

California Social Work Education Center

C A L S W E C

**THE RETENTION OF PUBLIC
CHILD WELFARE WORKERS**

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2006

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CaISWEC PREFACE

The California Social Work Education Center (CaISWEC) is the nation's largest state coalition of social work educators and practitioners. It is a consortium of the state's 17 accredited graduate schools of social work, the 58 county departments of social services and mental health, the California Department of Social Services, and the California Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

The primary purpose of CaISWEC is an educational one. Our central task is to provide specialized education and training for social workers that practice in the field of public child welfare. Our stated mission, in part, is "to facilitate the integration of education and practice." But this is not our ultimate goal. Our ultimate goal is to improve the lives of children and families who are the users and the purpose of the child welfare system. By educating others and ourselves, we intend a positive result for children: safety, a permanent home, and the opportunity to fulfill their developmental promise.

To achieve this challenging goal, the education and practice related activities of CaISWEC are varied: recruitment of a diverse group of social workers, defining a continuum of education and training, engaging in research and evaluation of best practices, advocating for responsive social policy, and exploring other avenues to accomplish the CaISWEC mission. Education is a process, and necessarily an ongoing one involving interaction with a changing

world. One who hopes to practice successfully in any field does not become “educated” and then cease to observe and to learn.

To foster continuing learning and evidence-based practice within the child welfare field, CalSWEC funds a series of curriculum modules that employ applied research methods to advance the knowledge of best practices in child welfare. These modules, on varied child welfare topics, are intended to enhance curriculum for Title IV-E graduate social work education programs and for continuing education of child welfare agency staff. To increase distribution and learning throughout the state, curriculum modules are made available through the CalSWEC Child Welfare Resource Library to all participating schools and collaborating agencies.

The module that follows has been commissioned with your learning in mind. We at CalSWEC hope it serves you well.

ABSTRACT

This curriculum addresses the issue of worker turnover in public child welfare agencies. We present knowledge from the existing literature on turnover together with conclusions from a new study. Potential subjects for the study were all new public child welfare workers hired in California between April 2000 and April 2001. Data were collected from new workers in 44 counties.

Agency factors, many under the control of administrators, have a greater effect on turnover than individual demographic factors. Latinos and Asians are generally more likely to remain on the job than Whites or African Americans. While salary alone is not a predictor of turnover, it is important to remember that leaving a job is in part an economic decision that will be affected by the worker's family and community resources. Education, training, and professional background are less related to turnover than one might hope. As expected, general job satisfaction is strongly correlated with turnover and can be used by an agency to predict turnover levels. Gradually giving new employees cases, rather than immediately giving them full caseloads, will tend to result in workers remaining on the job. This is an important and unexpected result of the present study, and indicates a change in practice that can be implemented by administrators immediately, at relatively little cost.

INTRODUCTION

This curriculum is intended to help child welfare workers, administrators, and policy-makers increase the job retention of public child welfare caseworkers. A statewide shortage of social workers is being experienced and is expected to get worse, and the field of public child welfare is facing its own acute shortage of social work personnel. Statewide there were 6,500 public child welfare positions funded for FY 2000/2001, yet there was a need for twice that many to meet minimum standards and three times that many to meet ideal standards. More important, high turnover rates in child welfare agencies are a major obstacle to timely investigations, compromising the ability of agencies to protect children. The retention of public child welfare workers is an immediate pressing professional and practical concern. The material in this curriculum points directly to specific solutions to the problem.

The audience for this curriculum is anyone interested in the problem of turnover among public child welfare workers. This includes students who intend to enter the field of public child welfare, current workers in the field, supervisors and administrators, and public officials in the position of implementing change. Current and future workers can better understand the factors that have influenced others like themselves to make the important decision about remaining on the job. Supervisors and administrators can draw on this material to provide an agency climate conducive to retaining workers. Decision makers can

understand the importance of policy changes in encouraging workers to remain on the job.

Participants may benefit from the curriculum very quickly through reference to the conclusions, which we present both at the beginning and at the end of the curriculum for convenience. We believe these conclusions are a very concise summary of the current state of knowledge on this topic. However, we strongly encourage participants to consider Modules II, III, and VI in order to understand important subtleties and implications of the stated conclusions. Participants who wish to explore the topic in more detail will want to include Modules IV, V, and VII, as well as turn to the cited literature.

In this curriculum, we combine conclusions from the literature on turnover and retention among workers in general, and child welfare workers in particular, with conclusions from the original study. As a result, the curriculum connects extensively with the existing literature. This provides the opportunity for interested participants to further pursue any specific topic of interest, or to independently assess the empirical evidence for stated conclusions.

Module I gives details regarding the present study. Module II emphasizes the importance of the retention of child welfare workers in providing quality services to children and families. Module III, by describing the ambiguities in the definitions of turnover, and the difficulties of obtaining accurate measures of turnover, emphasizes the problems of developing clear and certain information on turnover among child welfare workers. All participants should be exposed to Modules II and III because they present the essential context necessary to

understand the conceptual difficulties inherent in considering the issue of employee turnover.

Module IV describes the theoretical frameworks that have been used to explain why workers choose to remain in or leave their jobs. This material draws from psychological, sociological, and economic literature, and goes beyond the immediate interest in public child welfare workers. Participants interested primarily in the immediately applicable conclusions of the curriculum may skip this module.

Module V addresses the complexity of the issue of worker turnover by describing the conceptual and statistical nature of predictive models, in which apparent correlations between one factor and turnover may not persist when accounting for the effects of multiple factors simultaneously. This material will be of interest primarily to those who are approaching the topic in depth.

