Teamwork as a Remedy to Prevent Turnover amongst U.S. Public Child Welfare Workers

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Teamwork as a Remedy to Prevent Turnover Amongst U.S. Public Child Welfare Workers

Jinman Kyonne, PhD

Introduction

A high turnover rate among child welfare caseworkers has emerged in the past decade as possibly one of the most serious issues within the U.S. public social service sector. The vast majority of child welfare work in the United States, particularly the protection of children from abuse and neglect, is performed by child welfare workers employed by state agencies legally responsible for investigation of allegations of abuse and neglect and, often, for the on-going services provided to families when allegations are sustained.

Public child welfare workers have always been called upon to fulfill complex and demanding roles. They are asked to assess a child's safety, plan with the family, teach the family to find alternative parenting methods, support the family through the change process, document facts to a family, and report professional judgments based on facts about the family to the worker's supervisor and the court (Child Welfare Practice Framework 2007). When fulfilling these roles, they are legally mandated to protect children within families affected by "substance abuse, mental illness, mental retardation, violence, adolescent parenthood, incarceration, homelessness, and poverty" (Ellett, Ellett, and Rugutt 2003, 1). The demands of this work require employees who are well prepared educationally and well trained for the day-to-day demands of child protection.

Retention of well-prepared employees has become a major problem for each of the individual states. For example, in Georgia, child welfare workers turnover rates were 39% in 1999, which grew to 44% in 2000 (Ellett et al., 2003). In national status, the turnover rates for workers increased from 19.9% in 2000 to 22.1% in 2004 (Child Welfare League of America 2007). This serious turnover issue has demonstrated the need to develop child protective services that more effectively and fairly fashion environmental factors to enhance the workers' jobs.

As a result, many means for protecting caseworkers from deleterious effects of their work have been studied in order to ameliorate this trend. Researchers have tried to find the critical reasons for the high rate of turnover among caseworkers, and have suggested diverse programs and projects to decrease their intentions to leave. However, difficulty with research on actual turnover due to confidentiality (the agency managers usually do not want to share negative information such as employees' high turnover rate), lack of exit data, and/or reluctance by exiting workers to provide reasons have required researchers to find a surrogate measure. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) found that intention to leave is the primary antecedent to actual turnover, and Hellman (1997) verified that intention to leave an organization has gained much empirical and theoretical support as an important predictor of actual turnover. This study proposes to use public child welfare caseworkers' intentions to leave their agencies as a surrogate measure for actual turnover.

The Literature of Caseworker's Intention to Leave

If a given child welfare caseworker were to express an intention to leave his or her job, we could consider the following as possible major reasons. He or she might claim personal stress because of the following related factors: 1) burnout (Drake and Yadama 1996; Manlove and Guzell 1997; Wright and Cropanzano 1998; Mor Barak, Nissly, and Levin 2001); 2) job dissatisfaction (Jayaratne and Chess 1985; Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Griffeth, and Prussia 1992; Ostroff 1992; Tett and Meyer 1993; Wright and Cropanzano 1998; Mannheim and Papo 2000); 3) the organizational climate (Jayaratne and Chess 1984; Sundet and Cowger 1990; Collings

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and Murray 1996); and/or 4) issues of the worker's own educational background (Balfour and Neff 1993; Ellett, Ellett, and Rugutt 2003; Perry 2006).

Burnout has long been considered a major factor in employees' intentions to leave the child welfare field. Maslach and Jackson (1986) described burnout as the deleterious effects the environmental demands of the workplace have on the work, and he conceptualized that burnout can be understood in relation to job stress, and that emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment are considered as subscales. Whereas some researchers did not agree with the relationship between child welfare workers' burnout and intention to leave (Manlove and Guzell 1997), many studies verified that burnout is a main predictor of workers' intentions to leave (Drake and Yadama 1996; Wright and Cropanzano 1998; Mor Barak, Nissly, and Levin 2001).

