

July 2018

**Caseworker Retention
Survey Report**

*Applied Research in Child
Welfare (ARCH) Project*



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Research for Results

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ARCH Caseworker Retention Survey Report

1. Background

Caseworker retention continues to be a significant concern within child welfare agencies. The Alliance for Children and Families, American Public Human Services Association [APHSA], and the Child Welfare League of America [CWLA] all state that the functionality of the child welfare system suffers from numerous staffing and work condition issues (Gonzalez, Faller, Ortega, & Tropman, 2009). The average length of employment for child welfare employees is fewer than two years (APHSA, 2001, 2003; United States General Accounting Office [GAO], 2003; Zeitlin, Augsberger, Auerbach, & McGowan, 2014), while only 75% of child welfare positions are regularly filled (CWLA, 2006), indicating a need for more caseworkers (Gonzalez, et al., 2009; ICF International, 2014).

1.1. Research Context

From a national perspective, estimates of public child welfare caseworker turnover have ranged from 13% in a 2001 Administration for Children & Families (ACF) report, to 20% in a 2003 Annie E. Casey (AEC) Foundation report, to 22% in both a 2005 American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) report and a 2008 Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) report, to between 30% and 40% in a 2003 U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) report. From a state perspective, estimates of public child welfare caseworker turnover have ranged between 18% from a 2006 California report, to 20% from a 2007 Maryland report, to 26% from a 2013 Texas report, to 28% from a 2016 North Carolina report.

Based on the results of Phase 1 of the ARCH Caseworker Retention study, the average overall turnover rate for the 11 ARCH counties from 2006-2015 was 26.3% with a range from 20.7% in 2009 to 32.0% in 2014. This falls between the national estimates of 13%-22% in the ACF, AEC, APHSA, and CWLA studies and the 30%-40% estimate from the GAO study. The overall turnover rate in the 11 ARCH counties also falls between the state estimates of 18%-28% in California, Maryland, and North Carolina, and is the same as the 26% rate reported in Texas. Thus, the overall turnover rate in the 11 ARCH counties is comparable to national and state trends during the study time period. Furthermore, the overall turnover rate for a sample of non-ARCH counties during the same timeframe was comparable to the turnover rate for the ARCH counties.

1.2. Practice Context

When interpreting caseworker turnover data, it is important to understand the practice context behind it. In Colorado, caseworkers are often at a disadvantage from the outset of their work

experience due to the persistent understaffing of the child welfare system. According to a 2014 workload study conducted for the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) by ICF International, an additional 574 caseworker positions and 122 supervisory positions are needed to handle the volume of referrals, assessments, and cases across all counties. To date, only 184 new positions have been funded by the General Assembly. Although counties are working to hire the authorized caseworkers, there is a diminished pool of candidates as counties compete for the same hires.

Since 2010, new child welfare caseworkers have been certified to practice in Colorado after successfully completing the Child Welfare New Caseworker Academy. The New Caseworker Academy was redesigned to include 118 hours (over approximately seven weeks) of training on crucial child welfare topics. Once the State's training is completed, caseworkers are then trained on their respective county policies, procedures, and expected practices. As caseworkers begin working with families, they may be paired with a more senior caseworker or a practice coach to enhance their learning.

Depending on the position, it can take caseworkers up to one year to gain the competencies needed to successfully perform the functions of the job. However, caseworkers could be asked to carry full caseloads within six months given the reality of understaffing, which may lead to the same position turning over more frequently. It should be noted that turnover can sometimes be positive. Positive turnover occurs when employees leave for promotions, to raise families, or to address other life changes. Turnover can be viewed as healthy when employees leave agencies because they are struggling to perform in the position or determine that another career is a better fit.

1.3. Policy Context

Counties also have experienced an increase in workload, without a commensurate increase in resources, since the workload study was completed. The ARCH counties participated in an activity to document state and county policies that may have contributed to this increase in workload from 2006 to 2015. According to county administrators, increases in workload have occurred in the following areas:

- Statewide rollout of the Colorado Child Abuse Hotline and accompanying public awareness campaign. There was a 10% increase in referrals and a 6% increase in assessments from 2014 to 2015 after the rollout occurred¹.
- Statewide enactment of Review Evaluate Direct (RED) Teams and enhanced screening for child abuse or neglect referrals. This was a change from a single caseworker and their

¹ Data retrieved from the CDHS Community Performance Center website at <http://www.cdhsdatamatters.org/>

supervisor screening referrals to the RED Team process where a team of individuals screen referrals.