Module VI is the heart of the curriculum, where we describe the relative importance of various factors on the decision to leave or remain on the job. We first present findings from the literature, then the findings from our original study. As our study included both intention to leave the job and actually leaving the job as outcomes, we include Module VII, a presentation of differences in predictors of the two outcomes. Module VIII summarizes the conclusions of the study.

Important conclusions from the study are:

- The definition of job turnover generally assumed in the literature is that of workers voluntarily leaving jobs because they have obtained better jobs elsewhere. However, job turnover also includes workers who are fired or not retained past a probationary period, workers who leave the job for personal reasons without necessarily being dissatisfied with the job, workers who have

transferred to similar positions in other similar agencies, and workers who have been promoted to more responsible positions within the larger human services agency. In studies predicting turnover, the type of turnover should be specified.

- Leaving the job is a complex individual decision, made in social, professional, and economic circumstances. It is difficult to determine all of the reasons that workers leave.
- Some apparent reasons for leaving the job may in fact be due to other factors, as becomes apparent when developing predictive models that simultaneously consider multiple factors.
- It is difficult to specify precise current turnover rates in public child welfare because of regional differences and because of different ways of measuring turnover. The average annual turnover rate is probably 15-25%, possibly higher for new employees.
- Agency factors, many under the control of administrators, have a greater effect on turnover than individual demographic factors.
- Latinos and Asians are generally more likely to remain on the job than Whites or African Americans.
- While salary alone is not a predictor of turnover, it is important to remember that leaving a job is in part an economic decision that will be affected by the worker's family and community resources.
- As expected, general job satisfaction is strongly correlated with turnover and can be used by an agency to predict turnover levels.
- Caseload size does not seem to be related to turnover; however, gradually giving new employees cases, rather than immediately giving them full caseloads, will result in more workers remaining on the job. This is an important and unexpected result of the present study, and indicates a change in practice that can be implemented by administrators immediately, at relatively little cost.
- The experience of role conflict on the job is associated with worker turnover, and indicates another useful area for administrative change.
- Individual attitudes, such as commitment to the career of child welfare and satisfaction with various aspects of the job, are associated with the expressed intention to leave the job more than with actually leaving the job.

- While those who express an intention to leave the job are more likely to do so than those who don't, many who intend to leave the job do remain.

The results of this study can help inform child welfare supervisors and managers about some of the areas that they can positively influence to reduce turnover. To achieve this goal, managers and supervisors can assess staff needs and work to create an organizational culture that will meet those needs. When workers are satisfied with their jobs, are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and get support from their supervisors and managers, they can create excellent organizations that help improve outcomes for children and families.

At a time of increased accountability and a strong focus on outcomes, it is very important that skilled child welfare workers are retained and supported to ensure that all children and families receive services that are aligned with both promising and best practices. To this end, supervisors and managers have an opportunity to influence some key factors that can contribute to turnover. We hope this curriculum helps inform those who can make a difference in this area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Sherrill Clark, of the California Social Work Education Center, and Siyon Rhee, at California State University at Los Angeles, have been full partners in this research project every step of the way. Susan Jacquet, also of the California Social Work Education Center, has provided support and guidance throughout the process.

We offer a special thanks to Todd Franke, UCLA Department of Social Welfare, for guiding us through the quantitative analysis. We appreciate both his great competence and his patience and good cheer.

We are grateful to the numerous Cal State Los Angeles MSW students who used these data for their Master's theses. Each of them has contributed to this final report. In particular, we relied on the work of Kathleen McElroy on self-efficacy, Veronica Gomez on educational degree, Ching Fang Chang on union membership, and Tania Martinez in the section on training.

Deborah Anav, Carla German, Heather Miller, Erlinda Lopez, Kate McElroy, Veronica Gomez, Tania Martinez, Elizabeth Villalobos, Jane Gonzales and Samantha Ross, as Research Assistants, worked very hard and made invaluable contributions to the project.

We want to thank Michal Mor Barak, Marian Landsman, and, especially, Alberta Ellett for their willingness to share the details of their work with us.

There was a liaison in each of the study counties who facilitated the data collection in that county. We would not have been able to proceed without their diligent and gracious efforts.

Finally, and most importantly, we want to thank the child welfare caseworkers all over California who took time out of their frantic schedules to participate in this study. We hope that this study will provide some tangible reward for their cooperation.

COMPETENCIES

This curriculum addresses the following competencies:

- 4.10 Student is aware of potential work-related stress factors and is able to develop self-care and other strategies to render them harmless.
- 8.4 Student understands how to use information, research and technology to evaluate practice and program effectiveness, to measure outcomes, and to determine accountability of services.
- 8.5 Student demonstrates knowledge of how organizational structure and culture affect service delivery, work productivity, and morale.

MODULE I

THE PRESENT STUDY

MODULE I THE PRESENT STUDY

The retention of public child welfare workers is a pressing professional and practical concern. Although existing research has identified a number of factors that are closely related to employee retention and its correlates, this research has not determined which broad set of characteristics—individual, organizational, or economic—has the most effect on worker decisions to remain on the job. This study represents an advance on previous studies through the development of a more comprehensive model of prediction of retention, and, especially, through the use of a statewide multi-county sample which provides the opportunity to incorporate diversity in both agency characteristics and local labor markets.

- The research question was: What are the individual, agency, and local economic factors that predict worker turnover in public child welfare?
 - Individual variables are gender, ethnicity, age, country of origin, educational level of father, marital status, dependent children, income other than salary, educational degree, licensure, work experience, and commitment to the career of child welfare.
 - Factors that capture the relationships between individuals and their jobs include union membership, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy.
 - Agency variables are caseload size, time to full caseload, hours worked per week, amount and type of training received, job stressors, quality of supervision and administration, agency authority, job formalization, role conflict and congruence between individual values and the job.
 - Data on county level demographic and economic factors were taken from public sources. These variables include unemployment rates, employment by type of industry, social work salaries, predicted growth in social work jobs, cost of living, population, population density, and poverty rate.

