profit) and public child welfare sectors. The current research expands knowledge of the child welfare workforce by comparing the difference in factors contributing to job satisfaction and turnover between the voluntary and public child welfare sectors in a large urban community. The research includes workers from 202 voluntary agencies ($n=538$) and from one large public child welfare agency ($n=144$).

The bivariate analyses revealed that public agency workers were more satisfied with their opportunities for promotion, benefits, and the nature of their work, whereas the voluntary agency workers were more satisfied with their co-workers. A structural equation model (SEM) revealed that lower investment in child welfare work was associated with intent to leave for both samples, as was lower satisfaction with contingent rewards and the nature of their work. Moreover, agency auspice was strongly predictive of intent to leave. Voluntary child welfare workers had stronger intentions to leave, despite the fact they displayed higher investment in child welfare work in the bivariate analysis. The key factor predicting voluntary agency workers' intention to leave was their dissatisfaction with their level of pay.

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1. Introduction

It is well known that the recruitment and retention of a competent and qualified child welfare workforce impacts the child welfare system's ability to provide high quality services to at risk children and families (Child Welfare League of America, 2008; U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO], 2003, 2006). However, national studies of public and private child welfare agencies report annual turnover rates ranging between 20 and 40%, with length of employment averaging less than 2 years (American Public Human Services Association [APHSA], 2001, 2005; GAO, 2003). This is problematic because it takes approximately 2 years to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to become effective and independent child welfare practitioners (Louisiana Job Force Task, 2000). In an attempt to better understand the child welfare "workforce crisis," many researchers have examined the relationship between personal and organizational factors and turnover rates among child welfare staff (DePanfilis &

Zlotnik, 2008; MorBarak, Nissly & Levin, 2001; Strolin, McCarthy & Caringi, 2007; Yankeelov, Barbee, Sullivan & Antle, 2009; Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining & Lane, 2005). Although several studies have explored personal and organizational factors impacting retention and turnover in *public* or *private* agencies, there are no studies comparing the similarities and differences between voluntary and public child welfare settings. The research reported here is designed to contribute to knowledge about the differential factors that may contribute to worker retention and turnover in the voluntary and public child welfare sectors.

A study by the Casey Foundation estimated that the average annual turnover for public sector agencies was 20% compared to 40% for voluntary agencies. The average tenure of public agency workers was 7 years compared to 3 years for voluntary workers (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). According to the US General Accounting Office (2003), public agencies offer higher salaries to their staff, but disparities can vary widely from state to state. In another study the turnover rate in voluntary agencies was reported to be 45% for casework and case management positions and 44% for supervisors (Drais-Parrillo, as cited in the Child Welfare League of America, 2008).

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High turnover rates have both fiscal and human service costs. For example, there are large financial costs associated with the recruitment, hiring and training of new staff (MorBarak, Nissly & Levin, 2001). When staff members leave, cases are reassigned to current workers, resulting in high caseloads, emotional exhaustion, and a focus on more immediate issues such as crisis situations at the expense of case planning and meeting child safety and permanency planning goals (Cahalane and Sites, 2008; GAO, 2003). Instability in the child welfare workforce also leads to a lack of case continuity. This impacts the worker's ability to develop and maintain strong working relationships with children and families, an essential component of effective child welfare casework (GAO, 2003).

According to Yankeelov, Barbee, Sullivan and Antle (2009) the most consistently studied personal factors contributing to turnover include education, job satisfaction, burnout, personal and professional commitment, and role conflict. The most consistently examined organizational factors include co-worker and supervisor support, quality of supervision, workload, salary and organizational commitment (Yankeelov et al., 2009). DePanfilis and Zlotnik (2008) published a recent systematic review of the personal and organizational factors that limit turnover and enhance retention among public child welfare workers. Out of 154 documents identified, nine studies were selected based on their utilization of a multivariate analysis to explore the relationship between personal and organizational factors and retention (Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Ellett, 2000; Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Nissly, MorBarak & Levin, 2005; Ellett, Ellett and Rugutt, 2003; Drake and Yadama, 1996; Rosenthal, McDowell & White, 1998; Rosenthal & Waters, 2004). Study results cited significant factors for remaining employed including commitment to child welfare, self-efficacy, low levels of emotional exhaustion, supervisory support, co-worker support, salary and benefits.

