Who Stays, Who Goes, Who Knows? A State-Wide Survey of Child Welfare Workers

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Abstract

Child welfare workforce turnover remains a significant problem with dire consequences.

Designed to assist in its retention efforts, an agency supported state-wide survey was employed

to capture worker feedback and insight into turnover. This article examines the quantitative

feedback from a Southern state's frontline child welfare workforce (N=511), examining worker

intent to leave as those who intend to stay employed at the agency (Stayers), those who are

undecided (Undecided), and those who intend to leave (Leavers). A series of One-Way

ANOVAs revealed a stratified pattern of worker dissatisfaction, with stayers reporting highest

satisfaction levels, followed by undecided workers, and then leavers in all areas (e.g., salary,

workload, recognition, professional development, accomplishment, peer support, and

supervision). A Multinomial Logistic Regression model revealed significant (and shared)

predictors among leavers and undecided workers in comparison to stayers with respect to

dissatisfaction with workload and professional development, and working in an urban area.

Additionally, child welfare workers who intend to leave the agency in the next 12 months

expressed significant dissatisfaction with supervision and accomplishment, and tended to be

younger and professionals of color.

Keywords: child welfare, turnover, retention, urban, rural, job satisfaction

1. Introduction

In the federal fiscal year of 2014, an estimated 1,580 children died due to child maltreatment. In the same year, an estimated 3.6 million child abuse and neglect referrals were made involving about 6.6 million children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2016). Child welfare workers are responsible for responding to these referrals to ensure that children, our most vulnerable population, are living in a safe and healthy environment. Turnover within the child welfare system threatens the ability to respond effectively. It is critical to have a stable, competent, and committed child welfare workforce so that services are properly provided to children and families in need (McFadden, Campbell, & Taylor, 2015). However, families are facing many negative consequences due to high rates of turnover within the child welfare system (Schudrich, Liao, Lawrence, Auerbach, Gomes, Fernandes, McGowan, & Claiborne, 2013). For example, when turnover is high, the cases of families continuously pass from one worker to another (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). There are also not enough staff to meet performance standards required for effective child welfare service provision (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2007). Child welfare workers have a difficult time completing investigations in a timely manner and are limited in their ability to perform family visits (Government Accountability Office, 2003). Additionally, employee turnover can be costly in terms of recruitment, the training of new workers, and the loss of productivity (Ellet, Ellis, Westbrook, & Dews, 2007); the estimated cost for every child welfare worker that leaves the agency is $54,000 (National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, 2016).

The turnover rate within the child welfare system has been estimated to be between 30 to 40% each year (GAO, 2003), and according to Fernandes (2016), the majority of child welfare workers look for a different job every few months. However, inconsistent definitions of turnover

create difficulty in determining accurate percentages (Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & Lane, 2005). Intention to leave does not guarantee actual turnover (Gonzalez, Faller, Ortega, & Tropman, 2009) and polarizing those who intend to stay vs. those who intend to leave omits one very important group of child welfare workers – those who are undecided about their intentions. This study seeks to enhance the field's understanding of child welfare workforce turnover by assessing and comparing satisfaction levels of child welfare workers who intend to leave the field, those who intend to stay, and those who remain undecided. Focusing on, and better supporting, those who are undecided may be a more efficient and effective strategy for reducing workforce turnover than focusing on those who have already made the decision to leave the agency.

2. Factors Influencing Turnover and Retention

Empirical research has documented factors that contribute to worker retention and turnover in the child welfare system. Some factors are considered individual level factors while others occur at the organizational level. For example, individual level factors contributing to retention include a child welfare worker's sense of accomplishment, professional commitment, and job satisfaction (Williams, Nichols, Kirk, & Wilson, 2011). Organizational factors that contribute to retention include reasonable workloads, better salary, and opportunities for advancement (Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; Ellett et al., 2007; Zlotnik et al., 2005). Coworker and supervisor support (Williams et al., 2011; Zlotnik et al., 2005; Kim & Kao, 2014) as well as recognition (Williams et al., 2011; Barth, Lloyd, Christ, Chapman, & Dickinson, 2008; Ellett et al., 2007) have also been found to be organizational factors that influence retention and turnover. While there has not been a generally accepted theory developed to explain turnover or retention specifically within the child welfare system, research consistently points to several key factors of

worker satisfaction and dissatisfaction that are often associated with turnover and/or retention. These factors are the focus of the current study, and are described in detail below.   Additionally, although research on the topic is scarce, it is possible that other factors, such as race/ethnicity and geographical setting (urban/rural) are associated with retention and turnover (Yankeelov, Barbee, Sullivan, & Antle, 2009).