- County participation in the Colorado IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project, which includes the delivery of five enhanced interventions including kinship supports, Permanency Roundtables, family engagement meetings, and trauma assessment and intervention. This also has led to the creation of new non case-carrying and supervisory positions. Through a voluntary application process, all 11 ARCH counties are currently participating in the Waiver. Some funding was provided to counties for new positions and/or family resources.
- County implementation of Differential Response (DR), which requires a number of practice changes to engage families utilizing a family assessment response (FAR). Through a voluntary application and preparation process, six ARCH counties are currently practicing in DR.
- County adoption of prevention programs to serve families that were screened-out or closed after assessment. Through a voluntary application process, four ARCH counties currently offer Colorado Community Response (CCR), while eight ARCH counties currently offer SafeCare Colorado. Funding was provided to counties to support services and FTE needed to deliver the prevention programs.
- Statewide increase in casework documentation such as new Legislative Audit requirements and the revised safety and risk assessment tools. Another key finding of the CDHS workload study was that 38% of caseworker time was spent on documentation (Trails data entry) and administration (human resource tasks and general office tasks).

2. Significance

High turnover negatively impacts child welfare agencies (Zeitlin, et al., 2014), and increases the burden on remaining caseworkers (Johnco, Salloum, Olson, & Edwards, 2014; Strolin-Goltzman, 2010). Staffing shortages can create damaged relationships between agencies and families through case turnover and lack of continuity of caseworker trust (GAO, 2003). Turnover creates delays in decision making for children’s safety and in establishing permanency for families (Cahalane & Sites, 2008; GAO, 2003; Zeitlin, et al., 2014). Turnover also directly impacts attainment of federal safety standards and benchmarks (CPS Human Resources, n.d.), as the services provided by agencies experience decreased quality (GAO, 2003) and reach fewer families (Sudol, 2009).

Child welfare caseworkers are frequently exposed to events with high levels of emotion and uncertainty that can result in secondary trauma, which can contribute to turnover (Gonzalez, et al., 2009; Shier, et al., 2012). Working in unstable, possibly disorganized agencies due to

frequent turnover, can lead to an increase in feelings of stress (Spath, Strand, & Bosco-Ruggiero, 2013).

Turnover is costly in terms of increased training costs, lost productivity, and reduced morale (Lambert, Cluse-Tolar, Pasupuleti, Prior, & Allen, 2012; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). The average cost for the turnover of one caseworker is approximately 33% of that caseworker's salary (Children's Defense Fund & Children's Rights Inc., 2006a, 2006b; Sudol, 2009). Decreases in staff turnover can contribute to the retention of a competent workforce, therefore providing better services, more efficient funding spent on client services, and overall improvement in outcomes for families (Sudol, 2009).

Intention to leave can be used to identify and measure factors that relate to or predict turnover (Shier, et al., 2012). The predictors of intention to leave child welfare are organized by personal, psychological, organizational, and culture/climate factors. It is important to note the influence of both personal and organizational factors on intention to leave and turnover (Shier, et al., 2012). Personal factors can include demographic factors, education, psychological factors such as burnout, and attitudinal variables. Some work related factors include supervisory support, administration, peer support, and opportunities for advancement. Although the factors impacting turnover may not be consistent for all agencies and child welfare workers, numerous factors have been found to be significant, consistent, and preventable (CPS Human Resources, n.d.).

2.1. Personal Predictors

The most well-supported personal predictors of intention to leave child welfare include age, tenure, race, ethnicity, urbanicity, and education.

The most well-supported personal predictors of intention to leave child welfare include age, tenure, race, ethnicity, urbanicity, and education.

Age, tenure. In a recent study examining psychosocial outcomes of child welfare caseworkers, those most likely to leave were comprised of the youngest caseworkers in the agencies measured (Boyas, et al., 2015). Older employees, and caseworkers with more time working at an agency, are less likely to leave (Lambert, et al., 2012). For example, Aguiniga et al. (2013) found that caseworkers ages 20-29 had shown significantly higher intention to leave than did caseworkers ages 40-49, and 50-59. There is a significant association between age and burnout in child welfare casework. Younger employees have been found to experience more burnout than employees who are older, or may have been with an organization longer (Boyas & Wind, 2010). Age also can predict depersonalization, where younger caseworkers are more likely to experience depersonalization, which increases risk of burnout (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2012).