- While other studies of retention use either intention to leave or actually leaving as the outcome variable, this study included both outcomes, thus allowing for a comparison between the two outcomes.
- 44 of 58 California counties participated. Those not participating were mostly very small counties. Most of these 14 counties are not included because they had no new hires during this period of time, though some counties declined to participate.
- Potential subjects for the study were all new public child welfare workers hired in California between April 2000 and April 2001.
 - Over 1,700 surveys were mailed. About 10% of these were inappropriate (e.g., went to individuals who were not child welfare workers or who were not hired during our time period). With 519 active cases in the final data file, this is a response rate of approximately 34%.
 - Survey data collection began July 2001 and continued through April 2002. The range of time between hire date and survey completion date was 3 months – 2 years, with a mean of about one year.
 - 32 (6%) of the respondents had already left the agency at the time of the administration of the survey.
- Final turnover data were collected from each study county from June to August 2003. At the time of final data collection, respondents had been on the job for 2 – 3 ½ years (mean of 34 months).
 - Turnover data were collected for 1,165 workers, not only those who completed the survey.
 - In addition, we received qualitative data regarding reasons for departure for 657 workers.

MODULE II

**THE IMPORTANCE OF RETAINING
CHILD WELFARE WORKERS**

MODULE II

THE IMPORTANCE OF RETAINING CHILD WELFARE WORKERS

Note to Instructor:

This module is a combination of lecture, interactive exercises, and group discussion. This module introduces the student/participant to the importance of retaining child welfare workers.

Goals:

Participants will learn some of the key reasons it is important to reduce turnover among child welfare workers.

Objectives:

At the completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Describe why retaining child welfare workers is important.
- Value the need to find ways to reduce turnover among child welfare workers.

Why Retaining Child Welfare Workers Is Important

- A statewide shortage of social workers is being experienced and is expected to get worse (O'Neill, 2000).
- Public child welfare is facing its own acute shortage of social work personnel. Statewide there were 6,500 public child welfare positions funded for FY 2000/2001, yet there was a need for twice that many to meet minimum standards and three times that many to meet ideal standards (American Humane Association, 2000).
- The United States General Accounting Office (U.S. GAO, 2003) reports that high turnover rates in child welfare agencies are a major obstacle to timely investigations, compromising the ability of agencies to protect children.
- Title IV-E represents a significant investment in the education and training of professional child welfare workers. In California, 300 MSW graduates per

year are added to the pool of child welfare workers (California Social Work Education Center, 2005). Because of the stipend investment, the retention of workers who received support through Title IV-E has become especially important.

- Therefore, the retention of workers will be expected to accomplish these goals:
 - Increase the number of qualified child welfare workers.
 - Help reduce the shortage of social workers in public child welfare.
 - Better meet the more complex client needs of today.
 - Reduce training and recruitment costs.
 - Increase the effectiveness of Title IV-E stipend programs.

Attention Instructor

To help participants value the importance of retaining workers, it may be helpful to have them engage in a small group discussion on the following scenario.

If you were working to reunify a child with his/her family, what would be the benefits of having an experienced child welfare worker providing care to a family with the following needs: a) the mother is clinically depressed, is an occasional cocaine user, and is receiving no mental health or substance abuse services; b) the father is addicted to cocaine and has been arrested once for selling drugs; c) there are 2 children who both have special needs. The 7-year-old son has Attention Deficit Disorder and the 3-year-old daughter tested positive for cocaine when she was born and is experiencing multiple developmental delays.

Have each small group list 3-5 reasons why it is important to have an experienced child welfare worker involved with this family. Once the small groups have listed the top reasons you may want to have each group report out and list all the group responses on the board for further discussion.

- ***Some suggested large group discussion points***

Children and families in the child welfare system have more complex needs and require more services and assistance than in the past. Experienced workers usually have knowledge of existing resources and have built relationships with service providers to get needed services to children and families in a timely manner.

MODULE III

DEFINITIONS OF TURNOVER AND TURNOVER RATES

MODULE III

DEFINITIONS OF TURNOVER AND TURNOVER RATES

Note to Instructor:

This module is a combination of lecture and group discussion. It introduces the student/participant to the various definitions of turnover and provides information about turnover rates in child welfare.

Goals:

Participants will learn some of the key definitions of turnover and gain an understanding of the turnover rates in child welfare.

Objectives:

At the completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Define the different ways turnover can be measured.
- Understand how far-reaching the turnover rate in child welfare can be.
- Understand the reasons for turnover and the rates of turnover for participants in this study.

Definitions of Turnover

- *Types of turnover*
 - The common definition of job turnover is that of workers voluntarily leaving jobs because they have obtained better jobs elsewhere.
 - However, job turnover also includes:
 - ~ Workers who are fired or not retained past a probationary period.
 - ~ Workers who leave the job for personal reasons without necessarily being dissatisfied with the job.

