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McGowan, Brenda G.; Auerbach, Charles; Conroy, Kathryn; Augsberger, Astraea; and Zeitlin, Wendy, "Workforce Retention Issues in Voluntary Child Welfare" (2010). *Department of Social Work and Child Advocacy Faculty Scholarship and Creative Works*. 146.
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Workforce Retention Issues in Voluntary Child Welfare

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Source: *Child Welfare*, 2010, Vol. 89, No. 6 (2010), pp. 83-104

Published by: Child Welfare League of America

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48623284>

REFERENCES

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Workforce Retention Issues in Voluntary Child Welfare

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Unlike many studies focused on retention and turnover in public child welfare, this study examined issues of job satisfaction and retention in voluntary child welfare. Although three-fourths of the 1,624 workers surveyed intended to remain in child welfare, 57.3% had thought about leaving their agencies during the past year. All respondents were dissatisfied with their level of pay, but those thinking of leaving were significantly less satisfied with the contingent rewards they received.

Recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of child welfare staff is a challenge that has received extensive national attention in recent years (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2003; U.S. General Accounting Office [GAO], 2003, 2006). It is well documented that high turnover rates not only create a huge financial burden (GAO, 2003), but also have a very negative impact on service outcomes for children and families (GAO, 2006). As noted by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA, 2008), "No issue has a greater effect on the child welfare system's capacity to serve at-risk and vulnerable children and families than the shortage of a competent and stable workforce." Several studies have examined factors contributing to retention and turnover problems in *public* child welfare agencies (see DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008, for a recent systematic review). However, there is a lack of research focused on factors leading to these same problems in *voluntary* child welfare settings.

Recent national studies report annual child welfare turnover ranging between 20% and 40%, with length of employment averaging less than two years (American Public Human Services Association [APHSA], 2001, 2005; GAO, 2003). In 2002, the average 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 CWLA, 2008). Moreover, during 2003, it took an average of 7 to 13 weeks to fill vacant child welfare positions (APHSA, 2005). High rates of staff turnover and vacancies have both financial and human service costs. The financial costs derive from the expenses associated with worker separation, replacement, and training (Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). The human or service delivery costs include a lack of case continuity, potentially faulty decisionmaking, limited permanency planning, and failure to attain key federal child safety and permanency goals (GAO, 2003).

A number of studies have identified a combination of organizational and personal factors that contribute to turnover and retention in child welfare (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Strolin, McCarthy, & Caringi, 2007; Yankeelov, Barbee, Sullivan, & Antle, 2009; Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & Lane, 2005). Some common organizational factors include dissatisfaction with salary, workload, supervisory support, administrative support, coworker support,

working conditions, and promotion potential (Calahane & Sites, 2008; DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Ellett, 2000; Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; Nissly, Mor Barak, & Levin, 2005; Zlotnik et al., 2005). Examples of personal factors include commitment to child welfare, education, family/work balance, job satisfaction, and professional recognition (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008; Ellett et al., 2003; Nissly et al., 2005; Weaver, Chang, Clark, & Rhee, 2007).

The current study expands knowledge of the “crisis” in the child welfare workforce by focusing on factors contributing to job satisfaction and turnover in voluntary not-for-profit child welfare agencies in a large urban community. This was a survey of workers and supervisors in preventive service programs. Similar to what are called “family preservation programs” in some other parts of the country, preventive service programs in this state are designed to help families in which children are at risk of abuse, neglect, and 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 city’s public children’s services agency contracts with community agencies to deliver most of its preventive services.

In July 2008, there were 40,016 children receiving preventive services in the city with an annual budget of approximately 150 million dollars (New York City, Administration for Children’s Services [ACS], 2008). There are no hard data about the rates of turnover in these preventive programs, but city officials were concerned about the numerous program reports they received describing problems in retaining staff. Recognizing that staff retention is a key component of high-quality service delivery, they asked the authors to conduct this study examining issues in staff job satisfaction and turnover in preventive services programs.

