SATISFACTIONS AND STRESSORS EXPERIENCED BY RECENTLY-HIRED FRONTLINE CHILD WELFARE WORKERS

ISSUE

Many child welfare workers choose their positions due to their interest and commitment in protecting children and derive a sense of satisfaction from their work and serving children and families. However, child welfare workers commonly experience stress and burnout. High rates of turnover for child welfare workers occur within the first few years of hire with national annual rates ranging from 20% to 50% with the highest rates occurring during workers' first three years. The average length of child welfare employment is less than two years and high turnover rates create a constant flow of recently-hired child welfare workers.

FINDINGS

This study is a thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with recently hired Child Protection Investigators (CPIs) and Case Managers (CMs) in the state of Florida who have independent caseloads. Thirty-eight (38) recently-hired child welfare workers participated in the study including 21 CPIs and 17 CMs. All regions of Florida were represented in the sample.

Workers' satisfaction with their positions largely fell within two categories: 1) helping and making a difference; and 2) job autonomy and variety. Workers' stressors included administrative requirements, workload, unsupportive colleagues, challenging parents, and hurt children.

SATISFACTIONS	STRESSORS
1) Helping and making a difference ▸ Working with children and families and, ultimately, helping them ▸ Enjoying home visits ▸ Knowing that their decisions and actions played a role in helping and making a difference in people's lives was rewarding to workers **2) Job autonomy and variety** ▸ Enjoying the flexibility of their schedules and the uniqueness of each day ▸ Appreciating the freedom and flexibility to manage cases	▸ Required paperwork and documentation with some concern regarding rules ▸ Large, demanding caseloads; the constant flow of new cases; and the consequential long and unpredictable schedules ▸ Lack of a well-functioning team and the negative morale ▸ Working with hostile or unengaged parents and seeing the damaging effects of maltreatment on children

IMPLICATIONS

The identification of the initial sources of satisfactions and stressors can inform pre-service training by acknowledging workers' opportunity to make a difference and proactively addressing potential stressors. Specifically, the stressor of working with challenging parents may be addressed through training recently-hired workers about reasons why parents may seem uncooperative and difficult to engage as well as strategies to effectively engage them. Finding ways to ensure that the workers continue to see the impact of their work and enjoy the autonomy and variety in their positions is critical and may contribute to promote prolonged worker satisfaction and decreased stress.

Supervisors, senior workers, and recently-hired workers can benefit from training on promoting a team-based approach and supportive atmosphere. In addition to training, workloads can benefit from recognizing workers' needs to learn new responsibilities or assist recently-hired workers.

Given workers in this study identified key organizational pitfalls almost immediately upon receiving independent caseloads, workers could benefit from retention efforts upon hire. Retention efforts may elect to reduce caseloads, consolidate required paperwork, and increase support, particularly for recently-hired workers. With technological advances and the dominance of electronic paperwork, agencies may consider evaluating the documentation process to capitalize on self-populating fields in order to reduce data entry and the potential for human error.