

"Job retention in child welfare: Effects of perceived organizational support, supervisor support, and intrinsic job value," by Brenda D. Smith, Children and Youth Services Review, February 2005 reports on a study of staff turnover and retention in a dozen county based rural child welfare offices in a single unidentified state. These offices had relatively high staff turnover rates compared to other offices in the same region. "In the 12 counties, 296 staff completed the survey, which was a response rate of 71%." The survey was initially completed in 2002 following which staff retention information was gathered 15 -17 months later from participating agencies.

The study found that 24% of nonretiring staff had resigned from their positions by May 2003. The article does not clarify whether staff who resigned their positions left child welfare or took child welfare positions in other offices, an important distinction. "The 3 - year county average turnover rate ranged from 16% to 53%, with a mean of 28%."

A statistical analysis utilizing logistic regression indicated that "every increase of one unit (a logged year) in position time increases the odds of job retention by about 30%." "Perceiving few job alternatives increases the odds of job retention by more than two times." "Having a social work degree in itself (i.e., all else being equal) decreases the odds of retention by nearly three quarters." However, the author hastens to add that having a social work degree often means that all else is not equal, especially factors related to job satisfaction. "Every additional unit of average organizational caseload size decreases the odds of retention by 6%."

"Higher ratings of work - life balance increases the odds of job retention." In fact, staff perceptions of work - life balance was one of the two strongest predictive factors in job retention. The other major factor was perception of supervisory support; "... a one standard deviation increase in the measure of supervisor support increases the odds of retention by 57%."

Surprisingly, respondents' perceptions of the intrinsic value of their jobs was not related to job retention; ditto for perceived organizational support, factors which other studies of staff retention have found to be important.

The author comments that "Even in a work climate where intrinsic job value is ostensibly an important motivator, extrinsic rewards such as the facilitation of life -work balance and supervisor support are associated with job retention, but reports of intrinsic job value are not." "In these relatively high - turnover environments, staff who felt relatively more than others did that their organizations supported life - work balance, and those who reported relatively more supportive and more competent supervisors were those who were more likely to retain their jobs 15 -17 months after making these reports."

The study found that "respondents with a social work degree (BSW or MSW) report greater satisfaction with pay and promotional opportunities, higher levels of perceived job alternatives, higher levels of perceived supervisor support, and greater perceptions of work - life balance." "Most respondents with a social work degree have relatively low chances of leaving their child welfare position when all these characteristics are taken into account." However, "when a social work degree is not associated with other positive job characteristics, social workers are very likely to leave their jobs."

The author remarks on the finding that "staff remaining in child welfare jobs are just as likely as staff who leave to find few intrinsic rewards in the work." "Such findings raise concerns about the effects of unhappy staff on service quality," a concern which should be taken seriously by child welfare managers. The author comments that "If job commitment of frontline child welfare staff is tied closely to perceptions of supervisor support (a main finding of the study), frontline job commitment could be quite vulnerable to supervisor turnover."

This is another study which finds that quality of supervision is a major factor (possibly the major factor) in social workers' job satisfaction. Unfortunately, the study does not address the question of factors influencing supervisors' job satisfaction and / or job retention.