A number of other recent studies identified key variables impacting turnover and retention of child welfare staff. These include commitment to child welfare (Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, 2007; Weaver, Chang, Clark, & Rhee, 2007; Westbrook, Ellis & Ellett, 2006; O'Donnell & Kirkner), job satisfaction (Cahalane, & Sites, 2008; MorBarak et al., 2006; Strolin-Goltzman, Auerbach, McGowan, McCarthy, 2008; Weaver et al., 2007), supervisory support (Smith, 2005; Ellett et al., 2007; Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007; Strand & Dore, 2009; Westbrook et al., 2006; Yankeelov, Barbee Sullivan & Antle, 2008), and salary and benefits (Westbrook et al., 2006). Interestingly, a recent study by Jayarante and Coulborn (2009) comparing the commitment of private and public child welfare workers found that private child welfare workers were less committed to their agencies than their public counterparts. This could contribute significantly to differences in turnover rates.

1.1. Framework for research

The current research expands knowledge of the child welfare workforce by comparing the difference in factors contributing to job satisfaction and turnover between the voluntary and public child welfare sectors in a large urban community. The data presented here were originally drawn from two separate studies conducted in part by the same investigators during almost the same time period, using the same data collection instrument. The first study of public agency workers was part of a larger study of public child welfare workers in five counties in the state funded by the U.S. Children's Bureau. (Briar-Lawson et al., 2008). The second study, initiated within two months of the completion of data collection for the first study, was designed to inform the City children's service agency about staff retention issues in voluntary, non-profit contract agencies funded by the City. When the reports for these two studies were completed, it was decided to obtain comparative knowledge about the two populations by using an advanced statistical method, SEM, to analyze the combined results of the research.

2. Methods

The Institutional Review Boards of Columbia University and Yeshiva University each approved both studies, which were conducted from May 2007 to March 2008.

2.1. Sampling

The research includes workers from 202 voluntary agencies ($n = 538$) and from one large public child welfare agency ($n = 144$). For the voluntary agencies, all workers and supervisors in the 204 preventive service programs under contract with the City at that time ($N = 1624$) were asked to respond to an anonymous survey. Voluntary preventive service programs in this City are designed to help families in which children are at risk of abuse, neglect, and/or foster placement. They provide a range of family-tailored services that can promote child safety, positive family relationships, and community linkages, all oriented toward preserving the family unit.

Out of the potential pool of 1624 respondents (supervisors, social workers, caseworkers, case planners), a total of 538 survey responses were returned. This represents a 33.1% response rate. To obtain this response, the directors of each program received a cover letter with sufficient copies of the survey instrument packet consisting of the survey, a consent form, and a stamped return envelope for each of the staff members. They were asked to distribute the instrument packet to each worker and supervisor, encouraging, but not requiring, them to participate. Efforts to increase this response rate included a letter to all the program directors from the deputy commissioner responsible for preventive services explaining the City's interest in the study and asking their cooperation; a follow up letter from the research team; and repeated calls to the directors of programs with low response rates.

Data for the public agency study were obtained from a non-probability sample of public child welfare workers. The participants for this study were recruited from a sampling frame of 422 child welfare employees in one office of a large public child welfare agency. All front-line caseworkers and supervisors in this site, most of whom were responsible for child protective services, were invited to participate in the study in May 2007. One hundred forty-four employees responded to the survey, resulting in a response rate of 34%. Efforts to increase this response rate included repeated visits to the study site at different days and times with coffee and refreshments provided to all who agreed to participate.

2.2. Measures

The survey instrument administered is a modified version of an instrument developed to examine job satisfaction and potential turnover among public child welfare workers in one urban and three upstate counties in the state. This was developed as part of a study on workforce retention in public child welfare funded by the U.S. Children's Bureau (Strolin-Goltzman, Auerbach, McGowan & McCarthy, 2008).