 2.1 Workload

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

2.2 Salary

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

2.3 Recognition

Child welfare workers often feel undervalued; this factor can contribute to turnover (Ellett et al., 2007). Feeling undervalued and receiving little to no recognition from supervisors or the child welfare organization has a major negative influence on job satisfaction for these

workers (Cahalane & Sites, 2008; Barth et al., 2008; Williams et al., 2011). Child welfare

agencies experience higher levels of scrutiny than other social service organizations (Blome &

Steib, 2014) which is just one reason why child welfare workers need to feel valued and

recognized by the organization employing them. Providing recognition may help to abate the

negative feelings associated with this scrutiny and have positive effects on worker retention, as

an organizational focus on rewards and incentives significantly minimized intention to leave in a

study of 781 child welfare workers in New York (Shim, 2010).

2.4 Professional development

Workers with little opportunity for advancement are typically less satisfied (Barth et al.,

2008) which often leads to turnover (Ellett et al., 2007). Workers are more likely to stay in public

child welfare when opportunities for advancement are present (Zlotnik et al., 2005; Williams et

al., 2011) as well as opportunities to perform new tasks that encompass more of their talents and

skills (Cahalane & Sites, 2008).

2.5 Accomplishment

The feeling of personal accomplishment can serve as a predictor of retention within

public child welfare (Cahalane & Sites, 2008). However, public child welfare workers have

reported feeling lower levels of accomplishment than social workers in other settings (Kim,

2011). Feelings of ineffectiveness can lead to turnover (Williams et al., 2011).

2.6 Peer support

Coworker support has been found to have a positive influence on retention of child

welfare workers (Williams et al., 2011) in some studies, but in others it has not been found to be

a strong influence (Boyas, Wind, & Kang, 2011; Kim & Kao, 2014). One study revealed that

supervisor support is a stronger predictor of worker retention in child welfare than peer support

(Chenot, Benton, & Kim, 2009). However, coworker support may a predictor of retention when it comes to less experienced workers (Curry, McCarragher, & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2005; Chenot et al., 2009).

2.7 Supervision

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

2.8 Race and ethnicity

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

2.9 Rural or urban location

Child welfare workers in rural settings have reported higher levels of job satisfaction (Barth et al., 2008) and a greater intention to stay at their agencies (Yankeelov et al., 2009; Landsman, 2002) than those in urban settings. One study found that intention to leave was higher in rural and urban areas than in suburban areas (Strolin-Goltzman, Auerbach, McGowan, & McCarthy, 2008). However, some researchers believe this finding may not be about the geographical location itself, but rather the differences in size among agencies in rural and urban settings (Landsman, 2002) as well as other differentiating factors that exist in the two geographical settings (Aguiniga, et al., 2013).

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to enhance our understanding of child welfare workforce turnover as a means of promoting improved strategies to increase retention and reduce turnover. As noted previously, extant research on child welfare workforce retention and turnover focuses on those who intend to leave and/or those who intend to stay. However, decisions around remaining employed may not always dichotomous, but may rather occur on a continuum, including those who have decided to leave, those who are undecided, and those who have decided to stay. The current study adds to our understanding of retention and turnover within the child welfare field by answering the following research questions:

1. How satisfied are frontline child welfare workers with respect to key factors known to influence retention and turnover, including workload, salary, recognition, professional development, accomplishment, peer support, and supervision?

2. Does satisfaction with workload, salary, recognition, professional development, accomplishment, peer support, and supervision differ among child welfare workers who intend to stay, those who intend to leave, and those who are undecided?

3. What factors predict intent to leave and indecision about continued employment in child welfare?

4. **Methodology**

4.1 Design and data collection

A descriptive research design was employed to obtain feedback from one state's child welfare workforce using an electronic survey administered through Qualtrics. The survey contained salient factors known to influence workforce retention and turnover. The protocol for the research process was reviewed and approved by both the University and State's Institutional Review Boards and loaded into Qualtrics for distribution to the agency's employees by their government email addresses.