- ~ Workers who have transferred to similar positions in other similar agencies.
- ~ Workers who have been promoted to more responsible positions within the larger human services agency.
- The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) distinguishes between preventable departures and unpreventable ones. Preventable departures, those that could in principle be prevented by actions taken by the agency, comprise up to 60% of the turnover rate of public child welfare workers (APHSA, 2001).
- Similarly, Tai, Bame, and Robinson (1998) divide reasons for job departures into four categories: voluntary/avoidable (i.e., salary and job conditions), voluntary/unavoidable (i.e., retirement, moving out of the area, or staying home to care for a new child), involuntary/avoidable (i.e., dismissal), and involuntary/unavoidable (i.e., death or disability).
- *Turnover as a problem for agencies and individuals*
 - It is frequently difficult to say when employee departure is a positive or a negative occurrence, and from whose point of view.
 - Leaving a job can be a positive experience for the worker who has attained a better position.
 - Departures due to being dismissed are not necessarily a negative event from the point of view of the agency.
 - Unavoidable departures are seen as negative occurrences but outside the control of the agency.
 - A departure that is a promotion to another department within a county Human Services Department is a positive for that Department but a negative for Children's Services within the same county.
 - A departure from one county's Children's Services to that of another county is a negative for the first county, but a neutral or positive outcome (given the transfer of expertise) for the field of public child welfare (and for the Title IV-E program).
- *Intending to leave*
 - Because it is easier to do research at one point in time (cross-sectional), many studies use the workers' stated intention to leave the job as the

outcome, rather than wait some time (longitudinal research) to see who actually leaves. The present study includes both outcomes and so provides an opportunity to compare the two.

Turnover Rates

- It is difficult to specify precise current turnover rates in public child welfare because of regional differences and because of different ways of measuring turnover.
- While the U.S. GAO (2003) estimates the annual turnover rate of public child welfare workers as high as 30-40% based on anecdotal evidence, more methodologically rigorous measures are in the 10-20% range (APHSA, 2001; Daly, Dudley, Finnegan, Jones, & Christiansen, 2000; National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being Research Group, 2001), though with considerable national geographical differences.
- In San Diego County, Title IV-E workers were more likely (89% retention) than other workers to remain on the job during a period of 1 to 3 years after hire. (Jones & Okamura, 2000).
- The one statewide study to date found a 76% retention rate of Title IV-E students within 3 to 6 months after completion of the required payback period (Dickinson & Perry, 2002).
- All of the above studies have been limited to small sample sizes and have not included comparisons by agency characteristics or local economic markets.
- The studies regarding Title IV-E students have not always covered a sufficiently long period of time to account for the period recipients must remain on the job to fulfill their stipend requirements.
- Turnover rates from the present study.
 - Of the survey respondents, 27% left the job. For those who left, mean and median time on the job was about 16 months.
 - Those who stated their intention to leave at the time of initial data collection were more likely to leave than others. However, there are a significant number of workers still on the job who stated an intention to leave.
 - Of the 1,165 subjects for whom turnover data were received, 386 (33%) had left the job.

- Among these 1,165 subjects, we obtained information on reasons they intended to leave the job from 657 workers from 26 counties. Of these, 240 (37%) had left the job.
 - ~ 16 (7%) were fired or were unable to complete probation.
 - ~ 26 (11%) transferred to other social service departments in the same county.
 - ~ 8 (3%) took similar positions in other nearby counties. Two of these were subsequently rehired by the same department of the first county.
 - ~ 11 (5%) moved out of the area; 8 (3%) went back to school; 6 (2.5%) reported leaving for personal reasons, such as pregnancy.

MODULE IV

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

MODULE IV THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Note to Instructor:

This module, a combination of lecture, interactive exercises, and group discussion, introduces the student/participant to theoretical frameworks used to study turnover in employment.

Goals:

Participants will learn some of the key theories used to study turnover in employment.

Objectives:

At the completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Describe some of the factors addressed in the theoretical frameworks used to study turnover in employment generally.
- Value the diversity of factors addressed in these studies and the complexity of this body of research in predicting turnover.
- Understand the differences among the psychological theories, sociological models, and economic theories used in turnover research.

Theoretical Frameworks

- *Current theories*
 - Current empirical research on the predictors of turnover among social workers is relatively atheoretical; that is, it focuses on determining predictors of turnover.
 - The work of sociologists March and Simon (1958) provides a foundation for current theories. They focused on the degree of ease of movement that workers have as the basis for the likelihood of seeking a new job.

- *Psychological theories*
 - These focus on individual characteristics and the ability of individuals to adapt to and handle situations in the workplace.
 - Some psychological research has focused on the effect of stress on turnover (Todd & Deery-Schmitt, 1996), including both occupational stress and stress experienced outside of the workplace.
 - Also, individual well-being has been identified as a predictor of greater job satisfaction and lower job stress (Koeske & Kirk, 1995).
 - Burnout has also been given considerable attention in the turnover literature. For example, Maslach's model (Maslach & Jackson, 1984), which includes the emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment constructs, has been used to explain the stress levels of workers who exit their jobs. Drake and Yadama (1996) found that emotional exhaustion had a direct effect on job exit, while depersonalization appeared to be unrelated to worker retention.
 - The theory of job embeddedness focuses on three factors that contribute to an individual concept of being embedded in an organization: a) relationships with others in the organization; b) perceptions of goodness of fit with the job, organization, and community; and c) perceived losses that would occur if the job or organization is left (Lee, Mitchell, Holtom, McDaniel, & Hill, 1999). Preliminary research shows that lack of job embeddedness is a predictor of both intent to leave and actual turnover and is associated with other related outcomes such as job satisfaction and commitment (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001).
- *Sociological models*
 - These focus on the specifics of workplace situations and job characteristics and their effects on the satisfaction and commitment of workers (Glisson & Durick, 1988).
 - Employees gauge the legitimacy of the rules and actions of their superiors and weigh those factors against the subordination that they incur. The more legitimate the actions of the superiors are perceived to be, the greater the level of worker attachment (Halaby, 1986).
 - Lawler's affect theory of social exchange explains how the emotions produced by social exchange develop stronger or weaker ties to relations, groups, or networks. Individuals will attribute their exchange-based emotions to social units—such as relations, networks, or groups—to the

