1-1-2012

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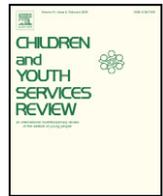
Factors impacting intention to leave in social workers and child care workers employed at voluntary agencies

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: To ameliorate high turnover in child welfare, researchers have attempted to identify factors that lead to undesirable turnover. While this has been studied extensively, little attention has been paid to turnover based upon job roles. Like social workers in child welfare, the field of child care also experiences high turnover. Child care workers employed in child welfare settings are no exception. The current study seeks to understand differential factors that impact intent to leave for preventive and child care workers employed in child welfare agencies.
Materials and methods: Data for prevention workers (n = 538) were obtained from all preventive service programs under contract with the City. Data for child care workers (n = 222) were obtained from three voluntary agencies located elsewhere in the State. The instrument was a modified version of a survey developed to examine job satisfaction and potential turnover among public child welfare workers. Domains measured included job satisfaction, intention to leave, career commitment, and agency investment. Data were analyzed using bivariate analysis and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).
Results: Child care workers had more positive perceptions of child welfare and planned to stay in child welfare longer. Despite this, prevention workers felt more invested in their work. Child care and prevention workers had different levels of satisfaction with their jobs although overall job satisfaction did not differ nor did their intention to leave. Tenure at the agency was predictive of career investment. Investment, perceptions of child welfare, satisfaction with nature of work, and contingent rewards were associated with career commitment. Commitment and satisfaction with supervision were the greatest predictors of intention to leave.
Discussion: There is a gap in literature addressing child care workers in child welfare, and future study of this group is needed. Child care workers are just as likely to intend to leave their jobs as prevention workers. For both groups, it appears that investment in their jobs increases commitment to the field which reduces intention to leave.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Turnover in child welfare agencies

High turnover of employees in child welfare agencies has historically been a serious problem. Annual turnover among public and private child welfare employees have been reported to be between 20% and 40% (APHSA, 2005). Excessive turnover can disrupt the quality and continuity of care to those needing services and are detrimental to clients (Braddock & Mitchell, 1992; Strolin-Goltzman, Kollar, & Trinkle, 2010). When caseworkers leave their agencies, children in their care are compromised as these workers are directly responsible for children's safety, stability, and well-being (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010). For children and youth in out-of-home care, the negative consequences of high turnover can delay the process of reunification or reduce children's chances of achieving permanency as they are assigned to multiple workers due to turnover (Flower, McDonald, & Sumski, 2005; Ryan, Garnier, Zyphur, & Zhai, 2006). On an emotional level, staff turnover can leave youth with feelings of instability and loss is compounded by separation from family (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2010).

Researchers have attempted to identify the various factors leading to high turnover rates among child welfare employees. Studies have found that factors related to intention to leave include overall job satisfaction, organizational commitment, satisfaction with contingent rewards, satisfaction with paperwork demands, and quality of supervision (Auerbach, McGowan, Ausberger, Strolin-Goltzman, & Schudrich, 2010; McGowan, Auerbach, & Strolin-Goltzman, 2009; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001).

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High caseloads have also been an important factor in predicting turnover (Alwon & Reitz, 2000; Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; United States General Accounting Office (GAO), 2003). Of particular note is the fact that there is an association between satisfaction with pay and job turnover or intention to leave among child welfare workers (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; Auerbach et al., 2010; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & Lane, 2005).

While turnover in child welfare has been studied rather extensively in recent years, little attention has been paid to turnover in child welfare based upon job titles. While it has been determined that excessive turnover in child welfare negatively impacts children and families, there is a dearth of information about turnover among specific front-line workers including those providing child care services in residential treatment centers.

1.2. Turnover among child care workers across sectors

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor, the child care industry employed 1.3 million people in 2008 (US Department of Labor, 2010). Despite this, there is little information on the annual turnover rates in this line of work. In 1993, the National Child Care Staffing Study revealed an annual staff turnover rate in center settings of 41% (Whitebook, 1993). This rate is comparable to more recent estimates of 40% annual turnover nationally and the turnover rates of child care workers in non-profit child welfare service sectors in several eastern states (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003). For example, between 2004 and 2006, the turnover rate for child care workers in the state of Maryland was 47.3% (University of Maryland School of Social Work, 2007).