The Commissioner of the state's child welfare system sent out a supportive preliminary email encouraging her workforce to share their feedback by participating in the study. The email identified the researchers and their affiliation with a major university-- not the state's child welfare system. That communication also stated the survey would arrive in a later email. A week later the electronic survey was sent to the entire child welfare workforce through a listserv and from the email account of a high-ranking child welfare administrator. In that email, a cover letter discussed voluntary and anonymous participation and included a hyperlink where the respondent could access the electronic Qualtrics survey. The survey was resent two weeks later as a reminder for those who had not previously responded.

The survey consisted of 14 demographic questions, a question about respondents' intention to leave or remain employed at their current child welfare agency, and 25 questions designed to provide respondents with an opportunity to rate their levels of satisfaction across seven areas known to influence child welfare workforce retention and turnover (salary, workload,

recognition, professional development, accomplishment, peer support, and supervision). The

satisfaction items were developed using key concepts found in peer-reviewed, published

literature as well as select instruments previously employed to assess these constructs (Auerbach,

McGowan, Ausberger, Strolin-Goltzman, & Schudrich, 2010; Cahalane & Sites, 2008; Chen &

Scannapieco, 2010; Ellett, Ellett, & Rugutt, 2003; Koeske, Kirk, Koeske, & Rauktis, 1994; Shim,

2010). It is important to note that prior to the full implementation of the survey, a preliminary

version of the survey was piloted with a small sample of workers representing various regions

across the state [Author, Year]. The preliminary version of the survey included 19 satisfaction

items. Following the pilot study, six items were added based upon a review for content and face

validity by a panel of experts composed of two current administrators in the state child welfare

system, a former administrator in the state child welfare system, the PI, and two university

colleagues with knowledge of child welfare issues and survey design. These six items and the

previously piloted 19 items were combined to create the 25 satisfaction items used in the current

study.

4.2 Sample

        This paper reports findings from frontline workers in the state's child welfare system;

however, survey data were also provided by child welfare supervisors and administrators. Using

the criterion of having direct client contact and not working in any supervisory role, 511 of the

possible 1,351 statewide frontline child welfare workers receiving the survey participated in this

study (37.8%). Although the response rate of this study was low, it was higher than that found in

other studies, such as Augsberger et al. (2012). The sample consisted primarily of female

respondents (86.5%), with a mean age of 37.62 years (SD 9.86), who had worked for the agency

for a mean of 8.15 years (SD 7.52). Related to race and ethnicity, the sample primarily identified

as being white (87.2%) with 41 individuals identifying as Black or African American (8.1%).

The majority of the sample reported that this was their first child welfare job (72.7%) and 51.2%

of the sample primarily worked in their home county. Sixty-five percent of respondents

described working in a primarily rural area and 35% reported working in an urban area.

Educationally, the sample included 203 individuals (40.4%) with a Bachelor in Social Work

degree. Roughly two-thirds of the sample did not have any graduate education (68.5%); 112

respondents (22.5%) had a Master of Social Work degree, and 45 (9%) had a graduate degree in

another field (see Table 1).

4.3 Measures

    4.3.1 Satisfaction Subscales. Seven satisfaction subscales were developed based upon the

25 satisfaction questions contained in the survey. Each satisfaction item utilized a five-point

Likert response scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly

Agree). The majority of the items were positively framed (e.g., "I have a competent supervisor,"

"I have sufficient support from my co-workers," "I am satisfied with the recognition of my

work") utilizing a strengths-based approach for assessing levels of satisfaction in the

respondent's position as a frontline child welfare worker.   The summation of all 25 items was

used to create the Child Welfare Employee Feedback Scale (CWEFS) with a theoretical range of

25 to 125. The CWEFS indicates the respondent's level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with

each of the previously described constructs found to influence worker turnover, and therefore

included subscales representing satisfaction with workload, supervision, recognition,

accomplishment, professional development, peer support, and salary. Higher scores on the

CWEFS and on each of the subscales indicated greater satisfaction. The number of items,

sample questions, item means, and coefficient alphas for each of the seven subscales, established

through a Principal Components Analysis, can be seen in Table 2. These subscales had acceptable coefficient alphas ranging from .705 to .919. Mean scores representing average satisfaction level for each subscale were used in the current study.

4.3.2 Age. The child welfare worker's numerical response to "Age" resulted in the operational definition of this scale level independent variable.

4.3.3 Professional of color. The respondent's categorical selection to the question "How do you describe yourself?" resulted in the operational definition of this independent variable (1=White; 2=Hispanic or Latino; 3=Black or African American; 4=Native American or American Indian; 5=Asian/Pacific Islander; 6=Biracial; 7=Other). For the current study, responses were recoded into a dichotomous variable (0=White, 1=Professional of Color).