- degree that the exchange brings them together in a common endeavor and creates a sense of shared responsibility (Lawler, 2001).
- Orthner and Pittman (1986) found that organizational support for employees' families increases the level of work commitment among the employees.
 - *Economic theories*
 - These focus on supply and demand and indicate that a more open job market is a major factor that leads to greater employee turnover (Price, 1977).
 - Economic theories focus on the employees' likelihood of staying in their current jobs based on weighing the utility of continuing with the current employer or leaving the job (Halaby, 1986).
 - The relationship between labor market and turnover remains unclear. Hulin, Roznowski, and Hachiya (1985) indicate that a correlation exists between the objective labor market and job satisfaction, which in turn predicts intention to leave. On the contrary, a study conducted by Hui (1988) did not find the situation in the objective labor market to have an effect on job satisfaction or on the withdrawal process on an individual level.

Attention Instructor

To help participants understand the diverse factors addressed in the theories that have been used to study employment turnover, it may be helpful to have them engage in a small group discussion on the following issue.

Ask participants to think of all the jobs they have left in the past. Have them draw three columns. In the first, have them list the reasons they left each job. In the second, have them describe how each of those reasons affected them/made them feel. In the third, have them describe what changes would have needed to occur for them to have stayed at each job.

Once all participants have completed this task, ask them to form small groups of 4-6 to share what they wrote and then have each group report out and list all the group responses on the board for further discussion.

Some suggested large group discussion points

- The factors that contribute to turnover are diverse and very individualized.
- Each of the theoretical models contributes to a piece of the puzzle that addresses turnover.
- The study of turnover is very complex.
- It may be equally important to address what contributes to retention as what contributes to turnover.
- When the reasons for wanting to leave are addressed by supervisors, managers, or the agency, will turnover rates improve?

MODULE V

PREDICTIVE MODELS

MODULE V PREDICTIVE MODELS

Note to Instructor:

This module is a combination of lecture and group discussion, which introduces the student/participant to the concept and use of predictive models in statistical analysis, and the content of the model used in the present study.

Goals:

Participants will learn the implications of the use of predictive models, and the content of the model of the present study.

Objectives:

At the completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Understand the purpose of predictive models.
- Understand that observable relationships between factors may only seem apparent and may in fact be due to other factors.
- Understand that all predictive models are inevitably incomplete, especially when attempting to predict a complex decision such as the individual decision to leave a job.
- Describe the four levels of variables within the model for the present study, and which variables are included in each level.

The Use of Predictive Models

- Most quantitative studies, including the present study, develop sets of variables (models) to predict turnover.
- The advantage of this approach is statistical control. When a set of variables is considered as a whole, the model is controlling for the interactions of variables among themselves. This means that a relationship between a factor and leaving the job is observed, but the leaving may in fact be due to some other factor.

- Though this process is successful at identifying a number of variables that are statistically related to turnover, each model falls short of including all relevant variables, and so falls short of completely predicting turnover.
- The individual decision to leave a job or to remain is very complex, made in the context of individual, agency, and economic circumstances. It is very difficult to develop models that include all possible factors affecting the decision to leave.
- As described above, workers leave the job for many different reasons. Clearly, the factors predicting getting fired are different from the factors predicting getting promoted, yet all of these different reasons are included in the outcome of turnover.

Model of the Present Study

- In the present study, we divided factors into four categories.
 - Individual/demographic—factors that the worker brings to the job. These variables were gender, ethnicity, age, country of origin, father’s educational level, marital status, having dependent children, income other than salary, educational degree, licensure, work experience, and commitment to the career of child welfare.
 - Individual/job relationships—the ways that each worker responds to the particular job situation. These include union membership, job satisfaction and self-efficacy.
 - Agency/job factors—elements of the job that can be changed by supervisors and administrators. These are caseload size, time to full caseload, hours worked per week, amount and type of training received, job stressors, quality of supervision and administration, agency authority, job formalization, role conflict, and congruence between individual values and the job.
 - Economic factors likely to affect a turnover decision. These variables include unemployment rates, employment by type of industry, social work salaries, predicted growth in social work jobs, cost of living, population, population density, and poverty rate.

Attention Instructor

To help participants understand the importance and the complexities of the use of predictive models in empirical research, have them engage in small group discussions, then with the class as a whole. Divide students into small groups of 4-6 people and have them work on the discussion topics below. Have each small group report out and list all the group responses on the board for further discussion.

Some suggested group discussion points

- It is difficult but important to understand how relationships between factors that are observed in the agency may be due to other unknown factors. For example, in this study it is apparent that workers with lower salaries are more likely to leave the job when we consider only those two variables. However, when other variables are taken into consideration, the statistical relationship between salary and turnover disappears. This is important because we observe accurately that workers with lower salaries leave the job more frequently than workers with higher salaries. But we learn from the inclusion of other variables that workers are not leaving *because of* lower salaries. Workers with lower salaries *could be* leaving the job because workers with less education, who have lower salaries, are more likely to leave, or because workers who have been on the job less time, also with lower salaries, are more likely to leave.

In this study, being male, being born in the U.S., not having an MSW, having a low level of commitment to the field of public child welfare, low self-efficacy, low salaries, low peer support, and poor supervision were each associated with leaving the job when compared individually to turnover, yet these factors were not statistically significant in the complete model. For each of these variables, discuss which of the other variables in the model *could* account for the observed relationship with leaving the job.