Because of the close relationship that is inherent in the child–caregiver relationship, frequent turnover among child care employees inhibits the development of a close, nurturing relationship. One study found that excessive turnover does not allow children to develop stable and affectionate relationships with caregivers (Scarr, Eisenberg, & Deater-Deckard, 1994). They also found that infants and toddlers display more developmentally appropriate social behavior when they are in long-term relationships with staff (Scarr et al., 1994). Other researchers have found that high turnover among child care workers can negatively impact children's social, emotional and language development and can negatively affect the overall quality of child care services (Korjenevitch & Dunifon, 2010).

Child care workers in child welfare systems have been overlooked as a primary research focus. Moses (2000) found that many residential child care workers choose to work in the field because of a desire to do "socially meaningful work" (p. 118). Other reasons mentioned for working as a residential child care worker include: the lack of stringent educational requirements, using the job as a stepping stone toward a better paying job, and convenient work shifts that enable workers to balance work and school (Moses, 2000). Overall, Moses (2000) found that these child care workers see their employment as short-term due to low pay and lack of job security.

Other studies have identified additional factors that lead to high turnover among child care workers employed in any setting. These include the high emotional demand of working with children, particularly in child welfare, low wages and poor benefits, better employment opportunities in other professions, and perceived inequity in the employment relationship relative to other medical and mental health professionals working in residential care (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; Jordan et al., 2009; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009; Whitebook & Sakai, 2003).

Given the important function of child care workers, the present study aims to compare and contrast factors that affect intention to leave among prevention workers and child care workers employed in child welfare. Comparing child care workers to prevention workers was chosen because of the close and personal nature of the relationship both types of workers develop with the children in their care.

1.3. Framework for research

The current research seeks to expand knowledge of the child welfare workforce by comparing factors contributing to job satisfaction and turnover between prevention workers and child care workers. The sampling frame included voluntary agencies, which are private, non-profit child welfare agencies that are under contract to provide services by the state or city government. The data for this current research were 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 study of prevention workers was designed to inform the city's children's services agency about staff retention issues in voluntary, non-profit contract agencies funded by the city. The study of child care workers employed at child welfare agencies was designed to focus on the workforce needs of voluntary workers in a wide variety of roles in the same state as the sample from the study of prevention workers. It was decided to obtain comparative knowledge about the two populations by using an advanced statistical method, structural equation modeling (SEM), to analyze the combined results of the research.

2. Material and methods

The Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) of the University at Albany, Columbia University and Yeshiva University approved the studies in 2008.

The sample includes workers from 202 voluntary agencies in the city ($n = 538$) and from three voluntary agencies located elsewhere in the state ($n = 222$). For the voluntary agencies based in the city, all workers and supervisors in the 204 prevention service programs under contract at the time ($N = 1624$) were asked to respond to an anonymous survey. Voluntary prevention 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. The response rate for this portion of the sample was 33.1%. Details about data collection efforts have been detailed elsewhere (Auerbach et al., 2010).

For the sample composed of child care workers, workers in voluntary child welfare agencies located in smaller cities elsewhere in the state were asked to respond to an anonymous survey. These agencies provide a wide range of services to families and children involved in the child welfare system including residential services for children and adolescents. Data were collected in person with staff from the research team visiting each site, sometimes multiple times, and asking staff to complete a confidential written survey. The response rate for this portion of the sample was 85%.

2.1. Measures

The survey instrument used in this study is a modified version of an instrument developed to examine job satisfaction and potential turnover among child welfare workers in one urban and three non-urban 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, 2007).

Variables selected to be included in the analysis were chosen based upon prior research findings and a review of the literature. The main outcome variable to be measured was intention to leave. Predictor variables included job role, various aspects of job satisfaction, perceptions of child welfare, career investment, commitment to child welfare, household income, and tenure at the agency.

Part of the written instrument included a modified version of Spector's Job Satisfaction Survey (Spector, 1985). This instrument measures composite job satisfaction by examining satisfaction with each of nine domains: pay; opportunities for promotion; supervision;

benefits; contingent rewards (feeling appreciated and recognized); operating procedures; co-workers; communication; and nature of the work. Coefficient alphas for each of these ranged from a low of 0.54 (operating procedures) to a high of 0.80 (supervision). Coefficient alpha for the total instrument was 0.89.