One of the key components of the instrument was the Job Satisfaction Survey (JSS) developed by Spector, 1985. This is designed to measure job satisfaction in human service organizations by assessing nine aspects of job satisfaction: pay, promotional opportunities, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards (appreciation and recognition), operating procedures, co-workers, nature of work, and satisfaction. It is a 36 item self-report questionnaire that uses a 6-point Likert scale with items ranging from 1 = disagree very much to 6 = agree very much. Reported reliability for this scale is high with total satisfaction coefficient alpha = .91 ($n = 2870$). Coefficient alphas for the subscales ranged from .60 (co-workers) to .82 (supervision). Our only modification was to use a 4-point rating scale ranging from 1 = agree strongly to 4 = disagree strongly, with some items reverse scored. This modification was made so that the job satisfaction scale

could use the same format as other scales in our survey. As in previous research (Auerbach, McGowan & LaPorte, 2007), this modification did not affect internal reliability, as the total satisfaction coefficient alpha was .89. Coefficient alphas for the subscales used on the study sample were similar to those reported above, ranging from .54 (operations) to .80 (supervision). Each of the subscales incorporated 4 items; Table 1 provides examples.

Other variables intended to measure intention to leave were examined with items that asked the participants if they had “considered looking for another job in the past year,” “spoke to their spouse/partner about leaving,” “made phone inquiries,” and “went on interviews.” These items were recoded as 0 (absent) and 1 (present). Two items were used to measure career satisfaction: “When you began planning your career, was casework your first choice?” and “If you turned back the clock and revisited your decision to take this job in this agency, would you make the same decision?” These items were also coded as 0 (absent) and 1 (present).

Variables intended to measure investment in child welfare work (investment) included the following, “I have too much time vested in my line of work to change;” “It would be very costly to switch my line of work;” “It would be emotionally difficult to change my line of work;” and “For me to change my line of work would mean giving up a substantial investment.” These items were derived from Landsman's (2001) study and were measured on a 5-point Likert scale with items ranging from 1 = agree strongly to 5 = disagree strongly.

2.3. Model specification

The purpose of this analysis was to develop a model to determine how different factors influence public and voluntary child welfare workers' intention to leave their agencies. We hypothesized that auspices (public or private), job satisfaction and workers' perceptions of their investment in child welfare work are related to the intention to leave. As a result, we tested for the presence of two latent constructs: investment in child welfare work and intention to leave. Various aspects of work satisfaction (supervision, benefits, pay, etc.) were tested in the model. Investment in child welfare work, the observed endogenous variables are: “I have too much time vested in my line of work to change;” “It would be very costly to switch my line

of work;” “It would be emotionally difficult to change my line of work” and “For me to change my line of work would mean giving up a substantial investment.” The coefficient alpha for this scale was .78. For intent to leave, the variables are: “I have thought about leaving in the past year;” “I spoke to my spouse about leaving;” “I looked in the paper;” “I searched the internet” and “I sent out resumes.” Coefficient alpha for this scale was .89.

Joreskog (1993) describes three uses for SEM: strictly confirmatory (SC), alternative models (AM), and model generating (MG). SC implies that there is a single a priori theory that can be accepted or rejected based upon the data. Kline (2005) points out that there are very few research situations that meet these limited criteria. AM implies that the researcher tests alternative models on a single set of data and then selects the best alternative. This is used rarely since it is difficult to establish alternative models a priori (Joreskog, 1993). MG is the most common SEM research situation. The goal of MG is to produce a model rather than to test it. Kline (2005) refers to GM as “model discovery” that has two criteria: it makes sense theoretically and it fits the data well statistically. In this research the model generating form of SEM was utilized to determine how different factors influence public and voluntary child welfare workers' intention to leave their agencies.

3. Results

Frequencies, cross-tabulations and *t*-tests were used to look at the total sample, both as a single group of child welfare workers, and as two separate groups of voluntary workers and public workers.

Overall, the sample was 85% female and 15% male. The average age of the sample was 36.7 years ($SD = 11.3$). Forty percent of the workers were married while 44.5% had never been married. Ten percent of the workers were divorced. Most workers (61.7%) had at least one major type of family responsibility (e.g., child or elder care) outside of work. The sample was well educated. More than a third (37.9%) of respondents had a bachelor's degree, and 44.3% had a master's degree. Less than half (41.4%) of the sample had social work-specific degrees with 6.3% having BSWs and 35.1% having earned an MSW.