- It is not possible for any predictive model to contain all possible variables that may be related to the outcome. Many studies, for example, including the present study, do not include many non-work related factors, such as quality of worker support in the form of family relationships. Discuss and list other factors not included in the model of this study that might be related to turnover and therefore might be included in a predictive model.
- Workers leave jobs for many different reasons, and the predictors of different reasons are likely to be very different as well. Consider three possible reasons for leaving a job: a) failing to pass probation, b) moving out of state because one's spouse found a better job elsewhere, and c) being promoted to supervisor in the Department of Mental Health. Discuss how the factors predicting turnover in each of these instances are likely to differ.

MODULE VI

PREDICTORS OF LEAVING THE JOB

MODULE VI PREDICTORS OF LEAVING THE JOB

Note to Instructor:

This module, a combination of lecture, interactive exercises, and group discussion, introduces the student/participant to predictive models of turnover, as well as specific predictors of leaving the job.

Goals:

Participants will learn about the key variables that help predict turnover.

Objectives:

At the completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Describe some of the variables that have been considered in studies seeking to predict turnover.
- Value the importance of studying diverse factors in attempting to examine and predict turnover.
- Understand the role staff can play in helping the organization to improve in areas related to turnover.

Predictors of Leaving the Job

- In this section, using the following categories of variables—individual/demographic, individual/job relationships, agency/job, and economic—we describe factors that are associated with job turnover, first from the empirical literature, and second from the present study.
- This literature review relies heavily on Mor Barak, Nissly, and Levin (2001), and Clark (2002). Recent important studies include Dickinson and Perry (2002), Ellett, Ellett, and Rugutt (2003), and Landsman (2001). Reagh (1994), Rycraft (1994), and Samantrai's (1992) early exploratory studies remain useful for their qualitative descriptions.

Individual Variables in the Literature

- *Overall*
 - From both the literature and the present study, it is apparent that characteristics of individual employees are not strongly associated with turnover.
 - Studies have found little or no relationship between personal characteristics and job satisfaction (Butler, 1990) or worker attitudes (Oldham & Hackman, 1981).
 - Koeske & Kirk (1995) found that psychological well-being was significantly related to retention of social workers, but no other individual characteristic predicted that workers would remain on the job.
- *Gender*
 - Women who work in the field of human services are more likely to report experiencing higher levels of stress, fewer opportunities for self-expression, and more environmental pressure than men (Ratliff, 1988), despite the fact that human service agencies are largely female dominated.
 - While Mor Barak et al. (2001) and Dickinson and Perry (2002) did not find gender to be a predictor of turnover, Landsman (2001) found that males were more likely to intend to leave, while Vinokur-Kaplan, Jayaratne, and Chess (1991) found the opposite.
- *Ethnicity*
 - While Mor Barak et al. (2001) and Dickinson and Perry (2002) did not find ethnicity to be a predictor of turnover, Landsman (2001) found that Whites were more likely to intend to remain, while Jones and Okamura (2000) found the opposite.
- *Age*
 - While some studies (Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Jones & Okamura, 2000; Koeske & Kirk, 1995) did not find a relationship between age and turnover, there is strong evidence from a number of studies (Mor Barak et al., 2001) that younger workers are more likely to leave the job.

- In a study of social workers that serve the severely mentally ill, younger workers were found to be less likely to remain on the job due to their lack of readiness to work with this population (Acker, 1999).
- *Family*
 - Among child welfare workers, support from a spouse has been found to be beneficial in dealing with job-related stress, in addition to support from supervisors and co-workers (Jayaratne, Chess, & Kunkel, 1986).
- *Education*
 - A social work education, either graduate or undergraduate, best prepares individuals for the field of social work (Dhooper, Royce, & Wolf, 1990).
 - A higher level of education has been associated with a higher level of career commitment (Glisson & Durick, 1988).
 - Research on Title IV-E programs has indicated that those who complete these programs feel a greater sense of confidence in their work (Hopkins & Mudrick, 1999).
 - Ellett et al. (2003) report that Title IV-E graduates in Georgia express a higher intent to remain on the job; Jones and Okamura (2000) and Dickinson and Perry (2002) report that Title IV-E workers in California are more likely to remain on the job.
- *Work experience*
 - Looking across studies, Mor Barak et al. (2001) found amount of work experience to be strongly associated with remaining on the job, as did Landsman (2001).

Individual Variables From This Study

- Latinos (and, to a lesser degree, Asians) were less likely to leave the job than African Americans or Whites.
- Respondents who were divorced, separated, or widowed were only about half as likely to leave as married respondents.
- The following variables were significant in comparisons between individual variables and leaving the job, but the significance disappeared in the complete model.

- Males appeared more likely to leave their jobs than females.
- Respondents born in the United States were more likely to leave the job than immigrants, though this difference disappeared in the complete model.
- Workers with MSWs appeared less likely to leave the job than workers with other degrees.
- Those with a high level of commitment to public child welfare were less likely to leave, but this difference disappeared in the complete model.
- Variables that were not associated with turnover include age, work experience, having children, outside income, and having a clinical license.

Individual/Job Variables From the Literature

- People who are satisfied with their jobs tend to perform better and tend to stay longer at their agencies (Krueger, 1996). There is mounting empirical and experiential support for the belief that higher levels of satisfaction are associated with lower levels of turnover and absenteeism (Butler, 1990). Jayaratne and Chess (1991) suggested that dissatisfaction with the job may lead to burnout, with negative implications for both workers and clients.
- High levels of self-efficacy have been linked to high levels of innovation and skill in bringing about positive change in an organization (Pearlmutter, 1998). Self-efficacy, along with other traits such as general high self-esteem, has also been linked to both job satisfaction and job performance (Judge & Bono, 2001). Preliminary evidence suggests a positive correlation between high levels of self-efficacy and intention to remain in the child welfare job (Ellett, 2001).
- Weiner (1980) found no correlation between attitudes toward unions and leaving the job among welfare workers, but Iverson and Currivan (2003) found that union participation among teachers was associated with remaining on the job.