Race, ethnicity. The Survey of Organization Excellence found that caseworkers who identified as either multiracial or other were twice as likely to intend to leave their current agency over the next two years (Aguiniga, et al., 2013). According to Hopkins et al. (2010), caseworkers of color demonstrate higher intent to leave; however this finding interacts with urban agencies having lower morale and higher levels of safety concerns. In a study that examined psychological withdrawal or disengagement from work responsibilities, Latinx caseworkers were more likely to disengage than were caseworkers of other ethnicities (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010).

Urbanicity. The research is mixed on the influence of urbanicity on caseworker retention. For example, Aguiniga et al. (2013) found that intention to leave was not significantly predicted by the geographic location (rural or urban), nor was there interaction between geographic location and organizational factors. According to Barth et al. (2008), working in a non-urban setting was associated with higher reported satisfaction. However, other research shows that agencies located in rural areas demonstrate higher rates of turnover compared to agencies located in urban areas (Fulcher & Smith, 2010). However, both urban and rural areas have been found to have higher turnover than suburban areas, indicating that geographic location could be a contributor to a caseworker's intention to leave (Strolin-Goltzman, et al., 2008).

Education. Caseworkers with an MSW are more likely than those with a B.A. to leave an agency (Dickinson & Painter, 2009), which is potentially explained by their perceived ability to find a better opportunity (Hopkins, et al., 2010). Having a BSW or MSW, compared to not having a social work degree, was found to be correlated with increased intent to leave (Kruzich, et al., 2014; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2008). Having a social work degree in an urban area doubles the likelihood of intention to leave, as compared to those with a social work degree in rural areas (Strolin-Goltzman, et al., 2008). However, caseworkers with a B.A. degree were found to be the less satisfied in a national sample, regardless of geographic location, than were caseworkers with a BSW (Barth, et al., 2008).

2.2. Psychological Predictors

The psychological predictors of intention to leave child welfare with the most evidence include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, stress, secondary traumatic stress, and satisfaction.

Emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion was found to be a negative predictor of caseworker retention based on a systematic review (IASWR, 2005). Stress and work-family conflict can predict emotional exhaustion, which contributes to burnout and eventually, turnover (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2012). Supervisory support was significantly associated with emotional exhaustion for more experienced caseworkers, which may be explained by level of influence in the agency, decision making over involvement, and increased responsibility (Boyas

& Wind, 2010; Boyas, et al., 2013). Younger, less experienced caseworkers with less commitment to the organization have shown more emotional exhaustion (Boyas & Wind, 2010), which is a significant risk factor influencing their intention to leave (Boyas, et al., 2013). Job demands have been found to predict emotional exhaustion (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2015).

Depersonalization. Emotional exhaustion has also been found to be related to both depersonalization and lower satisfaction with the job (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2015). Depersonalization, a construct associated with burnout, serves to protect an individual by creating cognitive and emotional distance from the work and clients as a coping mechanism (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2015). For caseworkers with more experience, depersonalization was a more significant risk factor for intention to leave than emotional exhaustion, signifying how intention to leave is impacted by different factors for caseworkers of different age groups (Boyas, et al., 2013). Work-family imbalance was found to be a predictor of depersonalization, which may contribute to increased intention to leave (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2012).

Stress. Caseworker stress is associated with a higher intent to leave and job withdrawal (Hopkins, et al., 2010; Kim & Kao, 2014; Shier, et al., 2012). Increased stress induced from working with clients increases likelihood of intention to leave (Benton, 2016). Supervisors also indicated that stress and pressure contributed to their intention to leave (McCrae, et al., 2015). Stress and role conflict were found to negatively impact intent to stay (IASWR, 2005). Specifically, caseworkers who report the highest levels of stress also report being concerned about staffing, experiencing a lack of support from supervisors, and lacking role clarity, unlike those who reported lower levels of stress (Antonopoulou, et al., 2017). In a study examining the relationship of intent to leave, job stress, and age, researchers found job stress to be the strongest predictor of turnover for younger respondents (Boyas, et al., 2012).

Secondary traumatic stress. Secondary traumatic stress and intent to leave have been significantly correlated (Bride, et al., 2008; Middleton & Potter, 2015). Using the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale, researchers found that most caseworkers in the sample had a moderate level of secondary trauma, while almost all participants experienced at least one secondary traumatic stress symptom per week (Bride, et al., 2008). The Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment showed that about one third of participants experienced vicarious trauma resulting from their child welfare work, and more than half considered leaving their organization of employment because of it (Middleton & Potter, 2015).