Mannheim and Papo (2000) defined job satisfaction as an individual's satisfaction with working conditions, job responsibility, and relationships with colleagues and supervisors. Although Wright and Cropanzano (1998) did not find job satisfaction as a critical factor in relation to child welfare workers' turnover intentions, the workers' intentions to leave were related to their job satisfaction (Jayaratne and Chess 1985; Ostroff 1992); their job-related attitudes, such as withdrawal cognition, were involved in the linkage (Tett and Meyer 1993). The child welfare workers seemed to leave their jobs due to withdrawal cognitions that resulted from job dissatisfaction, burnout, and the suppression of unpleasant emotions (Hom, Caranikas-Walker, Griffeth, and Prussia 1992). Overall, job satisfaction can be considered a crucial factor related to an individual's work, resulting in public child welfare workers' intentions to leave.

Jayaratne and Chess (1984) defined organizational climate as physical comfort, challenge, financial rewards, and promotional opportunities. Sundet and Cowger (1990) also defined organizational climate as workload factors, including availability of supervision, caseload size, caseload complexity, case improvement, case decision autonomy, and geographic dispersion of cases. Social workers' organizational climate has been studied as a component closely related to job satisfaction

(Mannheim and Papo 2000; Gellis 2002) as well as workers' turnover (Jayaratne and Chess 1984; Collings and Murray 1996). Thus, organizational climate perceptions might be considered a predictor of caseworkers' intentions to leave.

A review of literature suggests that public child welfare caseworkers' educational background has been a recent topic of study. Balfour and Neff (1993) found the significance of experience (especially from an internship) and education as being the most important characteristic for determining one's propensity to leave. Ellett, Ellett, and Rugutt (2003) reported that although there was no significant difference between the educational level and turnover, BSW/MSW staff showed lower turnover levels than did other degree groups. Although the relationship between education and turnover has been approached in different ways, exactly what the relationship consists of is still not clear (Perry 2006).

Child welfare workers' intentions to leave might result from individual work-related factors, such as burnout and job dissatisfaction; from a work environment factor, such as organizational climate; from a personal factor, such as educational background, and/or a combination of these factors. These four major components appear to be interwoven by related characteristics and are often difficult to distinguish clearly one from the other. However, researchers studying public child welfare caseworkers' intentions to leave have not focused on worker relationships with other workers or on worker relationships with supervisors. These relationship areas could be conceptualized as teamwork. Thus, studying the teamwork factors related to the workers' intentions to leave could contribute to building new knowledge on the research agenda concerning public child welfare caseworkers' intentions to leave.

Teamwork Model

The concept of "team" has been used to improve many kinds of organizations, and teamwork has been studied to make improvements in work processes and systems through effective management. Concerning the concept of teamwork, Hunter, Bailey, and Taylor (1998, 73) defined a

team as a "group of people who need one another in order to achieve a purpose." They explained that a team consists of its own purpose, vision, membership, ownership, integrity, communication, responsibility, culture, leadership, and management. Guzzo and Salas (1995) described teamwork as involving those activities that serve to strengthen the quality of functional interactions, relationships, cooperation, communication, and coordination of team members, while task work includes the operations-related activities to be performed by the team members. More specifically, they explained cooperation as a behavioral type of teamwork in which workers share information, take one another's perspectives, exchange resources, support one another, and communicate and influence effectively.

Based on these teamwork concepts, Dickinson and McIntyre (1997) designed a teamwork model in a systemic approach. They identified seven core components: team orientation, team leadership, monitoring, feedback and/or backup, coordination, and communication. In order to improve teamwork, they indicated the importance of cooperation by team members and supervisors through which the teamwork components are effectively conducted. They also explained that "teamwork requires team members who have positive attitudes toward the team and its task, have been provided adequate direction and support for accomplishing team goals, and know their own tasks and those of other members with whom they interact" (22).

The impact of teamwork on worker turnover has been studied in diverse sectors (Ingram and Jones 1998; DeFontes and Surbida 2004; Forbes-Thompson, Gajewski, Scott-Cawiezell, and Dunton 2006). However, no published studies connecting teamwork with public child welfare caseworkers' intentions to leave were found in the available literature. Therefore, it is meaningful to ask whether teamwork impacts the workers' intentions to leave. This study builds a bridge between public child welfare caseworkers' intentions to leave and teamwork, and it illustrates how perceived teamwork is related to employee perception of the work environment.