Individual/Job Variables From the Present Study

- General job satisfaction was strongly associated with remaining on the job, but satisfaction with specific job aspects was not.

- Self-efficacy, especially as regards personal motivation, was associated with remaining on the job, though this relationship disappeared when controlling for additional variables.
- Union membership had no relationship to turnover.

Agency/Job Variables From the Literature

- *Overall*
 - Much research suggests that organizational factors have a greater influence on job satisfaction than do personal characteristics of the worker (e.g., Poulin, 1994).
 - Variables such as heavy workload, low salary, poor agency operation and low agency morale, and few opportunities for advancement are closely related to a desire to change jobs (Sze & Ivker, 1986).
 - Jayarante and Chess (1991) found that among protective services workers, characteristics of the organization, such as opportunity for promotion, job challenge, workload, agency change, and role ambiguity were related to job satisfaction.
- *Salary*
 - Vinokur-Kaplan (1991) found a significant association between satisfaction with salary and job satisfaction in a study of child welfare social workers.
 - The importance placed on salary as an indicator of self-worth or satisfaction may have been overstated, and sources of job and life satisfaction are primarily found elsewhere (Henry, 1990).
 - Some researchers have found no relationship between job satisfaction and salary when other variables are controlled (Glisson & Durick, 1988; Vinokur-Kaplan et al., 1994).
 - Other studies have found that salary does in fact affect job satisfaction among social workers (Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991), as well as retention (Powell & Yourk, 1992).
- *Workload*
 - The amount of work needs to be distinguished from the difficulty or complexity of the work (Jex, 1998).

- Multiple studies have found that a major contributor to workers' decision to leave their jobs was high caseloads (e.g., Rycraft, 1994).
 - Excessive policy changes and paperwork were found to be sources of job dissatisfaction (Dressel, 1982) among social workers that work with the elderly.
- *Training*
 - The availability of training that is relevant to the occupation and affords an opportunity for professional development has been found to be a source of job satisfaction for child welfare workers (Tracy, Bean, Gwatkin, & Hill, 1992; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991).
 - Learning opportunities that are tailored to the specialized field of child welfare and that address the needs of the worker have been identified by child welfare workers as extremely important to their professional development (Reagh, 1994).
- *Job stressors*
 - Landsman (2001) found structural characteristics as they relate to levels of stress on the job to be closely related to the retention of child welfare workers.
 - A high level of stress was closely related to low job satisfaction and job commitment (McLean & Andrew, 2000).
 - Sze & Ivker (1986) found that stressful conditions were closely related to a desire to change jobs.
- *Peer support*
 - Peer and social support was closely related to the intentions of child welfare workers to remain at their current jobs (Acker, 1999; Mitchell et al., 2001).
 - Social support, including supervisors and peers, was found to be a major factor in whether MSW graduates remained at their child welfare jobs after completing their obligation for receiving Title IV-E stipends (Dickinson & Perry, 2002).
 - Support from child welfare co-workers is also associated with reduced levels of burnout (Jayaratne et al., 1986).

- *Quality of supervision and administration*
 - Satisfied workers can often recall the support and encouragement they got from their supervisor and their colleagues on the job (Krueger, 1996).
 - Quality of supervision was identified by both researchers and workers as a key element in the success of child welfare workers (Gleeson, Smith, & Dubois, 1993; Leslie, Holzhalb & Holland, 1998; Pecora, Whittaker & Maluccio, 1992; Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994; Samantrai, 1992).
 - The importance of the actions of administrators was found to be extremely important in the satisfaction and retention of social workers (Gutierrez & GlenMaye, 1995; Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994; Vinokur-Kaplan et al., 1994).
- *Organizational factors*
 - Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) found that creating a positive organizational climate (including role clarity, low conflict, and cooperation) was more effective in providing successful child welfare services than focusing on increasing the actual services available to clients.
 - A positive organizational culture was also found to increase the likelihood of retaining skilled child welfare workers (Ellett, 2001).
 - Poulin and Walter (1992) found that workers who have experienced greater work autonomy and have greater control over their jobs have higher levels of job satisfaction.
 - Connections have been made regarding the lack of autonomy in the workplace and feelings of burnout (Arches, 1991).
 - Guterman and Bargal (1996) found that social workers that did not have significant individual discretion were more likely to feel ineffective with their clients.
 - Qualitative studies have found that role conflict emerges from discussions with workers about their experiences on the job (Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994; Weaver, 1999). Mor Barak et al. (2001) report that role conflict, role ambiguity, or role stress are associated with intent to leave the job, but not with actual turnover.

Agency/Job Variables From the Present Study

- While caseload size was unrelated to turnover, respondents who were allowed more time before acquiring a full caseload were much more likely to remain on the job than workers who were given full caseloads quickly.
- Contrary to expectations, the presence of stressful job conditions was associated with remaining on the job.
- A high degree of role conflict was associated with leaving the job.
- The following variables were significant in comparisons between individual variables and leaving the job, but the significance disappeared in the complete model.
 - While it appeared that low salaries were associated with leaving the job, this difference disappeared in the complete model.
 - Peer support, good supervision, and good administration were associated with remaining on the job when compared directly with turnover, but these differences disappeared when controlling for other factors.

County Economic and Demographic Variables From the Present Study

- Child welfare workers from counties with higher salaries for all child social workers were more likely to leave the job than workers from counties with lower child social worker salaries.
- Child welfare workers from more densely populated counties were less likely to leave the job than were workers from rural counties.