Method

Sample and Data Collection Procedures

The survey was conducted from September 2007 to March 2008. All workers and supervisors in the 204 preventive service programs under

contract with the city at that time ($N = 1,624$) were asked to respond to an anonymous survey. Program directors received a cover letter with sufficient copies of the survey instrument packet consisting of the survey, a consent form, and a stamped return envelop 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. Prior to mailing the surveys, the city's deputy commissioner for family support services informed the preventive service program directors that the city was funding this survey and asked their cooperation. She later sent a letter to all the directors, again asking that they encourage their staff members to participate. To encourage greater participation, the research team members called program directors whose staff members had returned only a few or no surveys about three weeks after the initial mailing. In addition, they later sent another letter to the program directors, made repeated calls to some of the agencies, and distributed duplicate copies of the survey instrument at several meetings for preventive service workers. Out of the potential pool of 1,624 respondents (supervisors, social workers, caseworkers, and case planners), they received a total of 538 survey responses. This represents a 33.1% percent response rate.

Measures

The survey instrument administered is a modified version of an instrument developed to examine work 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).

To learn more about job satisfaction among this group, the authors also administered a slight modification of the job satisfaction survey (JSS) to the workers in our survey. The JSS (Spector, 1985) is designed to measure job satisfaction in human service organizations by assessing nine aspects of job satisfaction: (1) pay, (2) promotion potential, (3) supervision, (4) fringe benefits, (5) contingent rewards (appreciation and recognition), (6) operating procedures, (7) coworkers, (8) nature of work, and (9) satisfaction. It is a 36-item

self-report questionnaire that uses a 6-point Likert-type scale with items ranging from 1 = disagree very much to 6 = agree very much, with some items reverse scored. Each of the subscales incorporated four items. Box A provides some examples of the subscale items.

Box A

Sample Subscale Items on Job Satisfaction Survey

Promotion

There is really too little chance for promotion at 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 or 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 deserve.
I do not feel that the work I do is appreciated.

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.

Coworker

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.

Pay

I feel I am being paid a fair amount for the work I do.
I feel satisfied with my chances for salary increases.

Reported reliability for this scale is high with total satisfaction coefficient $\alpha = 0.91$. Coefficient alphas for the subscales range from 0.60 (coworkers) to 0.82 (supervision). The 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 the JSS could use the same format as other scales in the survey. It did not affect internal reliability, as the total satisfaction coefficient α was 0.89. Cronbach's alphas for the subscales used on the study sample (see Table 4) were similar to those previously reported, ranging from 0.54 (operations) to 0.80 (supervision).

The survey also incorporated slightly modified items related to organizational and occupational commitment derived from "Commitment in Public Welfare" (Landsman, 2001, Appendix B). These are measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale with items ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. In addition, the study measured satisfaction with work environment and workers' perceptions of public attitudes toward child welfare. Satisfaction with the work environment is a 16-item Likert scale ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 4 = very satisfied with a possible range of 1 to 64. This scale has been used statewide to assess child welfare workers' satisfaction with their work environment and has been found to be reliable with an α of 0.88.

The perceptions of child welfare attitudes scale is a 29-item Likert scale, which ranges from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. It is reliable having an α of 0.80 and ranges from 29 to 116. The scale has items similar to "When people find out that I am a child welfare worker, they seem to look down on me"; "Most people blame the worker when something goes wrong with a case"; and "Child welfare workers deserve respect for the type of work they do."

Findings

Demographic Data

The vast majority of the 538 respondents, 85.8%, were women. Respondents ranged in age from early 20s to over 70 years old, but more than one-third were below 30 years (36%). Slightly over one-

quarter were between 30 and 39 years (26%), and the same proportion were 40 to 49 years. The mean age for this population was 36.8 years ($SD = 11.6$). Over one-quarter of the respondents (28.2%) defined themselves as African American or black; 12.5% ($n = 64$) as Pacific Islanders; 32.9% as Hispanic or Latina/o; and 18.0% as white. The remainder identified as other. Their salaries ranged from under \$25,000 to over \$50,000, but the largest proportion (59.7%) earned between \$35,000 and \$45,000.