Satisfaction. Career satisfaction has a strong relationship predicting intention to leave (Barth, et al., 2008) with a decrease in satisfaction associated with higher intention to leave (McGowan, et al., 2009). Supervision is one of the factors most related to increased satisfaction among caseworkers, especially quality of supervision (Barth et al., 2008). Satisfaction can be negatively impacted by remaining in the same position for many years, poor supervision, difficulty

providing services to clients due to resource limitations, lack of professional mobility, and feelings of being overburdened (Strand & Dore, 2009). Role conflict and ambiguity negatively impact job satisfaction (Lambert, et al., 2012). Regardless of geographic location, both job satisfaction and efficacy significantly impact intention to leave (Strolin-Goltzman, et al., 2008). Work-life balance has been found to be a mediating factor for job satisfaction (Wu, et al., 2013). In addition, satisfaction with selection of a child welfare career can decrease intention to leave in both rural and urban samples (McGowan, et al., 2009).

2.3. Organizational Predictors

The organizational predictors of intention to leave child welfare with the most evidence include supervision, workload, job role, salary, training, culture, climate, respect/fairness, inclusion/psychological safety, and commitment.

Supervision. Supervision is one of the strongest factors related to child welfare caseworkers' intention to leave (Boyas et al., 2013; Westbrook, et al., 2012). An extensive literature review revealed that a lack of supervisory and administrative support consistently predicted intention to leave a child welfare agency (DePanfilis & Zlotnik, 2008). Analysis from exit interviews revealed that about 25% of employees that left a child welfare agency identified wanting better supervision as a factor that might have led them to stay (Gonzalez, et al., 2009). A North Carolina study measuring predictors of intention to leave found that employees who left had indicated receiving poor supervisory support (Dickinson & Painter, 2009). Supervisor and employee leadership also were significant predictors of turnover in a sample of public child welfare caseworkers (Kruzich, et al., 2014).

Workload. APHSA (2005) found workload and caseload to be the two most highly problematic contributors to turnover. Following workload and caseload, excess time spent on job related activities and unpredictability of hours spent working were also considered highly problematic preventable causes of turnover (CPS Human Resources, n.d.). Caseload size has been found to be significantly correlated to STS and intention to leave (Bride, et al., 2008). The GAO found that only 11% of caseworkers have caseloads that meet the standard maintained by the CWLA (Children's Defense Fund & Children's Rights Inc., 2006a, 2006b; Sudol, 2009; GAO, 2003).

Job role. Job role was found to be a significant risk factor for intention to leave among younger, less experienced caseworkers (Boyas, et al., 2013). Caseworkers may suffer from increased burnout relating to stress from being in an investigation position (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2009). Supervisors reported that they were three times more likely to intend to leave, compared to non-supervisors in a sample of caseworkers (Aguiniga, et al., 2013). Private child welfare agencies also have higher rates of turnover than public agencies (Faller, et al., 2010).

Salary. Low salary is a somewhat problematic contributor to turnover (CPS Human Resources, n.d.). High salary is associated with higher child welfare retention (Wermeling, 2013), while benefits have been revealed to be a positive influence on caseworkers' intention to stay (Gonzalez, et al., 2009). Disparity in pay between those hired solely to conduct investigations, ongoing caseworkers, and supervisors impacts turnover (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2009). However, when salary was found to predict retention, salary increases had minimal impact on decreasing intention to leave (Benton, 2016).

Training. Caseworkers without specialized training are at increased risk for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, which are precursors to intention to leave (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2015). Work-life conflict poses a greater risk for caseworkers without specialized training and more strongly predicts burnout compared to caseworkers with specialized training (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2015). Following issues with quality of supervision, limited professional development opportunities are another leading contributor to turnover (CPS Human Resources, n.d.).

Climate. Organizational climate has the strongest correlation to intent to leave, compared to culture, supervision style, and knowledge of the job before hire (Hopkins, et al., 2010; Sage, 2010). Caseworkers who leave child welfare often indicate a lack of cooperation, communication, and support from coworkers (Boyas, et al., 2015). Higher, more favorable perceptions of organizational justice, organizational support, and job related overload are climate factors that were shown to predict decreased intention to leave (Fernandes, 2016). However, caseworkers who are younger and report feeling supported by their coworkers, demonstrate higher levels of intending to leave (Boyas, et al., 2012). This finding contradicts previous research (Boyas, et al., 2012; Mossholder, Settoon, & Henegan, 2005; Moynihan & Pandey, 2008), in that researchers argue that younger caseworkers who may already want to leave, engage in supportive relationships with coworkers, who support their thoughts of leaving (Boyas, et al., 2012).