Attention Instructor

To help participants understand the diverse factors that can be predictors of leaving employment, have students/participants divide up into small groups of 4-6 to address one of the following areas: a) individual variables (gender, ethnicity, age, family, education, work experience);

b) individual and job variables (satisfaction, self efficacy, self-esteem, union participation); c) agency and job variables (salary, workload, training, job stressors, peer support, quality of supervision, organizational factors). More specifically, ask each group to pick at least 2 variables in one of the areas above and ask them to answer the following questions:

1. How would you measure this variable in a child welfare agency?
2. How could you use the results of your measurement of this variable to help reduce turnover?
3. How could you help staff at all levels engage in continuous improvement on the variables that are/may be predictors of turnover?

Have each small group report out and list all the group responses on the board for further discussion.

Some suggested large group discussion points

- List some of the quantitative and qualitative methods to measure these variables. Discuss the pros and cons of each.
- Discuss some of the data that are already being collected by the child welfare agency in your county and discuss how it is being used to address turnover.
- Invite a representative from human resources, training, or staff development to provide information on the data being collected at the local child welfare agency and to describe how it is being used. Students/participants can make suggestions for continuous improvement.
- Discuss the complexity of this research and the value of multiple methodologies, perspectives, and longitudinal studies.

MODULE VII

LEAVING COMPARED WITH INTENDING TO LEAVE

MODULE VII

LEAVING COMPARED WITH INTENDING TO LEAVE

- Many studies use stated intention to leave as an outcome rather than actual turnover. The present study included both outcomes, giving us an opportunity to compare results.
- Following are the differences and similarities in results from this study:
 - Male and older workers tended to express a higher commitment to the job in the cross-sectional analyses, yet tended to leave more than female and younger workers.
 - Latinos were less likely to leave the job than other ethnic groups, but there were no differences in expressed intention to leave by ethnicity.
 - Divorced respondents expressed a greater intention to stay and did in fact stay more than married respondents.
 - MSWs expressed a lack of commitment to the job, but were in fact less likely to leave than workers with other degrees.
 - The pattern of relationships between the two outcomes and job satisfaction and self-efficacy variables were similar.
 - Among agency variables, time to receiving a full caseload was not related to intention to leave the job but was strongly related to actually leaving.
 - Amount of training was strongly related to intending to remain on the job, but less strongly related to actually staying.
 - While various stressful job conditions were predictors of a low commitment to the job, these same variables tended to be predictors of actually remaining on the job.
 - Finally, in the cross-sectional analysis, there is some evidence of economic motivation, as the workers who stated that it was relatively easy to find a better job were more likely to express less commitment to the present job.

MODULE VIII

LESSONS LEARNED

MODULE VIII LESSONS LEARNED

Note to Instructor:

This, a combination of lecture, interactive exercises, and group discussion, introduces the student/participant to the lessons learned from this study and previous research on turnover in employment.

Goals:

Participants will learn how this study can help inform staff on some of the variables that can be addressed to help reduce turnover, as well as areas for future research.

Objectives:

At the completion of this module, participants will be able to:

- Describe some of the key lessons learned in this study.
- Value the importance of research on turnover in child welfare agencies.
- Understand how each person in a child welfare agency can contribute to reducing turnover through individual, job, and agency variables.

Lessons Learned

- Workers leave the job for many different reasons. Sometimes these departures are an advantage for the agency, sometimes not. Different reasons for leaving are certainly affected by different factors. Therefore, in predicting turnover, the type of turnover should be specified.
- Leaving the job is a complex individual decision, made in social, professional, and economic circumstances. It is difficult to determine all of the reasons that workers leave.
- Some apparent reasons for leaving the job may really be due to other factors.

- It is difficult to specify precise current turnover rates in public child welfare because of regional differences and because of different ways of measuring turnover. The average annual turnover rate is probably from 15-25%, possibly higher for new employees.
- Agency factors, many under the control of administrators, have a greater effect on turnover than individual demographic factors.
- Latinos and Asians are generally more likely to remain on the job than Whites or African Americans.
- While salary alone is not a predictor of turnover, it is important to remember that leaving a job is in part an economic decision that will be affected by the worker's family and community resources.
- Education, training, and professional background are less related to turnover than one might hope.
- As expected, general job satisfaction is strongly correlated with turnover and can be used by an agency to predict turnover levels.
- Contrary to the findings of prior researchers (e.g., Rycraft), caseload size does not seem to be related to turnover; however, gradually giving new employees cases, rather than immediately giving them full caseloads, tends to result in workers remaining on the job. This is an important and unexpected result of the present study, and indicates a change in practice that can be implemented immediately by administrators at relatively little cost.
- Experienced role conflict on the job is associated with worker turnover, and indicates another useful area for administrative change.
- Individual attitudes, such as commitment to the career of child welfare and satisfaction with various aspects of the job, are associated with the expressed intention to leave the job more than with actually leaving the job.
- While those who express intention to leave the job are more likely to do so than others, many who intend to leave the job remain.

Attention Instructor

To help participants value the importance of the individual, job, and agency factors that can contribute to turnover, ask each student to write down the top three priorities they think need to be addressed by frontline staff, supervisors, and managers to reduce turnover in child welfare agencies. Divide students into small groups of 4-6 people and have them share their priorities. Have each small group report out and list all the group responses on the board for further discussion.

Some suggested large group discussion points

- Some of the priorities are within the control of frontline staff (e.g., self esteem, family support, well being, peer support).
- Some of the priorities are within the control of supervisors (e.g., staff development and training, improvements to self-efficacy, job challenge, role clarity, social support, autonomy and discretion, quality of supervision).
- Some of the priorities are within the control of managers and administrators (e.g., salary, caseload/workload, training and professional educational opportunities, a positive organizational climate and culture, cooperation over conflict, rewards for best practice, rewards for continuous improvement).

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