

Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families (FSPSF)

Purpose

Recruitment and retention for child welfare professionals are widespread issues for the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Community-Based Care organizations (CBCs). High staff turnover puts vulnerable children at greater risk for recurrence of maltreatment, impedes timely intervention referrals and, ultimately, delays permanency. Annual attrition estimates across the state range between 25%-60% and the bill analysis submitted in consideration of Senate Bill 1666 indicated \$6.2 million in increased annual costs associated with staff training and inexperienced workers.⁴

The proposed project is a 5-year longitudinal study of newly hired employees into child protective investigator (CPI) and case manager (CM) positions to learn about individual and organizational influences on child welfare employee retention, and ultimately, child and family outcomes. This statewide study will examine **worker personal characteristics** (e.g., educational background, family history, self-esteem, etc.) **worker beliefs and behaviors** (e.g., stress and burnout, work/family balance, social support and coping, etc.), **organizational characteristics** (e.g., physical environment, supervisory and management practices, vacancy rate, etc.), and **work characteristics** such as caseload size and severity, prevalence of child deaths, and exposure to threats and violence. We will also examine **community context** (e.g., unemployment, poverty rates, etc.) recognizing that the local community may impact worker retention and child and family outcomes. A conceptual model is presented in Figure 1, and Tables 1-5 identify the variables used to define each element of the model.

Research Methods & Questions

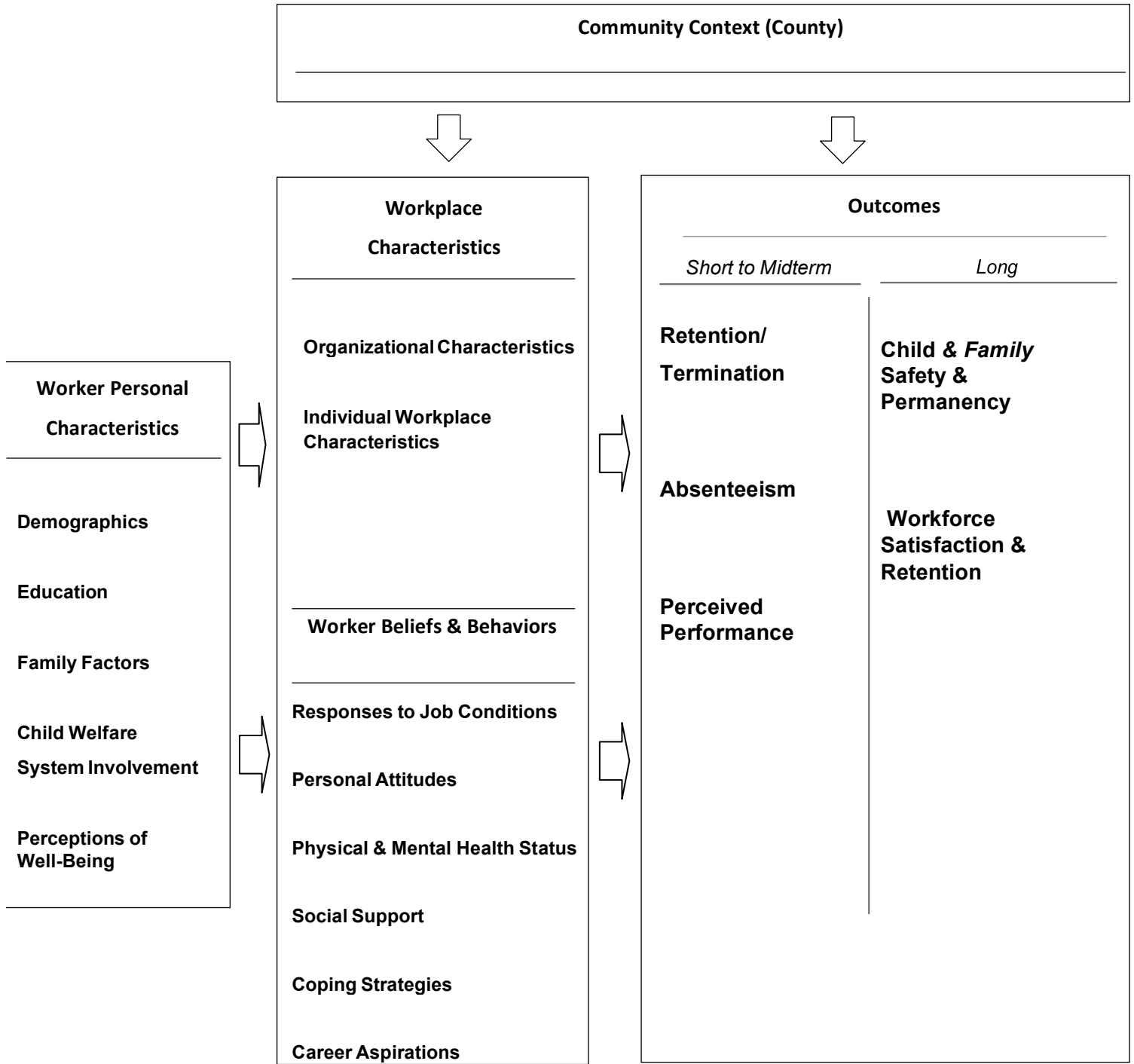
This 5-year longitudinal study will encompass three broad strategies to answer several different research questions based on the conceptual model. First, respondents will be surveyed every 6-7 months for 5 years with a core instrument.