4.3.4 Location of employment. The respondent's categorical selection to the question "Which best describes the area in which you work?" resulted in the operational definition of this independent variable (0=Basically Rural; 1= Basically Urban).

4.3.5 Intent to leave. Child welfare workers' response to the five-point Likert-scale item in the survey, "I plan on leaving this agency within the next 12 months", was used to create the intent to leave variable for the current study. For this study, workers who responded with agreement or strong agreement were coded as 'Leavers'; workers who responded with disagreement or strong disagreement were coded as 'Stayers'; and workers who responded as neutral were coded as 'Undecided.'

4.4 Data Analysis Process

The dataset was cleaned and prepared for further analysis. List-wise deletion was employed for all subsequent analyses, as this method has proven to carry less bias than pair-wise deletion (an alternative option; Baraldi & Enders, 2010). Descriptive analysis of mean

satisfaction scores was employed to assess child welfare workers' satisfaction with salary, workload, recognition, professional development, accomplishment, peer support, and supervision. Bivariate correlation analyses were used to assess relationships among the satisfaction subscales and CWEFS, and workers' intentions to leave. Multiple One-way ANOVAs with post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni adjustment were conducted to examine differences in satisfaction among Stayers, Leavers, and those who were undecided, followed by a multinomial logistic regression to further investigate the effects of key predictors (subscale scores and demographic variables) on workers' intentions to leave. The Kappa coefficient was calculated to evaluate the predictive power of the multinomial logistic model proposed.

5. Results

5.1 Univariate analysis

Respondents gave the highest satisfaction ratings to the Supervision, Peer Support, and Accomplishment subscales. By rating below the item mean of 3.0 (i.e. neutral category), respondents reported dissatisfaction with their Professional Development, Recognition, Workload, and Salary (See Table 2).

5.2 Bivariate analyses: Plan on leaving the agency

A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted between each of the subscales, the CWEFS overall score and the intent to leave variable. The results of all eight inverse relationships were statistically significant (See Table 3). Moderate negative correlations were found between workers' intentions to leave and each of the Recognition, Professional Development, Accomplishment, Workload subscales as well as the overall CWEFS. Weak, but significant, relationships were found for the remaining subscales.

A series of bivariate One-Way ANOVAs with post hoc comparisons using Bonferroni adjustment (Shaffer, 1995) were conducted to examine mean subscale differences among the Stayers, Leavers, and those who were undecided. Results revealed significant differences between Stayers, Leavers, and those who were undecided on all subscales with the exception of Salary. Stayers were more satisfied on every single scale, Leavers expressed the lowest levels of satisfaction across all subscales; and those who were undecided scored in the middle (See Table 4). The results of post hoc comparisons delved into the pairwise difference among the three types of respondents (i.e. Leavers, Stayers and the Undecided). Although there was no significant difference detected between Stayers and the undecided, the other comparisons across all subscales except for salary were all statistically significant (See Table 4).

5.3 Multivariate analysis: Multinomial Logistic Regression

Multinomial Logistic Regression (MLR) was used to analyze predictors of the intent to leave variable – a unordered categorical group classification. The use of MLR allowed for simultaneous assessment of predictors for a nominal dependent variable with more than two categories (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). The assumptions of independence, multicollinearity, and linearity were checked and met (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). The reference category for the outcome variable was 'Stayers' and each of the other two categories was compared to this reference group.

The previously identified seven subscales were included as predictor variables in the MLR model. Additionally, the model included three demographic predictor variables – respondent's age, identification as a professional of color, and location of employment. Reference categories for respondents' identification as a professional of color and location of employment were 'White' and 'Rural', respectively.

The results of MLR suggested that addition of predictors to a model that contained only the intercept significantly improved the fit between the model and data, $\chi^2(20, N=450) = 200.146$, and Nagelkerke $R^2 = .42$, $p <.001$ (Nagelkerke, 1991). As shown in Table 5, significant unique contributions were made by four of the seven satisfaction subscales - workload, supervision, accomplishments, and professional development - as well as all three demographic predictor variables – respondents' age, identification as a professional of color, and location of employment.