Research Design
Data and Methods

Respondents to the on-line Survey of Organizational Excellence (SOE) from a mid-western state child welfare agency in 2005 provide the data for this paper. The SOE is a population survey and was offered to all employees of the agency (2,423 survey invitations were sent) with a return rate of 70% providing 1,691 responses. Of the total, 1,045 responses came from child welfare caseworkers and were used in this study. In order to prevent the misinterpretation of outcomes overemphasized by a large sample size, this study randomly selected 319 caseworkers among 1,045 based on the observed power around .80 and the effect size at .01-score, which indicates a proper sample size (Keppel and Wickens 2004). The SOE instrument was designed to seek the opinions of all employees about their organization, and it examines five key workplace dimensions: work group, accommodations, general organizational features, information, and personal demands. These dimensions capture various aspects of the work environment. The SOE assessment links their responses to 20 constructs within the organization that are considered critical to overall effectiveness and efficiency (Lauderdale 2001).

The instrument is currently used in over 100 state agencies with more than 150,000 public employees (as of 2004). The SOE instrument has been tested for internal consistency and found to be reliable: Cronbach's alpha of .85 or greater (Collins-Camargo 2005). The instrument has been tested for face validity by asking a panel of expert users for "their common agreements with a particular concept" (Rubin and Babbie 2001, 193-196). The instrument developers have tested some subscales for convergent validity with other instruments, such as Maslach's Burnout Inventory (MBI) and the Dean's Alienation Scale (Dean 1961). In addition, content validity has been established by trained observers (Lauderdale 1999).

The Operational Definitions and Questionnaire

In order to measure the public child welfare caseworkers' *intentions to leave*, the caseworkers were asked to agree or disagree with the follow-

ing sentence: "I plan to be working for this organization in two years" (Lauderdale 2001, 13). The percent of caseworkers that see themselves working for the organization in two years is a good indicator of how well the organization is doing at retaining its employees. The item was answered with a 2-categorical response format (*yes or no*). Respondents answering "no" to this question were considered to have a stated intention to leave and were assigned a value of 1 for the analysis, whereas answering "yes" was considered not to have a stated intention to leave and assigned a value of 0 for the analysis.

In the instrument, *teamwork* was defined as employees' perceptions of the effectiveness of their work group, and as employees' perceptions of the nature of supervisory relationships in the organization. It was surveyed by eleven questions: 1) "Work groups receive adequate feedback that helps improve their performance"; 2) "Decision making and control are given to employees doing the actual work"; 3) "There is a basic trust among employees and supervisors"; 4) "Work groups are actively involved in making work processes more effective"; 5) "We have an opportunity to participate in the goal-setting process"; 6) "We seem to be working toward the same goals"; 7) "We are given the opportunity to do our best work"; 8) "We are given accurate feedback about our performance"; 9) "Supervisors know whether an individual's career goals are compatible with organizational goals"; 10) "People who challenge the status quo are valued"; and 11) "Favoritism (special treatment) is not an issue in raises or promotions" (Lauderdale 2001, 23). The Cronbach's alpha score has been reported at .91, which means that the scale's items have achieved a high level of reliability. Each sub-scale consisted of a 5-point response format, which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect greater teamwork. An average score for the eleven items was used in the analysis.

The concept of burnout was defined as a feeling of extreme mental exhaustion that can negatively impact an employee's physical health and job performance. It was measured by five questions: 1) "We feel a sense of pride when we tell people that we work for this organization"; 2) "We feel our

efforts count"; 3) "We are encouraged to learn from our mistakes"; 4) "My job meets my expectations"; and 5) "My ideas and opinions count at work" (Lauderdale 2001, 23). The reliability score on these scales has been reported at .80 in this study**.** Each sub-scale consisted of a 5-point response format, which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). In analysis, the scores were conversely changed from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*) because the burnout questions were answered in the opposite direction. An average score for the five items was used in the analysis.