Perceptions of child welfare were assessed by using a 29 question instrument to assess participants' understanding about how their work is viewed by others. This instrument is scored on a 4-point Likert scale with items ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. Items in the instrument include statements such as "Most people respect you for your choice to work in child welfare," "People feel that child welfare work is important," and "When people find out that I am a child welfare worker, they seem to look down on me." Coefficient alpha for this scale is 0.80 indicating a reliable instrument.

Investment in child welfare was measured by a series of questions on a 5-point Likert scale with items ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The items, derived from Landsman's work (Landsman, 2001) asked study participants to respond to each of the following statements: "I have too much time vested in my line of work to change," "It would be very costly to change 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 0.76.

Commitment to child welfare practice was measured in a series of questions on a 5-point Likert scale with items ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The items, also derived from Landsman (2001), asked study participants to respond to the following statements: "I plan to stay in child welfare as long as possible," "Under no circumstances will I voluntarily leave child welfare," and "I plan to leave child welfare practice as soon as possible." The last statement was reverse scored. The coefficient alpha for this scale was 0.81.

Intention to leave was assessed by asking study participants if they had thought about looking for a new job in the past year. If they had, they were asked to complete seven additional questions to assess the seriousness of their intention to leave. They were asked about the frequency with which they thought about leaving, how often they spoke to significant others about leaving, and the frequency of job-seeking behaviors including looking for new jobs in newspapers or on the internet, making phone inquiries, sending out resumes, and going on job interviews. These items were scored on a five-point scale with 1 = lowest frequency of behavior and 5 = greatest frequency of behavior. The coefficient alpha for this scale was 0.97. Table 1 illustrates this scale.

2.2. Model specification

The purpose of this analysis was to develop a model to determine what factors influence prevention and child care workers employed in child welfare agencies intention to leave their jobs. We hypothesized that position (prevention worker or child care worker), job satisfaction, investment in child welfare work, and commitment to the field are related to intention to leave. As a result, we tested for the presence of

Table 1
Intention to leave survey questions.

Have you considered looking for a new job within the past year?
If the answer to the above question was "yes," respondents were asked to answer the following:
1) How often have you thought about leaving?
2) How often have you spoken with friends/spouse/partner about leaving?
3) How often have you looked in the paper for a new job?
4) How often have you looked in professional journals for a new job?
5) How many phone inquiries have you made about other jobs?
6) How many resumes have you sent out?
7) How often do you search the internet for jobs?
8) How many job interviews have you had?

three latent constructs: investment in child welfare work, commitment to child welfare work, and intention to leave. Each of these latent constructs was measured by combining the observed endogenous variables discussed above.

In this study, SEM was used to generate a model to explain the different factors that influence prevention workers and child care workers employed in child welfare agencies intention to leave their agencies. While SEM can be utilized to confirm an a priori model, test alternate models, or generate models, model generation is the most commonly used application for the use of this statistical method (Auerbach et al., 2010; Joreskog, 1993; Kline, 2011). According to Kline (2011), use of SEM for model discovery has three requirements. The first is that it is theoretically logical; the second is that it is "reasonably parsimonious," (p. 8) and the third is that it statistically fits the data. In this study, the investigators utilized the model generating form of SEM to determine child welfare workers' intention to leave based upon their roles (prevention worker or child care worker), investment, and commitment to child welfare.

3. Results

The combined sample was made up of 760 workers. Seventy-one percent were prevention workers, and 29% were child care workers.

When looking at the demographics of the sample by the major independent variable, type of worker, the groups begin to take on distinctions. More than a third of child care workers are male (37.7%) compared to only 14% of prevention workers ($X^2 = 51.6$, $p = 0.00$). Prevention workers, on the other hand, were, on average, four years older than child care workers ($t = 4.3$; $p = 0.00$). In terms of race and ethnicity, there was more diversity in the sample of prevention workers with more than a quarter identifying as African-American (26.2%), 12.5% identifying as Caribbean, 33.9% identifying as Hispanic, 18% identifying as white, and 4.9% identifying as Asian. By comparison, almost 40% of child care workers identified as African-American (39.9%), 9.1% identified as Caribbean, and almost half identified as white (45.7%)($X^2 = 126.9$, $p = 0.00$). While there were no differences between the groups on parenting responsibilities, the prevention workers were more likely to have elder care or other family responsibilities outside of work (27.6% of prevention workers compared to 16.3% of child care workers) ($X^2 = 10.5$, $p = 0.00$). Prevention workers were more likely to be married (40.2%) compared to a quarter of child care workers (25.6%), and child care workers were more likely to have never been married (60.3%) than prevention workers (45%) ($X^2 = 19.2$; $p = 0.00$). Additionally, prevention workers were more well-educated than child care workers. More than nine out of ten prevention workers (93%) had a bachelor's degree or higher compared to slightly more than a quarter (26.3%) of child care workers. Conversely, child care workers were most likely to have some college, but not an associate's degree or higher (41.5%). Nearly one in five child care workers (17%) had only a high school diploma compared to only 1% of prevention workers ($X^2 = 409.9$; $p = 0.00$).