Table 6 presents MLR parameter estimates; the first column contains the outcome of Leavers compared to Stayers and the second column contains the outcome of Undecided compared to Stayers. For continuous independent variables like the subscale scores, the odds ratios presented are associated with each unit increase on the corresponding scale. The results suggest that higher levels of satisfaction with workload, supervision, accomplishments, and professional development significantly reduce the probability of leaving the agency. In addition, child welfare workers who are older are significantly less likely to leave the agency. Conversely, the odds of professionals of color leaving the agency are 2.98 times higher than their white colleagues, and the odds of those who work primarily in an urban area leaving the agency are 2.75 times higher than those of their rural colleagues. The results also suggest that higher levels of satisfaction with workload and professional development significantly reduce the probability of being undecided about leaving the agency as compared to those who choose to stay. As was the case for leaving the agency, child welfare professionals who primarily work in an urban area were significantly more likely to be undecided about leaving the agency than their rural colleagues.

It is important to note that good model fit, like the MLR model proposed in the current study, doesn't necessarily indicate good predictive utility (Zheng, & Agresti, 2000). Therefore, the Kappa coefficient was used as a measure of effect size for the model's predictive power, because it takes into account the cases for accurate prediction occurring by chance. The Kappa for the final MLR model was .374 (SE = 0.035, $p < .001$), indicating an acceptable degree of agreement between the model predictions and the facts (Cohen, 1960).

7. Discussion

Unlike some of the prior studies on child welfare workers' sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction that affect retention and turnover (Augsberger, et al., 2012; Cahalane & Sites, 2008; Curry et al., 2005; Gonzalez et al., 2009; Williams et al., 2011), the current study is unique in that its findings draw from an entire state-wide workforce of frontline child welfare workers with a particular focus on those who intend to stay, those who intend to leave, *and* those who are undecided. The study confirms that workplace factors such as workload, recognition, peer support, supervision, sense of accomplishment, and professional development opportunities do matter to frontline child welfare workers (Augsberger, et al., 2012; Barth et al., 2008; Cahalane & Sites, 2008; Ellett et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2011; Zlotnik et al., 2005).

These factors also authenticate the challenges and stresses of employment in child welfare (Boyas, Wind, & Ruiz, 2015; Horwitz, 2006; Lizano & Barak, 2012; Kim, 2011; Mandell, Stalker, Wright, Frensch, & Harvey, 2013) as workers attempt to make decisions that can literally save children's lives while operating in an environment that is crisis driven and emotionally charged. Indeed, when one's caseload is large and demanding, how does one balance the expenditure of time with one family knowing that others will be shortchanged?

Overall, respondents indicated the importance of the guidance and support they received from their supervisors as satisfaction with supervision received the highest mean rating on the seven subscales. This was closely followed by satisfaction with peer support and sense of accomplishment. Unfortunately, excessive workload is a common source of dissatisfaction among child welfare employees, and this subscale as well as the salary subscale had the lowest ratings among the seven subscales. Low salaries for child welfare workers, if not a tragedy, are a failure of our society to value our nation's children as much as we do other concerns.

Analyses revealed that satisfaction on all seven of the subscales was inversely related to planning to leave one's employment in the child welfare agency and that there were statistically significant differences on six of the subscales among the stayers, the leavers, and those undecided. Further, the multinomial logistic regression model revealed strong predictors for those planning to leave the child welfare agency as well as those who were undecided about their intentions to leave the agency. The results of this analysis suggest that working primarily in an urban area and dissatisfaction with workload and professional development are shared (and significant) predictors of leaving or being undecided about leaving the agency. Child welfare workers who intend to leave also express significant dissatisfaction with supervision and accomplishments, are younger, and professionals of color. One suspects that this is due to a greater number of social service agencies found in urban areas that create more opportunities for lateral movement and promotion. However, professionals of color also work in rural areas of the state, where they are still leaving at higher rates. Related to salary, it is possible that this factor did not achieve statistical significance because of the uniformly low satisfaction ratings it was assigned by child welfare workers that created very little variance in the data.

This study has identified an important subpopulation of child welfare workers who have revealed that they are undecided as to whether they will stay or leave the agency in the next 12 months. Although it is not clear if these individuals will leave or stay, they are on the cusp and their indecision must be acknowledged and better understood. Further, their job satisfaction matters. The step-down pattern of comprehensive worker dissatisfaction illuminate the challenges found in all areas, as the satisfaction of undecided workers was in the middle between that of the leavers and the stayers. Future research should work to better identify avenues for improving job satisfaction, as preventative strategies may be a cost-effective avenue for reaching out to this pivotal group and weathering the storms of worker turnover. How can we retain those who are undecided? The answer to this question may significantly improve retention efforts moving forward.