Job satisfaction was defined as an individual's satisfaction in the context of one's job-related attitudes in his or her organization. It was surveyed by four questions: 1) "We are given the opportunity to do our best work"; 2) "We have adequate resources to do our jobs"; 3) "The environment supports a balance between work and personal life"; and 4) "The pace of the work in this organization enables me to do a good job" (Lauderdale 2001, 23). Each sub-scale consisted of a 5-point response format, which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The internal consistent reliability score has been reported at .74 in this study. Higher scores reflect higher levels of worker job satisfaction. An average score for the four items was used in the analysis.

The *organizational climate* was defined as identifying role ambiguity, role conflict, workload, and sharing and support among colleagues. It was determined by nine questions: 1) "We are known for the quality of service we provide"; 2) "We know who our customers (those we serve) are"; 3) "We use feedback from those we serve to improve our performance"; 4) "We work well with other organizations"; 5) "We work well with our governing bodies (the legislature, the board, etc.)"; 6) "We work well with the public"; 7) "We understand the state, local, national, and global issues that impact the organization"; 8) "I have a good understanding of our mission, vision, and strategic plan"; and 9) "I believe we communicate our mission effectively to the public" (Lauderdale 2001, 23). Each sub-scale consisted of a 5-point response format, which ranged from 1 (*strongly*

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Random Sample (319 Caseworkers) Drawn from the 1,045 Respondents to the Survey of Organizational Excellence (SOE) in 2005

Demographic Characteristics (N=319)	Number of Survey Respondents (%)	Intention to Leave	
		Yes (%)	No (%)
Gender			
Female	286 (90)	59 (21)	223 (79)
Male	31 (10)	7 (23)	23 (77)
Race			
African-American	43 (14)	7 (17)	35 (83)
Hispanic-American	5 (2)	0 (0)	5 (100)
Anglo-American	256 (82)	57 (23)	195 (77)
Asian, Pacific, or Native American	2 (1)	1 (50)	1 (50)
Multiracial/Other	6 (2)	1 (17)	5 (83)
Age			
16 to 29 years old	89 (28)	30 (34)	59 (66)
30 to 39 years old	87 (27)	19 (22)	66 (78)
40 to 49 years old	63 (20)	6 (10)	56 (90)
50 to 59 years old	69 (22)	6 (9)	60 (91)
60 years and older	9 (3)	5 (56)	4 (44)
My annual gross (before taxes) salary is:			
Less than $15,000	8 (3)	3 (38)	5 (63)
$15,001 to 25,000	54 (17)	8 (15)	45 (85)
$25,001 to 35,000	213 (67)	51 (25)	157 (76)
$35,001 to 45,000	36 (11)	2 (6)	33 (94)
$45,001 to 50,000	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (100)
$50,001 to 60,000	4 (2)	1 (25)	3 (75)
$60,001 to 75,000	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (100)
Over $75,000	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Education			
Did not finish high school	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (100)
High school diploma	15 (5)	0 (0)	15 (100)
Some college	21 (7)	3 (15)	17 (85)
Associate degree	4 (1)	1 (25)	3 (75)
Bachelor's degree	205 (67)	42 (21)	160 (80)
Master's degree	62 (20)	17 (28)	43 (72)
Doctoral degree	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
BSW/MSW and Others			
Bachelor Degree of Social Work	64 (20)	11 (18)	52 (82)
Master Degree of Social Work	34 (11)	7 (21)	26 (79)
BSW & MSW	8 (3)	1 (13)	7 (87)
BSW or MSW	90 (28)	17 (19)	71 (81)
Others	229 (72)	49 (22)	175 (78)
The number of persons in my household is:			
1 person	42 (13)	8 (20)	33 (81)
2 person	118 (37)	29 (25)	86 (75)
3 person	67 (21)	13 (20)	52 (80)
4 person	57 (18)	12 (21)	45 (79)
5 persons or more	32 (10)	4 (13)	28 (88)
My length of service with this organization is:			
Under 1 year	50 (16)	7 (14)	43 (86)
1 to 2 years	46 (15)	16 (36)	29 (64)
3 to 5 years	61 (19)	15 (25)	46 (75)
6 to 10 years	60 (19)	12 (20)	48 (80)
11 to 15 years	32 (10)	4 (13)	26 (87)
Over 15 years	67 (21)	11 (17)	53 (83)