Not surprisingly, both the salaries and household incomes of the groups differed. Prevention workers make more money on average than child care workers. The largest group of prevention workers earned between $35,000 and $45,000 (47%) compared to the largest group of child care workers (57%) who made $25,000 or less per year ($X^2 = 442.8$; $p = 0.00$). Following a similar pattern, household income was significantly higher for prevention workers than for child care workers. Slightly more than half of prevention workers (50.4%) had household incomes in excess of $50,000 per year compared to only 17.4% of child care workers ($X^2 = 225.5$; $p = 0.00$).

Tenure for prevention workers and child care workers differed only in terms of whether their current job was their first job in child welfare. For the prevention workers, their current job was their first in child welfare for 59% of the respondents compared to almost three-quarters of the child care workers (72.4%) ($X^2 = 11.9$; $p = 0.00$). Both tenure at

the agency and tenure in their current positions did not differ between the groups.

Next, career beliefs and plans were compared for child care workers and prevention workers. Child care workers had higher total perceptions of child welfare compared to prevention workers with 76.5 as the mean for child care workers and 70.8 as the mean score for prevention workers ($t = -6.42$; $p = 0.00$).

These more positive feelings about child welfare in child care workers seem to be echoed in their career plans. Almost nine out of ten child care workers (88%) said that they would make the same decisions regarding their jobs if they could turn back the clock compared to 71% of the prevention workers ($X^2 = 25.1$; $p = 0.00$). Overall, child care workers were very committed to the field of child welfare. Nearly two-thirds of the child care workers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I plan to stay in child welfare as long as possible," compared to 38% of prevention workers ($X^2 = 58.7$; $p = 0.00$). Additionally, more child care workers plan to stay in the field of child welfare than prevention workers. More than a third of child care workers (34.4%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Under no circumstances will I voluntarily leave child welfare," compared to 18.3% of prevention workers ($X^2 = 42.8$; $p = 0.00$). This sentiment was echoed in the reverse-scored statement, "I plan to leave child welfare practice as soon as possible," with more than two thirds of child care workers disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement (77.2%) compared to slightly more than half (54.1%) of prevention workers ($X^2 = 42.8$; $p = 0.00$). When asked about their plans to stay in child welfare, child care workers scored significantly higher on the three question subscale than did prevention workers (10.5 versus 8.6)($t = -7.57$; $p = 0.00$).

Despite the workers' different perceptions of child welfare and their plans to remain in the field, both groups believed that their work was important and had a positive impact on their clients with whom they work and society.

Overall scores for career investment were the same for both groups, but prevention workers were more invested in their work. They believed it would be more costly to change their line of work than child care workers with 34.3% of prevention workers agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, "It would be very costly to switch my line of work," compared to 26.4% of child care workers ($X^2 = 13.8$; $p = 0.01$). Similarly, 43.6% of prevention workers believed that changing careers would mean giving up a substantial investment in training compared to 39.9% of child care workers ($X^2 = 10.1$; $p = 0.04$).

With regard to job satisfaction, child care workers were more satisfied than the prevention workers in their satisfaction with pay, promotion, and operating procedures. Prevention workers were more satisfied than the child care workers in regard to their co-workers and communication. No differences were found between the groups in satisfaction with supervision, benefits, contingent rewards, nature of work, or total job satisfaction. These findings are described in more detail in Table 2.