Second, in addition to the core instrument, in-depth modules will be rotated during the data collection period. Each module will be completed twice during the 5-year study. Modules will include: 1) Substance Use, Mental & Physical Health, and Coping Strategies; 2) Work/Personal Life Balance; 3) Supervision; and 4) Organizational Functioning. The intent of this strategy is to gain a deeper understanding of key areas of worker personal or organizational characteristics that may impact job satisfaction and retention. For example, a mental health screening inventory will be part of the core instrument that participants complete during every administration, but on two different occasions, participants will provide in-depth information about mental health and its impact on employment outcomes.

Finally, qualitative interviews will be used to further augment information gathered on the in-depth modules. For example, when the in-depth module focuses on supervision, qualitative interviews will provide greater detail on the role, quality, and depth of supervision for respondents.

⁴ <https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2014/1666/Analyses/2014s1666.ap.PDF>

Figure 1. The Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families Conceptual Model



The Florida Study of Professionals for Safe Families will seek to answer the following questions:

Individual Attributes

- Do child welfare professionals feel adequately prepared to enter the workforce and do perceptions of the job match work experiences?
- How do worker personal characteristics, including prior educational attainment, impact job satisfaction, retention, and child and family outcomes?
- How do worker beliefs and behaviors, including stress and burnout, impact job satisfaction, retention, and child and family outcomes?
- At what point do workers consider leaving their positions?
 - Among those who stay, what individual attributes contribute to retention?
 - Among those who leave, what individual attributes contribute to departures?

Organizational and Contextual Attributes

- What training practices or structures contribute to readiness, competence in the field, and retention?
- How do organizational characteristics, including supervisory and management practices, influence job satisfaction, retention, and family and child outcomes?
- How do the influences of organizational characteristics change over time?
- What work characteristics, including caseload size and severity, influence job satisfaction and worker retention?
- Among those who leave their jobs for other positions, what are characteristics of their new work environments?
- What organizational and caseload characteristics contribute to an intent to leave or to remain in child welfare?
- What contextual influences impact job satisfaction, retention, and child and family outcomes?

Sample & Recruitment

This study proposes to recruit all Child Protective Investigators (CPIs) and Case Managers (CMs) who are hired between Sept. 1, 2015 and August 31, 2016. To qualify for the study, participants must have completed a 4-year college degree and have received, be eligible for, or have already applied for provisional Florida certification in their respective job category. CPIs are hired by the state of Florida or by one of 6 county sheriffs' offices to conduct investigations. Case managers are hired by agencies sub-contracted with the CBCs to provide case management services. While CPIs and CMs reflect a continuum of care for child welfare cases, CPIs are public employees and CMs are private employees.

Based on previous rates of turnover among CPIs and CMs, we anticipate 1,000 eligible participants throughout the state. We will follow the total sample of new hires for five years, even if they leave their child welfare positions during the study timeframe. This strategy is critical to understanding employment outcomes for those who leave their initial CPI/CM positions.

Participants will be recruited during their pre-service training, a mandatory 12-week training for all new hires not currently holding Florida certification in the job for which they have been hired. DCF staff (or their sub-contractors) provides pre-service training for the CPIs, and CBC staff (or their sub-contractors) provides training on behalf of the case management agencies.

An FSPSF graduate assistant will maintain a database of all pre-service training staff throughout the state and will, on a monthly basis, identify which agencies are beginning a pre-service training class each month. Within the first three weeks of a new training commencing, an FSPSF staff member will physically attend one session in order to seek participation from the entire cohort of trainees. FSPSF staff will use this time to explain the purpose of the study, obtain informed consent, and gather pre-survey demographic and contact information.