Respect/Fairness. The Respect Scale was developed to measure caseworker perceived respect in five areas: (1) Organizational support; (2) Fair salary and Benefits; (3) Fair promotion potential; (4) Adequate communication; and (5) Contingent rewards (Augsberger, et al., 2012). Results from a survey of child welfare caseworkers that utilized the Respect Scale found that those who scored lower on the Respect Scale demonstrated a significantly higher intention to leave compared to those who scored higher on the Respect Scale (Augsberger, et al., 2012). Poor perceptions of fairness had a high influence on intent to leave an agency (Kim & Kao, 2014). Specifically, a culture low in emphasis on rewards poses a significant impact on intention to leave (Shim, 2014).

Inclusion/Psychological Safety. When not considering the moderating effect of personal commitment, lower perceptions of inclusion have been associated with increased intent to leave (Hwang & Hopkins, 2012). As employees speak up in attempts to make organizational improvements, they are also more likely to become more disengaged, influencing intent to leave (Travis & Mor Barak, 2010). Lack of psychological safety, defined by safety to take interpersonal risks within a team or lack thereof, also was found to be one of the most significant predictors of intention to leave (Kruzich, et al., 2014).

Commitment. Organizational commitment is comprised of a caseworker's attachment and alignment with an organization's values and goals (Boyas & Wind, 2010; Lee & Henderson, 1996; Lowe & Schellenberg, 2001). Researchers have found that decreased organizational commitment is significantly related to increased turnover (Faller et al., 2010). Greater than pay or benefits, organizational commitment has a more significant impact on intention to leave (Lambert, et al., 2012). As a result, organizational commitment can serve as a protective factor contributing to decreasing intent to leave (Boyas, et al., 2013). Organizational commitment predicts intent to leave for both younger and older workers and is the strongest predictor for older workers (Boyas, et al., 2012). Furthermore, lack of organizational commitment has been significantly associated with burnout, emotional exhaustion, and feelings of depersonalization (Boyas & Wind, 2010). Affective commitment, especially for child welfare supervisors, can serve as a predictor for intent to leave and other indicators of work withdrawal (Strand & Dore, 2009). In addition, professional commitment has been demonstrated as a strong retention predictor (Kim & Kao, 2014) with lower commitment being associated with greater intention to leave (Faller, et al., 2010).

3. Survey Methodology

Caseworkers completed a web-based survey to explore the reasons and motivations for staying in the child welfare field. Of interest are three levels of intent to stay: 1) intent to stay in the position; 2) intent to stay in the county; and 3) intent to stay in the field. Having a better understanding of caseworkers' intent to stay will allow for the identification and implementation of best practices to train and support caseworkers, thereby increasing retention rates.

3.1. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What factors contribute to why caseworkers come into child welfare?
2. What expectations do caseworkers have when they are first employed?
3. Are caseworkers' expectations at time of hiring aligned with the reality of the job?

4. How do caseworkers currently perceive their job?
5. What factors are having a positive impact on caseworker retention?
6. What can be learned about how to train and support caseworkers who will stay in child welfare?

3.2. Survey Development

The caseworker retention survey was developed by the ARCH retention workgroup from August to November 2016. The workgroup members brought multiple questions based on previous studies and their own experiences and beliefs about the child welfare workforce. Demographic questions included age, education, marital status, and previous work experience. Other topics were levels of secondary traumatic stress and how well the job matched the caseworkers' initial expectations. There was one open-ended question about differences between initial job expectations and the actual work of being a caseworker. Many of the questions developed by the workgroup were county-specific with the intent to stay and leave questions oriented to the caseworker's current position in their county. Some questions of interest, such as caseload size, intake or ongoing, were not included due to variations across counties regarding how caseloads and roles are defined.

ARCH Caseworker Retention Survey Subscales

Several validated scales used in previous studies of child welfare turnover were presented to the workgroup for inclusion in the survey. They were chosen based on previous studies of caseworkers in Colorado and other states to allow for the comparison of results and contribute to the consistency of measurement in the field of child welfare retention. The scales previously used to assess safety culture in the Tennessee child welfare workforce presented to the group were Stress Recognition, Emotional Exhaustion, Psychological Safety, Leader-Member Exchange, Safety Organizing and Safety Climate (Vogus, Cull, Hengelbrok, Modell, & Epstein, 2016). Additional, longer scales presented to the group were the most recent version of the Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) (Stamm, 2010); the Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (STSS) (Bride, Robinson, Yegidis, & Figley, 2004); Impact of Events Scale-Revised (IES-R) (Weiss, 2007); and the Trauma Informed Organizational Culture Survey (TIOC) (Handran, 2013). The following scales were chosen by the workgroup for inclusion in the caseworker retention survey.