Next, the dependent variable, intention to leave was examined by type of worker. When asked, "Have you considered looking for a new job in the past year?" there was no difference between the prevention workers and child care workers. Respondents that answered that they had thought about looking for a job in the past year were prompted to answer seven additional questions to assess the seriousness of their intention to leave. Respondents were asked about the frequency of behaviors related to job seeking. They included frequency of thinking about leaving, speaking with significant others about leaving, looking in the newspaper or internet for other jobs, making phone inquiries about other jobs, and going on job interviews. These items were aggregated into a single intention-to-leave score, and there were no significant differences noted between child care workers and prevention workers.

Next, the data were analyzed using SEM. Results of the SEM 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 6.1 (Muthen & Muthen, 2010) 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 at least one binary or ordered categorical dependent variable is present in the model (Muthen and Muthen, 2010). The overall X^2 is significant for this model ($X^2 = 297.07$; $df = 183$; $p = 0.00$), which is not unusual given the large sample size (Kline, 2011). When sample sizes are large, there are increased chances of significant values for X^2. In these cases, one broad rule of thumb for considering other indices of fit is if the ratio of X^2 to df is not greater than two (Tabachnik & Fidell, 2007). In the existing model, this ratio is 1.6 which suggests that it would be advisable to look at other indices for goodness-of-fit. With this in mind, the researchers examined the Root Means Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI). For the developed model, RMSEA was 0.04; CFI and TLI were each 0.99. Evaluation of the TLI is particularly valuable in this case as the two sample sizes in this study were unequal and the overall sample size in this study was larger than is typical for SEM (Marsh, Balla, & McDonald, 1988). Acceptable cutoff values for the CFI and TFI are values greater than or equal to 0.95 and less than or equal to 0.06 for RMSEA (Hu & Bentler, 1999). With this in mind, it appears as if the identified model was a strong one.

In this model, the three latent variables "investment," "commitment," and "intention to leave" all had high factor loadings between them and associated observed exogenous variables. The latent variable "investment" was defined by four observed exogenous variables, all of which produced significant p values at the 0.00 level. Parameter estimates for the observed exogenous variables ranged from 0.59 for the observed variables "too costly to switch" and "give up substantial investment" to 0.67 for the observed variable "emotionally difficult to leave." The latent variable "commitment" was defined by three observed exogenous variables, all of which produced significant p values at the 0.00 level. The parameter estimates for these observed exogenous variables ranged from 0.76 for the observed variable "plan to stay as long as possible" to 0.82 for the observed variable "plan to leave as soon as possible." Finally, the latent variable "intention to leave" was defined by five observed exogenous variables, all of which also produced significant p values at the 0.00 level. The parameter estimates for these exogenous variables ranged from 0.92 for the observed variable "spoken to friends/spouse/partner" to 0.96 for the observed variable "looked in the paper for a new job." These relationships are displayed in Fig. 1.

The hypothesis that the latent construct investment in child welfare work is associated to the latent construct of commitment to child welfare work is confirmed by the standardized parameter estimate between these concepts displayed in Fig. 1 (0.29; $p = .00$). This indicates that investment in child welfare work is predictive of commitment to the field. Similarly, the hypothesis that the latent construct commitment to child welfare work is associated to the latent construct of intention to leave is confirmed by the standardized parameter estimate

Table 2
Domains of job satisfaction for prevention and child care workers.