Four-fifths (78.9%) of the workers were employed at the voluntary child welfare agencies while 21.1% worked at the public agency. Forty-six percent of the sample earned salaries between \$35,000 and \$45,000 per year, and 61.8% of workers stated that their household income was between \$30,000 and \$50,000 per year. Almost 21% of workers reported household incomes over \$70,000 per year. On average, workers reported that they had been employed at their agencies for 5.7 years and had been in their current positions for 4 years.

T-tests and cross-tabulations were performed to determine the differences between workers employed at the voluntary agencies and the public agency. There were no significant differences between the groups on gender, age, or marital status.

Voluntary and public workers did vary from each other on various personal attributes including family responsibility, level of education, salary, and household income. Additionally, public and voluntary workers varied on whether this was their first position in child welfare, length of employment in their agencies, and tenure in current position.

Public workers had more family responsibilities outside of work than did voluntary workers. Twenty-four percent of public workers had multiple family responsibilities while only 17.2% of voluntary workers had this level of responsibility, and 40.7% of voluntary workers had no family responsibilities while only 29.2% of public workers had none ($X^2 = 7.01, p = 0.03$). A fifth (19%) of public workers had BSWs compared to 2.9% of voluntary workers. Additionally, more public workers had completed some graduate school (17.6%) than voluntary workers (7.6%). Conversely, 39.4% of voluntary workers had MSWs compared to only 19% of public workers ($X^2 = 95.6, p = 0.00$).

Salary and household income data were analyzed through cross-tabulations as survey respondents were asked about these variables

Table 1
Job satisfaction sub-scales.

Promotion:	There is really too little chance for promotion on my job. Those who do well on the job stand a fair chance of being promoted.
Supervision:	My supervisor is quite competent in doing his/her job. My supervisor is unfair to me.
Benefits:	I am not satisfied with the benefits I receive. The benefits we receive are as good as most organizations offer.
Contingent rewards:	When I do a good job, I receive the recognition I should receive. I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated.
Pay:	I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do. I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases.
Operating procedures:	Many of our rules and procedures make doing a good job difficult. My efforts to do a good job are seldom blocked by red tape.
Co-worker:	I like the people with whom I work. I find I have to work harder at my job than I should because of the incompetence.
Nature of work:	I sometimes feel my job is meaningless. I like doing the things I do at work.
Communication:	Communication seems good within this organization. The goals of the organization are not clear to me.

categorically. In terms of individual salaries, public workers had significantly higher salaries than voluntary workers. A majority (54.5%) of the public workers made more than \$45,000 while only 24% of the voluntary workers achieved that salary level ($X^2 = 60.9$, $p = 0.00$). In terms of total household income, 14.9% of voluntary workers had a total household income of less than \$35,000 while only 5.5% of public workers had a total household income of less than \$35,000. Conversely, 25.7% of voluntary workers had a total household income of greater than \$70,000, while none of public workers achieved this income level ($X^2 = 192.2$, $p = 0.00$). The groups also differed in whether this was their first job in child welfare. More than two-thirds (68.9%) of public workers were in their first full-time job in child welfare compared to 59% of voluntary workers ($X^2 = 4.3$, $p = 0.04$). Table 2 summarizes all of these characteristics.

Table 3 describes differences in means between the samples. Length of current employment and tenure in current position were analyzed using *t*-tests. Public workers had been employed at their agencies longer than those at voluntary agencies (9.48 years vs. 4.63 years, $t = 8.3$, $p = 0.00$). Additionally, public workers averaged 5.41 years in their current positions, while voluntary workers were in their positions for an average of 3.56 years ($t = 3.1$, $p = 0.00$).