Roles and Experience

Just over 12.9% of the respondents were supervisors, 49.9% were case planners, and 14.8% identified as social workers. Over one-third of the total sample (39.4%) had master's of social work (MSWs), and another 12.9% had another type of graduate degree. Overall, this was an experienced group, with a mean time of 6.7 years ($SD = 6.4$) spent in some type of child welfare practice, a mean time of 4.6 years ($SD = 5.3$) spent at an agency, and 3.6 years ($SD = 5.0$) in the current position.

Reasons for Selecting Job

The vast majority of respondents (75%) indicated that child welfare was not their first career choice. For almost 60% of the respondents, this was their first full-time job. It is important to note that, despite the fact that child welfare was not a first choice for most, 70% of the workers agreed that if the clock were turned back, they would have made the same decision to accept their current position.

Attitudes Toward Staying and/or Leaving Agency

Overall, the workers had a positive view toward their agencies, with 69% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they would recommend it to others seeking employment. Despite this, well over half of the participants (57.3%) reported that they had thought about leaving in the past year ($n = 299$; see Table 1). Overall, those who thought about leaving their agency were reasonably serious about this possibility: 90% had discussed this with their spouses or friends, 79% had looked in the newspaper for job opportunities, 54% had made phone

Table 1Intent to Leave ($n = 299$ who thought of leaving in past year)

		<i>n</i>	%
How often have you spoken with friends/spouse/partner about leaving?	Almost never	10	3.6%
	Some of the time	109	39.2%
	Often	63	22.6%
	Very often	63	22.6%
	Almost every day	33	11.9%
How often have you looked in the paper for a new job?	Never	42	15.1%
	Every few months	99	35.5%
	Monthly	58	20.8%
	Weekly	52	18.6%
	Daily	28	10.0%
How many phone inquiries have you made about other jobs?	None	121	42.6%
	1–2	67	23.6%
	3–4	53	18.7%
	5–6	14	4.9%
	More than 6	29	10.2%
How many resumes have you sent out?	None	98	35.2%
	1–2	66	23.7%
	3–5	51	18.3%
	6–10	18	6.5%
	More than 10	45	16.2%
How many job interviews have you had?	None	157	56.1%
	1–2	76	27.1%
	3–4	39	13.9%
	5–6	6	2.1%
	More than 6	2	0.7%

inquiries about job possibilities, 60% had sent out resumes, and 41% had gone on at least one job interview.

Job Satisfaction

As discussed, job satisfaction was measured by a slight variation of Spector's (1985) JSS. Table 2 presents the overall means, minimum, and maximum scores for total job satisfaction and each of the subscales. Each of the subscales has a possible range of 4 to 16 with the total scale having a possible range of 36 to 144. Higher values represent elevated

Table 2
Means for Job Satisfaction Subscales

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum	Alpha
Supervision	12.82	2.50	4.00	16.00	0.80
Coworker	12.30	2.13	6.00	16.00	0.61
Nature of work	12.13	2.12	4.00	16.00	0.68
Communication	11.03	2.25	4.00	16.00	0.65
Contingent rewards	9.96	2.51	4.00	16.00	0.71
Benefits	9.60	2.50	4.00	16.00	0.71
Promotion	8.90	2.62	4.00	16.00	0.73
Operating procedure	8.41	1.83	4.00	14.00	0.54
Pay	7.87	2.70	4.00	16.00	0.72
Total job satisfaction	93.08	13.50	49.00	133.00	0.89

job satisfaction. Satisfaction with supervision, coworkers, and nature of work have very high satisfaction ratings with mean scores of over 12. On the other hand, satisfaction with pay, operating procedures, promotions, and benefits were all lower with means ranging from 7.87 to 9.60. Satisfaction with communication and contingent rewards are in the middle with means of 11.03 and 9.96.

Factors that Influence Attitudes Toward Leaving

Because it was impossible to track and interview workers who had left prior to initiation of the study, a surrogate outcome (dependent variable) method of measuring retention was needed. Asking workers if they thought about leaving their agency in the past year has been found to be a strong correlate to retention (see, Nissly et al., 2005, for a discussion of intent to leave as an outcome variable). This section compares workers who thought about leaving to those who did not on a series of independent variables.