Job satisfaction domain	Prevention workers		Child care workers		t	p
	n	Mean	n	Mean		
Pay	503	7.89	201	8.87	−4.78	0.00
Promotion	490	8.99	197	9.57	−2.81	0.01
Supervision	508	12.83	202	12.99	−0.81	0.42
Benefits	490	9.63	191	9.57	0.25	0.81
Contingent rewards	506	9.96	200	9.62	1.66	0.10
Operating procedures	505	8.42	203	10.56	−13.65	0.00
Co-workers	512	12.30	207	10.85	7.98	0.00
Nature of work	509	12.14	209	12.23	−0.52	0.61
Communication	504	11.03	202	10.38	3.41	0.00
Total job satisfaction	392	93.09	152	94.96	−1.50	0.13
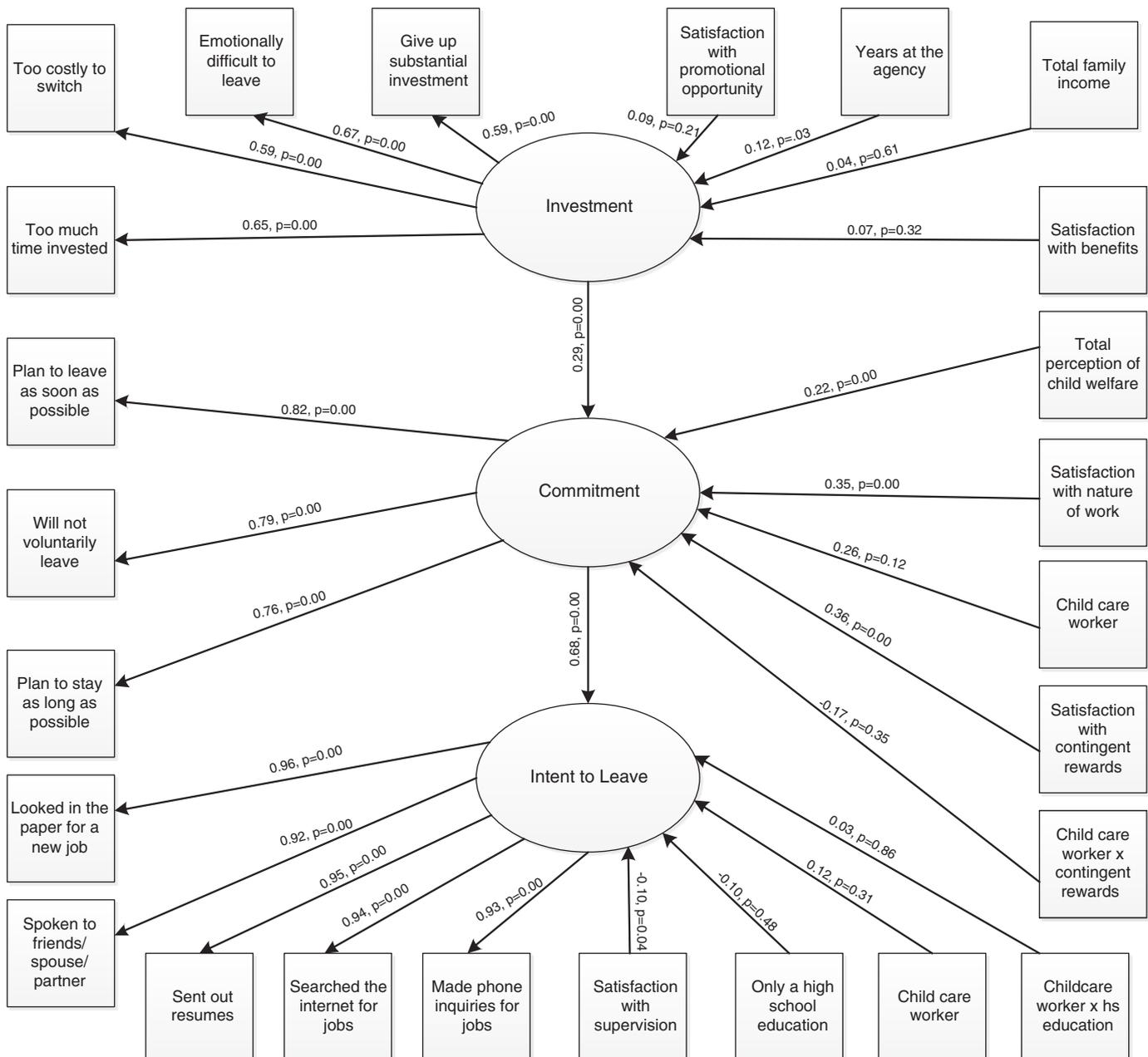
Note: X² = 297.07; df = 183; p = 0.00; CFI = 0.99,TLI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.04

Fig. 1. SEM model.

between these concepts, also displayed in Fig. 1 (0.68; $p = .00$).This in-dicates that commitment to child welfare work is predictive of intention to leave.

With regard to investment in child welfare, the exogenous indepen-dent indicator "years at the agency" was the only statistically significant indicator with a value of 0.12 ($p = 0.03$). Considering commitment to child welfare, the exogenous independent indicators "total perception of child welfare," "satisfaction with nature of work," and "satisfaction with contingent rewards" were significant indicators with values of 0.22 ($p = 0.00$), 0.35 ($p = 0.00$), and 0.35 ($p = 0.00$), respectively. Finally, concerning intention to leave, the exogenous independent indicator "satisfaction with supervision" was statistically significant with a value of -0.10 ($p = 0.00$).