Job satisfaction was looked at as an aggregate of the nine domains specified in the Spector (1985) instrument including satisfaction with: pay, promotion, supervision, benefits, operating procedures,

contingent rewards, co-workers, nature of the work, and communication. *T*-tests were performed for each of these domains by type of worker, and it was found that public workers were significantly more satisfied than voluntary workers in three domains, though voluntary workers were significantly more satisfied than public workers in one domain. Public workers were more satisfied with opportunities for promotion than were voluntary workers with means of 10.06 and 8.99, respectively ($t = 4.24$, $p = 0.00$). Public workers were significantly more satisfied with their benefits with a mean of 11.46 compared to 9.63 for the voluntary workers ($t = 7.13$, $p = 0.00$). Finally, public workers were significantly more satisfied with the nature of their work, with a mean of 13.67, as opposed to voluntary workers, with a mean of 12.14 ($t = 6.10$, $p = 0.00$). Voluntary workers were more satisfied with their co-workers than public workers with means of 12.30 and 10.03, respectively ($t = -10.26$, $p = 0.00$). No differences existed between the groups on the other domains. A composite job satisfaction scale was created combining all domains, and it was found that public workers expressed significantly more overall job satisfaction on average than voluntary workers, ($t = 2.04$, $p = 0.04$).

Respondents were asked five questions on how invested they felt in their agencies and jobs, and in three of the five, it was found that voluntary workers believed they were more invested than public workers said they were. Almost two-thirds (63.6%) of public workers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I would have many options if I decided to change my work" versus 58.5% of voluntary workers ($X^2 = 9.5$, $p = 0.05$). Thirty-one percent of voluntary workers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "It would be emotionally difficult to change my line of work" while this was the case for only 23.9% of public workers ($X^2 = 13.7$, $p = 0.01$). Forty-three percent (43.6%) of voluntary workers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "For me to change my line of work would mean giving up a substantial investment in training," while only 29.7% of public workers felt the same way ($X^2 = 11.1$, $p = 0.03$).

Workers' perception of efficacy was determined by asking three related questions. In all three, voluntary workers believed their work made a more significant difference to their clients and society than public workers. Most (89.8%) of the voluntary workers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "By being a social worker, I believe I am making a difference" compared to 72.7% of public workers ($X^2 = 31.71$, $p = 0.00$). Most (92.6%) voluntary workers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "As a social worker I am able to provide help to people who need my assistance" while 79.4% of public workers expressed the same level of agreement ($X^2 = 25.16$, $p = 0.00$). Additionally, 91.8% of voluntary workers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I believe that my work as a social worker is important to society" as compared to 82.9% of public workers ($X^2 = 21.92$, $p = 0.00$).

Results of the Structural equation model (SEM) with categorical factors on the samples are displayed in Fig. 1, where circles represent latent variables and squares indicate observed endogenous variables. The absence of a line connecting variables indicates no direct effect. Because of its incorporation of routines to analyze categorical dependent variables, Mplus 5.21 (Muthen & Muthen, 2009) was utilized to test the model. Weighted least squares using a diagonal weight matrix (WLSMV) were utilized to estimate the model. This type of estimation is recommended when binary dependent variables are present in a model (Muthen & Muthen, 2009, pp. 424–426). This method of estimation also utilizes an adjusted chi-square test statistic for more accurate results (Hipp & Bollen, 2003). The model fits the data well for both samples as indicated by various fit indices, with a $X^2 = 51.6$, $df = 37$, and $p = .07$. The chi-square indicates that the sample model does not differ significantly from the hypothesized population model. The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was .003. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) were .99.

The hypothesis that the latent construct *investment in child welfare work* is associated to the latent construct of *intention to leave* is confirmed by the standardized parameter estimate between these concepts

Table 2
Selected demographics of the samples.