Worker Commitment to Social Work and Child Welfare

As Table 3 displays, workers who have not thought about leaving were more strongly committed than the other workers both to social work

Table 3

Commitment to Social Work and Child Welfare by Thought of Leaving in Past Year

	Have you considered looking for a new job within the past year?			
	Yes Mean	No Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
I plan to stay in prevention as long as possible.	2.38	3.53	10.7	0.000
Under no circumstances will I voluntarily leave prevention.	1.92	2.84	8.9	0.000
By serving as a social worker, I am making a difference.	4.26	4.52	3.8	0.000
As a social worker, I am able to provide help to people who need my assistance.	4.31	4.50	3.2	0.002
I believe my work as a social worker is important to society.	4.35	4.55	3.1	0.001
I have too much time vested in my line of work to change.	2.92	3.31	3.4	0.001
It would be very costly to switch my line of work.	2.77	2.98	1.7	0.119
It would be emotionally difficult to change my line of work.	2.60	3.00	3.5	0.000
For me, changing my line of work would mean giving up a substantial investment.	2.91	3.20	2.4	0.005
I would have many options if I decided to change my work.	3.71	3.36	2.9	0.003

and to child welfare. The higher the score, the more strongly they agreed with each of the statements in the instrument. It is important to note that those who had not thought of leaving rated their commitment to social work as high, with means over 4.0 on several key questions related to social work. Those who had thought about leaving agreed more strongly with the statement, "I would have many options if I decided to change my work" than those not considering leaving. Also, almost 62% of workers who indicated that prevention was not their first job choice were considering looking for a new job as compared to 37% of those who indicated that prevention was their top choice (chi-square = 14.7; $p = 0.000$).

Life-Work FIT

Workers were asked to rate the fit between “my personal life” and “my work life” on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. Those workers not considering looking for a new job rated their life-work fit as higher (mean = 4.1) than those looking for a new job (mean = 3.2). These differences are statistically significant ($t = 8.7$; $p = 0.000$).

Perception of Public Attitudes Toward Child Welfare

On a scale with a maximum of 93 for “perceived public attitudes toward child welfare,” those not looking for a new job rated public perceptions of child welfare relatively high with a mean of 73.4. This compared to a mean of 68.4 for those thinking of looking for a new job, indicating that these workers perceived the external environment (friends, family, government, and the media) as having a less positive view of their work than those not looking for a new job ($t = 6.3$; $p = 0.000$).

Association of Job Satisfaction with Looking for a New Job

Table 4 displays the mean scores for total job satisfaction and each of its subscales by whether respondents had considered looking for a new job in the past year. Workers affirming that they had considered looking for a new job scored significantly lower on each of the subscales. It should be noted that, regardless of whether they were looking for a job or not, they rated satisfaction with supervision, coworkers, and nature of work as relatively high. Still those who reported that they were not looking rated these subscales higher. Responses to pay, promotions, and operating procedures yielded lower satisfaction both for those looking and not looking for other work. There is a large difference between the two groups on contingent rewards. Those who are not looking have a mean of 11.21 level of satisfaction with contingent rewards compared to those who are looking, who had a mean of 9.05 ($t = 10.5$; $p = 0.000$).

Binary logistic regression was used to assess the impact of each of the subscales on the likelihood of a worker looking for other employment. This method provides the odds or probability of the occurrence/nonoccurrence of an outcome (looking or not looking for

Table 4

Job Satisfaction by Looking for a New Job

	Have you considered looking for a new job within the past year?			
	Yes	No	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Mean	Mean		
Pay	7.14	8.90	7.5	0.000
Promotion	8.37	9.78	6.1	0.000
Supervision	12.23	13.63	6.4	0.000
Benefits	9.17	10.31	4.9	0.000
Contingent rewards	9.05	11.21	10.5	0.000
Operating procedures	8.14	8.79	3.9	0.000
Coworker	11.92	12.83	4.7	0.000
Nature of work	11.56	12.92	7.3	0.000
Communication	10.44	11.83	7.1	0.000
Total satisfaction	88.01	100.45	9.9	0.000