7.1 Limitations

The most important limitation of this study related to the interpretation of its findings is that the researchers used a measure of intent to remain employed at the agency, which may not actually result in workers leaving the agency. Future research should examine the relationship between intent to leave, or being undecided, and actual turnover. Additionally, the survey response rate was low, yet consistent with other research. Although some of the voices from workers in the field are not included in this study, the authors believe that adequate representation of workers at the agency was obtained. Finally, even though workers were highly dissatisfied with salary, future research should explore whether the non-significant effect on intent to leave was due to their investment in the retirement system or something else, such as lack of variability in the salary subscale.

8. Conclusions

The strengths of this study include the use of a statewide sample and examination of child welfare worker intent to leave on a continuum, describing comprehensive patterns of job dissatisfaction between those who intend to stay, those who are undecided, and those who plan on leaving the agency in the next 12 months. While this study has examined child welfare workers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction with seven of the prime factors found in the literature, areas for future research remain. Specifically, the field needs to know more about those who are undecided in their intent to leave the agency, as they report significant dissatisfaction with particular subscales as compared to those who intend to stay. Also, the field needs a better understanding of the proportion of those who are undecided actually leave the agency? Related to individual characteristics, what influences professionals of color working in this large and minimally diverse bureaucratic agency to consider leaving in greater proportions? Is it the lack of diversity in the workforce? Are there any administrative or systematic barriers that must be addressed to improve the retention rates of this critically important population? Beyond race and ethnicity, does marital status or having dependent children influence workers to consider leaving for higher salaries, positions with more predictable hours, or less stressful? Given the predominately female workforce, a logical consideration would be to examine whether these factors contribute to turnover, and if so, to develop supports if they are determined to be relevant to worker retention. Do child welfare workers need hazardous duty pay? More opportunities for advancement? These were issues not explored in this paper.

Child welfare workers continue to leave their positions at alarming rates. This study revealed that approximately one out of every four child welfare workers intends to leave their agency in the next 12 months with another one out of four workers reporting indecision about their intent. This problem is nothing new, yet the problem prevails. Findings from studies with

large samples are important for understanding the conditions that affect worker performance and their interest in remaining employed in child welfare. Efforts made to better support those who are undecided may be a more cost efficient strategy for addressing the child welfare workforce crisis. Identifying this subpopulation may create a more refined and focused approach to improving high rates of worker turnover, as these individuals may still be receptive to a long-term employment relationship in their positions. Improving salaries will always be something of a challenge in governmental employment, but administrators can find innovative ways to improve supervision and professional development. Without spending a great deal of money, mechanisms can be put into place to enhance workers' recognition for their efforts and sense of accomplishment in the performance of their responsibilities. Greater use of technology (such as use of tablets and laptops in the field) may help with the huge burden of paperwork that workers feel in the same way as too many assigned cases. The high turnover among child welfare workers *must be* addressed; administrators cannot pretend that the factors studied in this state-wide survey do not matter.

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Table 1 *Sample Characteristics of Child Welfare Workforce (n = 511)*

Worker Characteristics	*f (Valid %)*	*Range*	*M (SD)*
Age		22-64	37.62 (9.86)
Years Worked at Agency		1-45	8.15 (7.52)
Gender			
Female	441 (86.5)		
Male	68 (13.3)		
Other	1 (0.2)		
How do you describe yourself?			
White	442 (87.2)		
Black or African American	41 (8.1)		
Hispanic or Latino	2 (0.4)		
Native American or American Indian	2 (0.4)		
Asian/Pacific Islander	3 (0.6)		
Biracial	8 (1.6)		
Other	9 (1.8)		
Is this your first job in child welfare?			
Yes	365 (72.7)		
No	137 (27.3)		
Do you primarily work in your home county?			
Yes	260 (51.2)		
No	248 (48.8)		
Which best describes the area in which you work?			
Basically Rural	326 (64.7)		
Basically Urban	178 (35.3)		
Graduate Degree			
None	341 (68.5)		
Social Work	112 (22.5)		
Other	45 (9.0)		
Undergraduate Degree			
Other	300 (59.6)		
Social Work	203 (40.4)		