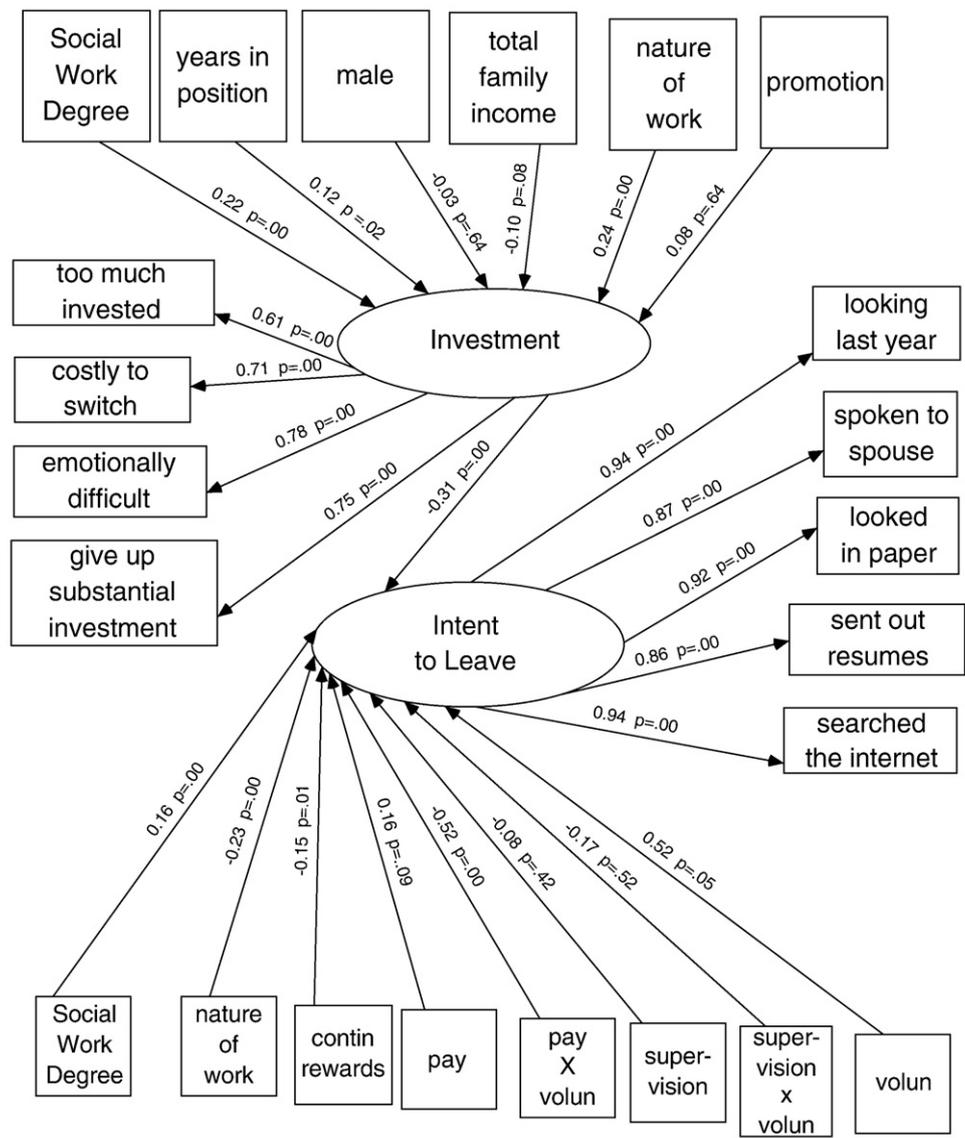
	Sample type			
	Public workers		Voluntary workers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Family responsibility				
None	40	29.2	208	40.7
Child care or other family care	64	46.7	215	42.1
Child care and other family care	33	24.1	88	17.2
	$X^2 = 7.01$; $df = 2$; $p = 0.03$			
Education levels				
High School	3	2.1	6	1.1
Some college	1	0.7	6	1.1
Associate's degree	5	3.5	11	2.1
Bachelor's degree	53	37.3	158	30.1
BSW	27	19.0	15	2.9
Some graduate school	25	17.6	40	7.6
MSW	27	19.0	207	39.4
Doctorate	1	0.7	6	1.1
Other graduate degree	0	0	62	11.8
Other	0	0	14	2.7
	$X^2 = 95.59$; $df = 9$; $p = 0.00$			
Salary				
\$25,000 or less	0	0	11	2.2
\$25,001–\$30,000	1	0.8	24	4.9
\$30,001–\$35,000	3	2.4	107	21.8
\$35,001–\$45,000	52	42.3	231	47.1
\$45,001–\$50,000	28	22.8	62	12.6
Greater than \$50,000	39	31.7	56	11.4
	$X^2 = 60.91$; $df = 5$; $p = 0.00$			
Household income				
\$25,000 or less	0	0	5	1.1
\$25,001–\$30,000	1	.9	9	2.0
\$30,001–\$35,000	5	4.6	54	11.8
\$35,001–\$45,000	26	23.6	115	25.2
\$45,001–\$50,000	17	15.5	43	9.4
\$50,001–\$55,000	61	55.5	29	6.4
\$55,001–\$60,000	0	0	19	4.2
\$60,001–\$65,000	0	0	26	5.7
\$65,001–\$70,000	0	0	39	8.6
Greater than \$70,000	0	0	117	25.7
	$X^2 = 192.2$; $df = 9$; $p = 0.00$			
First job in child welfare				
Yes	91	68.9	307	59
No	41	31.1	213	41
	$X^2 = 4.3$; $df = 1$; $p = 0.04$			