Those CMs or CPIs who change jobs within their category of certification are not required to repeat the pre-service training. However, we will recruit these individuals for this study. An FSPSF graduate assistant will contact agency human resource personnel each month to identify any new hires who did not attend training. We will recruit those new hires during the agency orientation.

Data Collection & Variables

We will survey participants twice annually. Demographic and contact information will be gathered during pre-service training followed by electronic administration of Wave 1 baseline data collection. Wave 2 will begin 6 months later. Starting with Wave 3, monthly cohorts will be clustered into quarterly cohorts in order to manage the data collection process. For example, all participants who began the study in September, October, or November 2015 will be clustered together for data collection beginning with Wave 3 (scheduled for October 2016). This same pattern will repeat in subsequent months, and Wave 4 data collection will follow 6 months after Wave 3. In an effort to learn more about potential seasonal influences on caseload satisfaction, job satisfaction, and retention outcomes, Wave 5 will be collected 7 months after Wave 4, and Wave 6 will be collected 6 months after Wave 5. This pattern will repeat each year. As a result, each group of participants will be surveyed during 9 different months of the year during the course of the 5-year study.

Survey data will be gathered electronically using Qualtrics. Participants will provide work and personal email addresses during initial data collection at the pre-service training. The baseline data collection protocol consists of two stages:

1. A FSPSF team member will present the study to potential participants during pre-service training and obtain participant consent. The FSPSF team member will give the participant an iPad (or other tablet) with a pre-loaded link to a Qualtrics survey. This initial data collection will request personal contact information including work and personal email addresses, work and personal phone numbers, and language preference for subsequent surveys. In order to increase study retention, respondents will identify two additional collateral contacts they are likely to stay in contact with throughout the course of the study. Data on the collateral contacts will include personal phone numbers and email addresses.
2. Within one week of completion of the pre-survey data collection, respondents will be sent a link to the Wave 1 baseline instrument.

Subsequent data collection will also involve a multi-stage strategy. First, one week prior to data collection, respondents will be sent a text message to their personal phone number informing them of the upcoming data collection and asking them to confirm contact information. Second, respondents will be sent a link from Qualtrics directing them to the survey. Future waves of data collection are expected to take about 45-60 minutes to complete. Reminder messages will be sent at 5 days and at 10 days for those who have not completed the survey. At 14 days, project staff will email participants who have not yet opened the survey link to insure that the Qualtrics generated emails were not sent to a spam folder. If there is no response to the individual email, project staff will telephone the non-respondent. At 21 days, project staff will attempt to email or call the identified contact persons of non-respondents.

Surveys will be optimized for mobile use and respondents will be able to complete the instrument in multiple attempts and on multiple devices. Survey links will remain available for one month. Upon completion of each

survey, respondents will receive financial compensation for participation that will increase with each year of participation (\$25 for Waves 1 and 2, increasing incrementally to \$75 for Waves 9 and 10).

In an effort to create an identity with the collateral contacts, within one week of receiving the collateral contact's information, FSPSF staff members will send an email explaining the study and their potential role in it. The participant who identified the collateral contact will also be copied on the message in order to verify participation, if requested. Collateral contacts will be given the opportunity to decline participation. In that event, the study participant will be emailed and asked to provide information on an additional contact.

Incentives

A series of gradually increasing incentives will be utilized to minimize participant attrition. Incentives, primarily in the form of monetary compensation, will be provided upon completion of each survey administration. The incentives will be electronic gift cards to online retailers (e.g., Target) or credit to online accounts like Amazon.com or iTunes. Participants who complete all waves of the study will receive \$500.00 in total compensation, distributed as follows:

- Year 1 (Waves 1 & 2): \$25.00
- Year 2 (Waves 3 & 4): \$40.00
- Year 3 (Waves 5 & 6): \$50.00
- Year 4 (Waves 7 & 8): \$60.00
- Year 5 (Waves 9 & 10): \$75.00

At the end of the survey, participants will be asked to choose their incentive from a list of possible options. When surveys are completed, project staff will send a thank you email that will contain a link to an electronic credit in the appropriate amount.

Beyond compensation for survey completion, other incentives will be used to encourage continuing engagement and identification with the study. At least annually, participants will be asked to verify their phone and email contact information along with the information on their collateral contacts. Respondents who provide this information may elect to participate in a sweepstakes drawing that will include a variety of gifts to be determined.

Finally, beginning in Wave 2, a small subset of respondents will be randomly selected to participate in qualitative interviews. Those who volunteer to engage in a longer interview will receive \$50.00 as compensation, in addition to quantitative survey completion incentives. Qualitative survey incentives will be electronically distributed in a similar manner to the quantitative survey incentive plan.