disagree) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability score on these scales has been reported at .77 in this study. This means that the reliability of the scale's items is acceptable. Higher scores reflect greater perceptions of organizational climate. An average score for the nine items was used in the analysis. The *educational background* considered whether or not the workers had received a social work degree: no social work degree or social work degree (bachelor/master degree of socil work).

Findings
Demographic Characteristics of the Participants
Demographic characteristics of the sample used in this study are detailed in Table 1. Most were female (90%), Anglo-Americans (82%), and below 59 years of age (97%). Most respondents (87%) had a bachelor's degree or higher. Ninety workers (28%) achieved a bachelor's or master's degree in social work.

About the same percentage of male (23%) and female (21%) caseworkers responded they would

leave their organizations within two years. A higher percentage of Anglo-American caseworkers (23%) indicated they would leave the organizations than African-American (17%). Age was the factor that most influenced caseworkers to declare their intention to leave, with 56% of those aged 60 or older saying "yes" to intention to leave. When salary was the consideration, the caseworkers who made less than $15,000 annually had the highest percentage (38%) saying "yes" to intention to leave. About the same percentage of caseworkers who achieved a bachelor's or master's degree in social work (19%) and the caseworkers holding other degrees (22%) responded they would leave their organizations within two years. In the number of persons per household category, the caseworkers who answered five persons or more had the smallest percentage (13%) saying "yes" to intention to leave. In the length of service category, the caseworkers who answered one to two years had the highest percentage (36%) saying "yes" to intention to

Table 2: Demographics of Independent Variables on Intention to Leave

Variables		Intention to Leave	
		Yes	No
Teamwork	High	1 (1%)	98 (99%)
	Low	34 (50%)	34 (50%)
Burnout	High	33 (65%)	18 (35%)
	Low	6 (5%)	124 (95%)
Job Satisfaction	High	3 (3%)	107 (97%)
	Low	30 (50%)	30 (50%)
Organizational Climate	High	8 (7%)	111 (93%)
	Low	12 (36%)	21 (64%)
Educational Background (with either a BSW or MSW)	Yes	19 (24%)	59 (76%)
	No	33 (16%)	173 (84%)

leave.

Demographic Characteristics of Independent Variables on Intention to Leave

Following dichotomizing the independent variables, the numbers and percentages of the respondents on the workers' intentions to leave (yes or no) are shown in Table 2 and as follows: in teamwork, one worker who has a high level of teamwork answered yes (1%) and 98 workers having the same level of teamwork answered no (99%) on their intentions to leave; 34 workers who have a low level of teamwork answered yes (50%) and 34 workers having the same level of teamwork answered no (50%) on their intentions to leave. In burnout, 33 workers who have a high level of burnout answered yes (65%) and 18 workers having the same level of burnout answered no (35%) on their intentions to leave; six workers who have a low level of burnout answered yes (5%) and 124 workers having the same level of burnout answered no (95%) on their intentions to leave. In job satisfaction, three workers who have a high level of job satisfaction answered yes (3%) and 107 workers having the same level of job satisfaction answered no (97%) on their intentions to leave; 30 workers who have a low level of job satisfaction answered yes (50%) and 30 workers having the same level of job satisfaction answered no (50%) on their intentions to leave.

In organizational climate, eight workers who have a positive perception of organizational climate answered yes (7%) and 111 workers having the same perception of organizational climate answered no (93%) on their intentions to leave; 12 workers who have a negative perception of organizational climate answered yes (36%) and 21 workers having the same perception of organizational climate answered no (64%) on their intentions to leave. In educational background, 19 workers who have a BSW or MSW answered yes (24%) and 59 workers having a BSW or MSW answered no (76%) on their intentions to leave; 33 workers who have neither a BSW nor an MSW answered yes (16%) and 173 workers having no BSW nor MSW answered no (84%) on their intentions to leave. These demographic characteristics of independent variables support the outcomes -- how they impact

the dependent variable, intention to leave -- by using logistic regression.