Table 2   *Item Means and Cronbach's Alphas for Subscales and Global Scale*

Subscale	Example question	*Item mean*	*# Items*	*Possible score*	*Alpha*
Salary	Our salaries are competitive with similar jobs.	1.87	2	2-10	.705
Workload	I have a manageable client caseload.	2.24	8	8-40	.885
Recognition	I earn recognition from doing a good job.	2.57	3	3-15	.790
Professional Development	I am satisfied with the opportunities for promotion.	2.85	4	4-20	.721
Accomplishment	I have a sense of accomplishment from doing my job.	3.53	2	2-10	.787
Peer Support	I have sufficient support from my co-workers.	3.97	2	2-10	.806
Supervision	I have a competent supervisor.	4.19	4	4-20	.919
CWEFS		2.90	25	25-125	.910

Table 3

Subscale Correlations with Plan on Leaving the Agency

Subscale	*n*	*Correlation*	*p*
Salary	507	-.221	.006**
Workload	504	-.489	.000***
Recognition	507	-.330	.000***
Professional Dev.	507	-.435	.000***
Accomplishment	508	-.406	.000***
Peer Support	506	-.221	.000***
Supervision	505	-.348	.000***
CWEFS	485	-.543	.000***

Note. * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Table 4

Results for One-Way ANOVAs and Post Hoc comparisons with Plan on Leaving the Agency

Subscale	*n*	M (SD)	Leavers (L)	Undecided (U)	Stayers (S)	U:L	S:L	S:U	*F*	*p*
Salary	507	3.74 (1.53)	3.46	3.69	3.86	N/A	N/A	N/A	2.69	.070
Workload	504	17.95 (6.80)	11.75	14.11	18.29	2.36**	6.54**	4.18**	75.69	.000***
Recognition	507	7.71 (2.76)	6.38	7.36	8.38	.98**	2.00**	1.02**	26.02	.000***
Pro. Development	507	11.38 (3.28)	9.20	10.81	12.49	1.6**	3.29**	1.68**	50.54	.000***
Accomplishment	508	7.07 (1.89)	5.97	6.69	7.66	.71**	1.68**	.97**	35.13	.000***
Peer Support	506	7.94 (1.84)	7.26	7.96	8.20	.69**	.94**	.25	9.49	.000***
Supervision	505	16.77 (3.67)	14.47	16.76	17.70	2.28**	3.23**	.94**	24.86	.000***

Note. * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001. Value under L:U, L:S and U:S stands for the mean difference in post hoc multiple comparison (using Bonferroni adjustment).

WHO STAYS, WHO GOES, WHO KNOWS?

Table 5
Likelihood Ratio Tests for Variables Entered the Multinomial Logistic Regression

Subscale	-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Chi-Square	df	p
Salary	705.556	3.070	2	.216
Workload	739.396	36.910	2	.000***
Recognition	705.428	2.942	2	.230
Professional development	717.204	14.718	2	.001**
Accomplishment	709.746	7.259	2	.027*
Peer support	704.964	2.477	2	.290
Supervision	714.625	12.139	2	.002**
Age	712.879	10.393	2	.006**
Professional of Color (1/0)	710.163	7.677	2	.022*
Urban (1/0)	714.121	11.635	2	.003**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6. *Regression Coefficients for Predictors of Probability of Leaving the Agency (N = 450)*

Predictor	Leavers (n=107)			Undecided (n=109)		
	OR	95% CI	SE	OR	95% CI	SE
Workload	0.815***	0.754-0.882	0.040	0.891***	0.841-0.944	0.030
Supervision	0.860***	0.787-0.939	0.045	0.951	0.875-1.033	0.042
Recognition	1.121	0.967-1.299	0.075	1.086	0.961-1.228	0.063
Accomplishment	0.791**	0.659-0.949	0.093	0.850	0.722-1.002	0.084
Prof. development	0.805***	0.712-0.909	0.062	0.871**	0.788-0.964	0.051
Peer support	0.899	0.762-1.060	0.084	1.024	0.879-1.192	0.078
Salary	1.168	0.932-1.464	0.115	1.164	0.964-1.406	0.096
Age	0.950**	0.920-0.981	0.016	0.987	0.962-1.013	0.013
Prof. of Color (1/0)	2.971*	1.232-7.166	0.449	.947	.388-2.313	0.456
Urban (1/0)	2.751**	1.482-5.108	0.316	1.909*	1.117-3.265	0.274

Note. Reference group: Stayers (n=261). OR = Odds Ratio. SE = Standard Error. 95% CI = Confidence Interval. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$