Table 5

Logistic Regression, Looking for New Employment (*n* = 484)

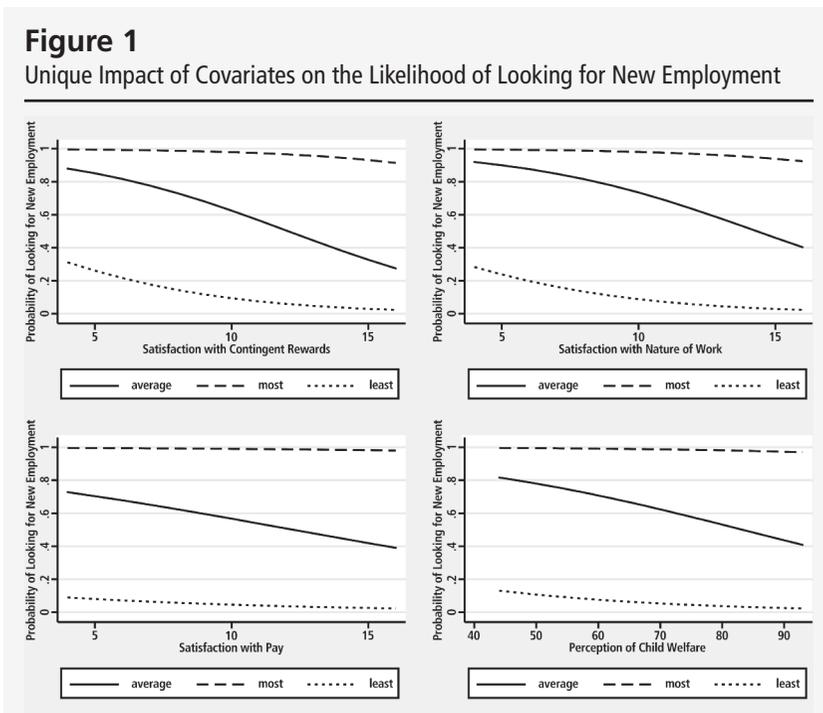
Covariates (1 = yes, 0 = no)	<i>b</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>P</i>	Odds
Pay	-0.1296	-2.41	0.016	0.8784
Contingent rewards	-0.2884	-4.43	0.000	0.7494
Nature of work	-0.2018	-3.05	0.002	0.8172
Perception of child welfare	-0.0335	-2.09	0.037	0.9670

work) based on the influence of predictor variables (covariates). The rationale for using this technique is to develop a profile of workers most likely to be considering looking for new employment. Thus, an estimate of the probability of a worker looking for a new job can be projected.

Table 5 presents the results of the final logistic regression, which includes only statistically significant predictor variables (specific aspects of job satisfaction). The overall model is statistically significant (chi-square of 94.75, *p* = 0.000). The column labeled “Odds” in this table is the odds ratio, which indicates the degree of likelihood

a worker will leave with every one-point increase in an aspect of job satisfaction. An odds ratio of one indicates even odds or no difference. All the odds ratios in Table 5 are below one, indicating that they *decrease* the chance a worker will be looking for new employment. For example, the odds of looking for employment decreases 25% (1–0.75) for every one-point increase in satisfaction with contingent rewards; it decreases 18% (1–0.82) for every one-point increase in satisfaction with the nature of work. Satisfaction with pay and positive perception of public child welfare attitudes also decrease the odds of looking, but are not as powerful predictors. The odds of looking decrease 12% for every one-point increase in satisfaction with pay and 3% for every one-point increase in a worker’s perception of public child welfare attitudes.

Figure 1 displays the conditional effects of the four key covariates on the probability of looking for new employment. A probability close



to zero indicates little or no chance a worker is looking for new employment. Conversely, as the probability increases to one, the chance a worker is seeking other employment is more likely. The top line on the graph represents the impact of contingent rewards when the combined covariates most likely to predict looking for employment (pay, nature of work, and perception of child welfare attitudes) are at their lowest values. The bottom line represents the most likely combination for not seeking other employment or the reverse of the top line (pay, nature of work, and perception of child welfare attitudes are at their highest values).