The Effects of Variables on Intention to Leave

A logistic regression analysis was performed using SPSS 13.0 in order to assess predictions of public child welfare caseworkers' intentions to leave their jobs based on five independent variables: teamwork, burnout, job satisfaction, perceived organizational climate, and educational background (having a BSW/MSW or not). Among 319 cases, 26 cases with missing values were deleted. In order to find outliers, standardized residuals were conducted; the standard deviation for proportions is used when the dependent variable is dichotomous or binary (Tabachnick and Fidell 2001). If a case has a standardized residual larger than 3.0 or smaller than -3.0, it is considered an outlier. In this study, nine cases were excluded because they were smaller than -3.0 (case number 269: -3.25, 16: -3.47, 241: -3.67, 200: -3.94, 273: -4.28, 101: -4.41, 5: -4.52, 251: -5.52, and 129: -6.36). After the deletion of 35 cases (26 missing values and nine outliers), 284 cases were computed to test the predictions.

There was a good model fit on the basis of the five independent variables, $\chi^2 = 4.25$, $p > .05$, using the Hosmer and Lemeshow test. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test is a formal test to see whether the predicted probabilities match the observed probabilities in logistic regression. A large p-value indicates a good match (Tabachnick and Fidell 2001). The independent variables of teamwork, burnout, job satisfaction, organizational climate, and educational background explained 47% of the dependent variable: intentions to leave (Nagelkerke's $R^2 = .47$). Nagelkerke's R Square is the most-reported of the R-squared estimates in logistic regression because it is an attempt to imitate the interpretation of multiple R-square, based on likelihood (Nagelkerke 1991).

Table 3 shows the contribution of five individual predictors (teamwork, burnout, job satisfaction, organizational climate, and educational background) of the model. The probability that the workers' teamwork impacted their intentions to leave by chance was smaller than 5%. More specifically, the workers who had high teamwork

Table 3: Summary of Logistic Regression Analyses Predicting Intention to Leave

	B	Wald	Odds Ratio
Teamwork	-2.33*	4.84	.10
Burnout	2.19**	27.62	8.91
Job Satisfaction	-1.24	3.38	.29
Organizational Climate	-.38	.62	.68
Educational Background	.73	3.05	2.08
Constant	2.21	14.94	9.12
Model Chi-Square	4.25		
Nagelkerke's R Square	.47		

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

were 90% less likely to report that they intended to leave their jobs than those who had low teamwork at a significant level (*Odds Ratio* = .10; 1 - .10 = .90, $p < .05$). "Odds ratios greater than one show the increase in odds of an outcome of the response category with a one-unit increase in the predictor; odds ratios less than one show the decrease in odds of that outcome with a one-unit change" (Tabachnick and Fidell 2001, 549). For example, an odds ratio of .10 shows that the outcome is 10% as likely (or 90% less likely; 1 - .10 = .90) with a one unit increase in the predictor.

In burnout, the probability that the workers' burnout impacted their intentions to leave by chance was smaller than 1%. More specifically, the workers who had high burnout were 8.91 times more likely to indicate that they intended to leave their jobs than those who had low burnout at a significant level (*Odds Ratio* = 8.91, $p < .01$). However, the probability that the workers' job satisfaction impacted their intentions to leave by chance was greater than 5%. Also, the probability that the workers' perception of organizational climate impacted their intentions to leave by chance was greater than 5%. Finally, the probability that the workers' educational backgrounds (having a BSW/MSW or not) impacted their intentions to leave by chance was greater than 5%. Thus, in this study,

job satisfaction, organizational climate, and educational background were not significant factors impacting on workers' intentions to leave.