Table 3
T-tests: mean differences on job satisfaction and tenure factors.

	Auspices						t	p
	Public workers			Voluntary workers				
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD		
Length of employment at agency	142	9.48	8.52	515	4.63	5.33	8.30	0.00
Length of time in position	135	5.41	9.11	484	3.56	5.02	3.10	0.00
Satisfaction with pay	141	7.73	3.14	503	7.89	2.70	-0.59	0.55
Satisfaction with opportunities for promotion	141	10.06	2.58	490	8.99	2.63	4.24	0.00
Satisfaction with supervision	141	13.13	2.74	508	12.83	2.50	1.27	0.21
Satisfaction with benefits	141	11.46	3.15	490	9.63	2.54	7.13	0.00
Satisfaction with operating procedures	141	8.38	2.75	505	8.42	1.86	-0.18	0.86
Satisfaction with contingent rewards	141	9.55	3.45	506	9.96	2.51	-1.58	0.12
Satisfaction with co-workers	141	10.03	2.83	512	12.30	2.16	10.26	0.00
Satisfaction with nature of work	141	13.67	3.89	509	12.14	2.18	6.10	0.00
Satisfaction with communication	141	10.67	3.44	504	11.03	2.26	-1.50	0.14
Composite job satisfaction	144	96.14	19.46	392	93.09	13.54	2.04	0.04

displayed in Figure 1 (-0.3 ; $p = .00$). This indicates that *investment in child welfare work* is predictive of intention to leave. In fact, satisfaction decreases as worker intention to leave increases.

The hypothesis that the exogenous independent indicator “voluntary agency” is associated to the latent concept *intention to leave* is confirmed by the standardized parameter estimates between these



Note: $\chi^2 = 51.6$; $df = 37$; $p = 0.06$; CFI=.99; TLI=.99; RMSEA=.03

Fig. 1. SEM Model.

concepts. This indicates that the type of auspice (voluntary or public) is strongly predictive of *intention to leave* (.52, $p = .00$). Workers from voluntary agencies have stronger *intentions to leave*. The exogenous independent indicators “social work degree,” “nature of work,” and “contingent rewards” parameters were statistically significant with values of .14 ($p = .00$), $-.23$ ($p = .00$), and .15 ($p = .01$), respectively, on *intention to leave*.

To answer the question, “do different indicators influence voluntary or public agencies more?” the interaction of auspice with the following indicators were tested: “satisfaction with the nature of work, X voluntary;” “satisfaction with contingent rewards X voluntary;” “satisfaction with pay X voluntary;” and “satisfaction with supervision X voluntary.” The model was re-specified to select the best-fitting model to the data, which includes the interactions of auspice with “satisfaction with pay X voluntary” and “satisfaction with supervision X voluntary.” The coefficient of .52 ($p = .00$) for “satisfaction with pay X voluntary” indicates that this indicator impacts voluntary workers’ intentions to leave but not public workers’ intentions to leave.

Exogenous independent indicators “social work degree,” “years in position,” parameters and “satisfaction with nature of work” were statistically significant on *investment* with standardized parameters of .22 ($p = .00$), .12 ($p = .00$) and .24 ($p = .00$).