Of the four covariates presented in Figure 1, contingent rewards and satisfaction with nature of work have the most impact on decreasing the likelihood of a worker looking for employment. To illustrate, the middle line in Figure 1A represents the impact of contingent rewards on the probability of a worker looking for employment in the sample when all other covariates are held constant at their mean. Controlling covariates in this way removes their impact. This shows that as satisfaction with contingent rewards increases, regardless of the impact of all other covariates, the probability of looking for employment decreases. The sharp decline in the middle line for contingent rewards demonstrates a sharp decrease in the probability of looking for a new job as satisfaction increases. This occurs under the condition that workers all have the same scores (the mean) for nature of work, pay, and perception of child welfare. This clearly demonstrates that the probability of looking for other employment decreases as satisfaction with contingent rewards increases, regardless of the impact of all other covariates.

Degree of Intent to Leave

As indicated in Table 5, logistic regression identified some factors related to which workers are likely to be considering leaving. An important subsequent question to ask is, "How committed are they to leaving?" To test this, a scale was developed to measure intent, which included the following items: "How often have you spoken with friends/spouse/partner about leaving?" "How often have you looked in the paper for a new job?" "How often have you looked in

professional journals for a new job?” “How many phone inquiries have you made about other jobs?” “How many resumes have you sent out?” “How often do you search the internet for jobs?” “How many job interviews have you had?” Each item was measured on a scale from 0 to 4 and then summed to create an overall score for the degree of intent to leave. The lowest possible score is 0 and the highest value is 28. This analysis only includes workers who indicated that they were looking for work ($n = 217$) and were engaging in any of the above activities reflecting intent to leave. The mean on the scale was 7.4 ($SD = 3.7$) with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 16. Table 6 presents the results of a multiple regression for the covariates tested in the logistic regression. The column labeled “coefficient” is the slope that indicates how much the degree of *intent to leave* decreases for every one-point increase in a covariate. For example, when satisfaction with nature of work increases by 1, a worker’s intent to leave decreases by 0.74 points. A worker who had a score of 15 on this scale would have an 11.1-point decrease (15×0.74) in his or her degree of intent to leave. Contingent rewards and the nature of work strongly influence the strength of workers’ intention to obtain other work, as indicated by their alternative job-seeking activities. Pay and perception of child welfare are not statistically significant in this model.

Study Limitations

Four caveats must be noted regarding the findings. (1) Desirability of turnover—There was no way to determine the performance level

Table 6

Multiple Regressions for Degree of Intent to Leave ($n = 217$)

Covariates	Coefficient	Standard Error	<i>t</i>	$P > t $
Pay	−0.0916164	0.2674153	−0.34	0.732
Contingent rewards	−0.8339742	0.2810558	−2.97	0.003
Nature of work	−0.7425942	0.2633978	−2.82	0.005
Perception of child welfare	0.0693861	0.0750824	0.92	0.357
Constant	40.1900000	5.339303	7.53	0.000

of the respondents. Those most likely to be looking for new work may be the ones who are least desirable to retain. (2) Missing data—Some respondents did not respond to every question, so some items were tabulated with less than the total number of respondents. (3) The limitations of self-reported perceptions—This report presents participants' perceived realities, which may depart from actualities. (4) Social desirability—Participants may have responded in socially desirable ways, at the same time concealing their true feelings. For example, some respondents may be apprehensive about revealing their desires for a new job, and other more objective measures could reveal a different picture.

Discussion

The workers in this study of voluntary child welfare programs are primarily people of color who have solid experience in child welfare (mean = 6.7 years) and at their current agency (mean = 4.8 years). Although child welfare was not the first career choice for the vast majority, many indicated a relatively strong commitment to social work and child welfare, and 75% planned to remain there. Despite this, over half (57.9%) said they had thought of leaving their agency in the past year.