Discussion
Implications for Public Child Welfare Practice

Caseworkers who do not experience cooperation from other workers through sharing information, getting another's perspectives, exchanging resources, and communicating effectively with colleagues and/or a supervisor probably will be more likely to leave. Based on the result that teamwork affects the caseworkers' intentions to leave, improving the cooperation between employees or between a supervisor and employee might be a good strategy to reduce the workers' intentions to leave. Therefore, teamwork must be part of an overall climate or culture of the organization. It must be supported by all levels of administration from the first line supervisor to the highest administrative post. In addition, many public child welfare units are part of multi-service umbrella agencies that may not understand or support the unique difficulties faced by workers.

There are practical actions that could encourage teamwork. For example, current caseworkers could be involved in interviewing potential new employees and these new potential employees

could be invited to spend a day or more with an existing team. The team would then provide their assessment. The new employee would join a team that would then take some responsibility for orienting and training the new member. They could also be encouraged by the agency to take actions or provide suggestions on how to improve team performance. Through these types of actions, the agency would enhance a team culture. If a caseworker feels frustrated with a case, her/his colleagues or supervisor need to actively contact the caseworker and provide counsel. It is recommended that the managers in pubic child welfare agencies establish the policies and programs for caseworkers and their supervisors to participate in these activities. These efforts can contribute to the caseworkers' adjustments to their work environments and the reduction of their intentions to leave.

Limitations

There are numerous limitations to the present study due to the nature of a single cross-sectional data set from one agency. First and foremost is the limitation of the generalizability of the findings. The data are responses from public child welfare caseworkers who chose to answer the survey (SOE) and thus represent a self-selected sample. Also, the interpretations of results are restricted to this single mid-western state child welfare agency. Second, since the present study was limited by its cross-sectional design, it is recommended that a longitudinal design with a larger random sample be conducted which would provide a better understanding of the relationships between the workers' perceptions of job environment and intentions to leave.

Third, while most studies have used "intention to leave," studies need to be concerned with a different concept. It might be more productive to look at why employees choose to stay. Although answering "no" to the question "I plan to be working for this organization in two years" was considered a stated intention to leave, the answer does not thoroughly cover their true intentions as it might only indicate delaying a plan to stay. Thus, this study could have focused on the role of teamwork in public child welfare caseworkers' intentions to stay. The factors impacting public child welfare

caseworkers' intentions to leave could be quite different from those impacting the workers' intentions to stay.

Future Research Needs

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study contribute to the literature on turnover by suggesting that teamwork might contribute to understanding public child welfare caseworkers' intentions to leave. This study makes an important preliminary connection between teamwork and the caseworkers' intentions to leave; however, studies should be designed to use actual turnover data. Using intention to leave as a surrogate measure raises several questions about how accurately workers' expressions are carried out. Therefore, actual turnover based on agency records, exit interviews, or other confirmed data would be necessary to test more precisely the relationships between turnover and the other variables.

Furthermore, when considering that 90 % of the respondents of this study were women, a percentage which is characteristic of the U.S. public child welfare workforce, special attention should be directed to research concerning workplace issues important to women (National Association of Social Workers 2007). Women continue to carry the heaviest share of care for children and the home often while earning less than their men. Consequently, their jobs may be considered less important and require relocation when a spouse has a better job opportunity.

Many women caseworkers may be making decisions to form families, which might require relocation to other communities and/or temporary leave from the workforce. Caseworkers may be "on call" 24 hours per day every day of the week. Such "on call" duties place a very high demand on those caring for children, particularly single parents. Research directed to women's work issues could help agencies identify and make important organizational accommodations. Assuring equal pay and advancement opportunities would be a basic and important feature but other accommodations such as safe, affordable, or subsidized child care available around the clock for worker's children might be an important feature.

Future research could identify other issues which influence women's intentions to leave or, if correctly addressed, might assist them in remaining in the workforce. These vital questions could not be addressed in this study due to the nature of quantitative data analysis. It is likely that a qualitative study method would be necessary for a deeper understanding of why workers choose to leave their jobs and what components might induce them to stay.

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