4. Discussion

The bivariate analyses conducted by means of cross-tabulations and *t*-tests of difference between the means revealed some interesting differences between the voluntary and public child welfare workers. The public agency workers were more satisfied with their opportunities for promotion, benefits, and the nature of their work, whereas the voluntary agency workers were more satisfied with their co-workers. Interesting demographic and social differences also emerged between the two groups. Although there was no difference in mean age, the public agency workers were employed longer in their agency and in their current position, earned higher salaries, and had more family responsibilities. Although more had attended graduate school of some type, the voluntary agency workers had a higher proportion of MSWs. Most important, the voluntary agency workers displayed a higher investment in child welfare work and a higher sense of efficacy in their work.

The SEM analysis revealed interesting findings about the total sample. Investment in child welfare work was associated with lower intent to leave for both samples, as was satisfaction with contingent rewards and the nature of their work. Total job satisfaction was highly predictive of intent to leave. Moreover, agency auspice was strongly predictive of intent to leave. Voluntary child welfare workers had stronger intentions to leave, despite the fact they displayed higher investment in child welfare work in the bivariate analysis. The key factor predicting voluntary agency workers’ intention to leave was their dissatisfaction with their level of pay.

4.1. Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this research. One is that both samples were drawn from a very large city. Second, these were not random samples; and despite repeated recruitment efforts, response rates were only one-third for each of the public and private samples. Third, because of the length of time needed to establish the construct validity of a measure, this type of validity could not be established for the intent to leave and investment scales. Still, these scales demonstrated strong internal reliability. Finally, although the workers were all in child welfare, the public agency workers were primarily in child protection and the voluntary agency workers were all in preventive services. We have no way of knowing what difference this could make in our findings.

5. Conclusion and implications

As discussed above, there are enormous human service and fiscal costs associated with high turnover in both the public and voluntary child welfare sectors. A number of our findings regarding factors associated with intent to leave such as job satisfaction, commitment to child welfare, self-efficacy, and salary and benefits parallel the findings of earlier studies on different sectors of the child welfare workforce and have important implications. However, three critical factors highlighted in this study as associated with intention to leave among *both* public and voluntary child welfare workers deserve particular attention. These factors are: lower worker investment in child welfare work; lower worker satisfaction with the nature of their work; and lower worker satisfaction with their contingent rewards. Both of the separate prior studies we conducted also highlighted the importance of contingent rewards for these workers. Although agency administrators can and should attempt to improve the level their workers’ investment and their satisfaction with the nature of their work, this would probably require different recruitment strategies, more careful hiring decisions, and perhaps some restructuring of workers’ tasks. In contrast, it would be relatively easy for administrators and supervisors to increase the level of appreciation and support, i.e., contingent rewards they provide to workers.

Perhaps most interesting, the structural equation modeling revealed that satisfaction with level of pay was most predictive of voluntary agency workers’ intent to leave. This finding is consistent with the 2003 report of the General Accounting Office, Child Welfare: HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff. It states, ‘Low salaries, in particular, hinder agencies’ ability to attract potential child welfare workers and to retain those already in the field.... Disparities in the salaries between public and private child welfare workers—with public agency case-workers generally earning higher salaries—also present a retention challenge within the child welfare profession’ (GAO, 2003, p.3). The U.S. Children’s Bureau has made a number of efforts to respond to the recommendations inherent in this report related to increased research and training, but to our knowledge, there has been no systematic effort to initiate programs that would increase the salaries of child welfare workers, particularly in the voluntary sector.

Although the workers in both of the prior studies indicated low levels of satisfaction with their pay, the extent of their dissatisfaction did not distinguish the workers who intended to leave in either sector. This new finding highlights the value of SEM analysis and should give increased credence to the voluntary agency executives who have long argued the need for higher salaries in order to retain their workers. With the current shift in public policy toward increased privatization and contracting with voluntary agencies for the provision of child welfare services, this finding assumes greater importance. It is essential that the public sector implement ways to insure that child welfare workers in voluntary agencies are paid fair and adequate salaries.

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