The hypothesis that the exogenous independent indicator "child care worker" is associated to the latent concept intention to leave was not confirmed; however, inclusion of that variable in the model in

association with the latent constructs of commitment and intention to leave enhanced the goodness-of-fit of the entire model.

4. Discussion

The bivariate analysis revealed interesting differences between the samples of prevention workers and child care workers. Child care workers had lower levels of education, lower salaries, and lower house-hold incomes than the prevention workers. They had more positive per-ceptions of child welfare and planned to stay in child welfare longer. Despite this, prevention workers felt more invested in their work than the child care workers. In terms of job satisfaction, child care workers were more satisfied with their pay, opportunities for promotion and operating procedures. Prevention workers were more satisfied with their co-workers and communication. Overall, there was no difference in the groups' total job satisfaction and their intention to leave.

SEM analysis showed interesting findings with regard to the total sample. The model indicated that job tenure was associated with career investment. Career investment, total perception of child welfare, satisfaction with nature of the work, and satisfaction with contingent rewards were all associated with career commitment. Career commitment and satisfaction with supervision had the greatest association with intention to leave. While job role was not a significant predictor of agency investment, career commitment or intention to leave, its inclusion in the overall model improved fit statistics indicating that job role plays some part in the variance of each of these outcome variables.

4.1. Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study. First, the response rate for the sample of prevention workers was considerably lower than that for the child care workers. This occurred despite repeated efforts to improve participation in the study by providing letters of support for the study from city child welfare administrators and follow-up letters and phone calls to agency administrators with low response rates. Next, the sample of prevention workers and child care workers may have differed in ways not measured as the prevention workers all worked in a large, urban setting while the child care workers were employed in agencies located in smaller cities, and neither of the samples was drawn randomly. Additionally, although the workers were all employed in child welfare settings, the prevention and child care workers were employed at different agencies. There is no way to assess what difference this could have made in our findings. Finally, in the state in which this study was conducted, child care workers in child welfare settings are employed by private agencies which are under contract with the public child welfare system; therefore, no conclusions can be drawn about child care workers in other states whose child welfare systems may be structured differently.

5. Conclusions

There is a dearth of literature addressing child care workers employed in child welfare settings. This is particularly notable because of the important role these workers have in the lives of children in care. This study begins to describe some of the ways in which these workers differ from other child welfare workers, but a greater understanding is needed. For example, there is evidence to suggest that child care workers in some settings are part of the secondary labor market, which theoretically suggests that workers behave in a manner different from those employed in the primary labor market (Cleveland & Hyatt, 2002; Kaye, 2000). Whether child care workers employed in child welfare settings would be included in this secondary labor market is currently unclear. Again, more study of this group is needed to address factors leading to retention and turnover among these workers.

Despite demographic differences, differences in perceptions of child welfare, differences in feelings of investment, and differences in various aspects of job satisfaction, prevention workers and child care workers were equally likely to intend to leave their jobs. For both groups, it appears that career investment is related to commitment to the field of child welfare, and commitment to child welfare and satisfaction with supervision is predictive of intention to leave. To improve commitment to the field, which accounted for more variance than any other identified variable, it would be advisable for agencies to try to bolster feelings of investment, satisfaction with nature of the work, and contingent rewards among all employees. Previous literature has suggested that increasing workers' investment and satisfaction with the nature of the work requires agencies' efforts to examine and possibly modify existing recruitment and hiring practices and restructuring workers' responsibilities. It is, however, relatively simple to increase contingent rewards among employees by expressing support and appreciation for the work done by employees (Auerbach et al., 2010). Additionally, it is advisable for agencies to assess the quality of supervision provided direct

care workers as this has been linked to intention to leave and retention in this and other studies (Chen & Scannapieco, 2010; Faller, Grabarek, & Ortega, 2010; Landsman, 2001; Le, Zmuda, Perry & Muñoz, 2010).

Previous research focusing on retention and turnover in child welfare has examined career investment and commitment (Auerbach et al., 2010; Faller et al., 2010; Landsman, 2001; Lee, Forster, & Rehner, 2011; McGowan et al., 2009) separately. This study suggests that investment and commitment are related with investment moderating the relationship between commitment and intention to leave. Additional study is needed to further clarify the relationship between agency investment, career commitment and intention to leave in child welfare and the roles they play in retention and turnover.

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