Bivariate analysis identified some interesting similarities and differences between the voluntary agency workers in this study and those in prior studies focused primarily on public child welfare workers. In brief, the workers in this study who were not thinking of leaving

- were more strongly committed to social work and child welfare;
- thought there was a better fit between their work and personal lives;
- rated public perceptions of child welfare more positively; and
- had higher total job satisfaction.

Some of these findings are similar to those of prior studies on worker retention. For example, Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, and Dews (2007); Mor Barak, Levin, Nissly, and Lane (2006); and Weaver et al. (2007) all identified the importance of professional commitment and

child welfare commitment. Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2008) found more satisfaction with the fit between home and work life among the public child welfare workers not thinking of leaving. Ellett et al. (2007) and Nissly et al. (2005) reported that workers not thinking of leaving thought the public had more positive attitudes toward child welfare. Cahalane and Sites (2008), Mor Barak et al. (2006), Weaver et al. (2007), and Strolin-Goltzman et al. (2008) all found higher total job satisfaction among those not thinking of leaving.

Despite the similarities in the findings on total job satisfaction, there were some major differences regarding specific aspects of job satisfaction. One of the most striking is that the workers in this study all reported relatively high satisfaction with supervision. In contrast, as Smith (2005) noted, "One fairly consistent finding among studies addressing human service or child welfare turnover is the important role of supervisors" (p. 156). Also, although all the workers in this study expressed some discontent with the level of pay, and it was a predictor of intent to leave, it was not as significant as other predicting factors. In contrast, both Dickinson and Perry (2002) and Jayaratne and Chess (1984) found low salary to be a key predictor of intent to leave.

The two most important findings of this study, which derived from multivariate analysis, are that the key predictors of intent to leave are (1) workers' satisfaction with *contingent rewards* (recognition and appreciation) and (2) their satisfaction with the *nature of the work* itself. To our knowledge, none of the other studies of workforce retention and turnover in child welfare used the Spector (1985) JSS, which specifies these two variables, so it is impossible to make direct comparisons. However, it is interesting to note that one of the major findings in the large qualitative study ($n = 369$) conducted by Ellett et al. (2007) was that workers who chose to remain in child welfare believed that the larger organization cared about them as employees and as individuals. Although it was not labeled as such, it seems likely that this belief derived at least in part from the contingent rewards they received.

Two large multivariate studies of job satisfaction and intent to leave in public child welfare yielded somewhat conflicting findings

on constructs similar to our focus on satisfaction with the nature of the work itself. Smith (2005) concluded, "Even in a work climate where intrinsic job value is ostensibly an important motivator, extrinsic rewards such as the facilitation of life-work balance and supervisory support are associated with job retention, but reports of intrinsic job value are not" (p. 165). In contrast, Landsman (2001) concluded, "The strength of orientation to service may be the single most important factor in explaining job satisfaction and commitment among public child welfare employees" (p. 406). Thus, it is difficult to conclude that this emphasis on the nature of the work itself is unique to voluntary child welfare workers, but whether unique or not, this study highlights the importance of focusing on this in any effort to enhance worker retention. Further research is necessary to determine whether the findings of this study highlighting the importance of contingent rewards and the nature of work would be found in other voluntary child welfare agency settings.

Implications

The current study has clear implications for program administrators and supervisors eager to enhance job satisfaction and staff retention in child welfare. First, as the findings indicate, it is important to insure that workers hired have a real commitment to practice in child welfare and share a sense of the agency's mission. Second, agencies in which staff members are under tremendous pressure, working with vulnerable populations and often negatively perceived by their clients and the larger society, need to develop strategies to support their workers. In the corporate world, administrators can provide bonuses and salary increases. In the nonprofit sector, managers need to be creative and expansive in the ways they reward staff. There are many ways to accomplish this. Acknowledgment can be important to a worker who has just handled a very difficult case situation or collateral contact successfully. Special recognition at a staff meeting or in an agency memo or newsletter always helps build morale. Workers can occasionally be offered extra time off. Since staff members often have to work extra night hours, flexibility in time demands can be

perceived as a real benefit. Finally, a simple thank you can mean a lot to workers under stress.

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