Factors Influencing the Retention of Specially Educated Public Child Welfare Workers

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The Issue

- Studies indicate that child welfare workers with MSWs are more competent and better able to manage job-related stresses (Dhooper, Royce, & Wolfe, 1990)\(^1\)
- Over the past 20 years the number of MSWs entering child welfare has decreased dramatically
- Title IV-E funds have been used to recruit and specially train MSW students for work in child welfare
- Indications that having more MSWs enter child welfare field is not enough, retention issues remain significant
Retention of MSWs in Child Welfare Study (Dickinson and Perry, 2001)

- Survey sent to every social worker supported by Title IV-E during their MSW at California Social Work Education Center
- Sent 3-6 months after completing “employment payback”
- Survey explored
  - Potential for leaving child welfare in near future, and why
  - Work experiences
  - Perception of work conditions
  - Personal and socio-demographic variables
Results

- Response rate to survey was 64%
- Of these
  - 11.5% had left public child welfare agency
  - 27.6% reported planning to leave within a year
  - 60.9% planned to remain in child welfare work
Results

Multiple regression analysis showed the following variables significantly influenced the likelihood of retention:

- Level of emotional exhaustion (Maslach Burnout Inventory)
- Salary
- Percentage of week spent on other (esp. court-related) tasks*
- Extent to which others at work listen about work-related problems
- Level to which supervisor concerned about welfare of workers

*Note: The asterisk indicates a significant variable in the regression analysis.
Implications

- Better pay is necessary but not sufficient
- Supervisor competence in supportive skills—training
- Not just work load, task type and load
- Team building and team support
- Self-care and protection from emotional exhaustion
**Activity**

- Design an intervention to address the problem of high turnover in MSW child welfare workers
- Which of the variables would you target?
- How would you change them?
- What resources would this take?
- What authority or support would you need to implement the change?
- How would you measure the effectiveness of your intervention?
REFERENCES