The Leader-Member Exchange (L-MX) scale has eight questions, and is based on social exchange theory. It measures the quality of the relationship between a worker and supervisor, from the worker's perspective. This scale has been used in a number of industries, as well as in child welfare. It was used in the Tennessee study of safety culture, and in a longitudinal study of

caseworker turnover intention (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1999; Kim & Mor Barak, 2015; Vogus, et al, 2016).

The Psychological Safety (Psy-S) scale has four questions. It measures the quality of the relationship between members of a worker's team or unit. It is intended to measure how safe it is for workers to speak up, admit mistakes or point out safety concerns, so everyone on the team can learn from them (Edmondson, 1999). This short scale has been used in industries and settings where safety is a high priority, such as hospitals and airlines. It was also used in the Tennessee study. That study found a significant and negative association between psychological safety and emotional exhaustion (Vogus, et al, 2016).

Both the Leader-Member Exchange and Psychological Safety questions are Likert scales with seven response choices. These are: 1 = very strongly disagree, 2 = strongly disagree, 3 = disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = agree, 6 = strongly agree, and 7 = very strongly agree, for all questions except for one in the Psy-S subscale which is reverse coded.

The Professional Quality of Life Scale (ProQOL) has 30 questions and three subscales: Compassion Satisfaction, Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout (Stamm, 2010). It has been used in studies of child welfare workers, including one study in Colorado (Conrad & Kellar-Guenther, 2006). There are no agreed upon diagnoses for burnout or secondary traumatic stress, and the ProQOL subscales are not intended for diagnoses. However, the scores can be used to measure the impact of indirect exposure to traumatic material, the gradual development of dissatisfaction and depersonalization, and a worker's level of self-efficacy and personal satisfaction in a professional caring role (Stamm, 2010). The ProQOL responses are Likert scales with five choices regarding how frequently the phenomenon or feeling described in the statement has been experienced in the last 30 days. These are: 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = very often, for most of the questions, although some are reverse coded.

Other survey questions regarding negative media exposure, professional relationships, personal social supports for caseworkers, and other concerns were developed and refined by the workgroup. The survey was administered to a small number of caseworkers as a pilot in February 2017. The complete survey can be seen in Appendix A.

3.3. Survey Administration

The survey was sent to all caseworker positions in the 11 ARCH counties, including case aides, screeners, and meeting facilitators. Most, but not all, of the caseworkers invited to participate in the survey have a caseload. They may be intake, ongoing, blended, or work primarily with youth. Non case-carrying caseworkers fill a variety of support roles as family meeting facilitators, coaches, and trainers of staff, foster and kinship home supports, or overseeing Core

Services. The names of these roles vary across counties, and there are a few unique roles. The survey was not sent to administrative/support staff (e.g., business office), or supervisors.

Caseworkers received a \$10 Starbucks e-gift card for completing the survey. The survey was active from June 14, 2017 to July 8, 2017 and two reminders to complete the survey were sent. The total number of respondents was **843 out of 1,314** for an overall response rate of **64.2%**. The response rate by county ranged from 84.4% to 41.7%. Table 1 details the response rates by county. A study of survey response rates in published research studies in 2000 and 2005 looked at surveys of both individuals and organizations. The average response rate for surveys of individuals averaged 53%, while surveys of organizations averaged 36% (Baruch & Holtom, 2008).

Table 1: Survey Response by County

Counties	Valid emails	# of Responses	Response Rate
Adams	163	103	63.2%
Arapahoe	172	102	59.3%
Boulder	109	92	84.4%
Broomfield	12	5	41.7%
Denver	258	164	63.6%
Douglas	35	20	57.1%
El Paso	187	125	66.8%
Jefferson	151	79	52.3%
Larimer	128	83	64.8%
Mesa	53	37	69.8%
Pueblo	46	33	71.7%
Grand Total	1314	843	64.2%

4. Results

The results of the survey are reported for sample demographics, intent to stay, caseworker stress, protective factors, psychological safety, and leader membership exchange.

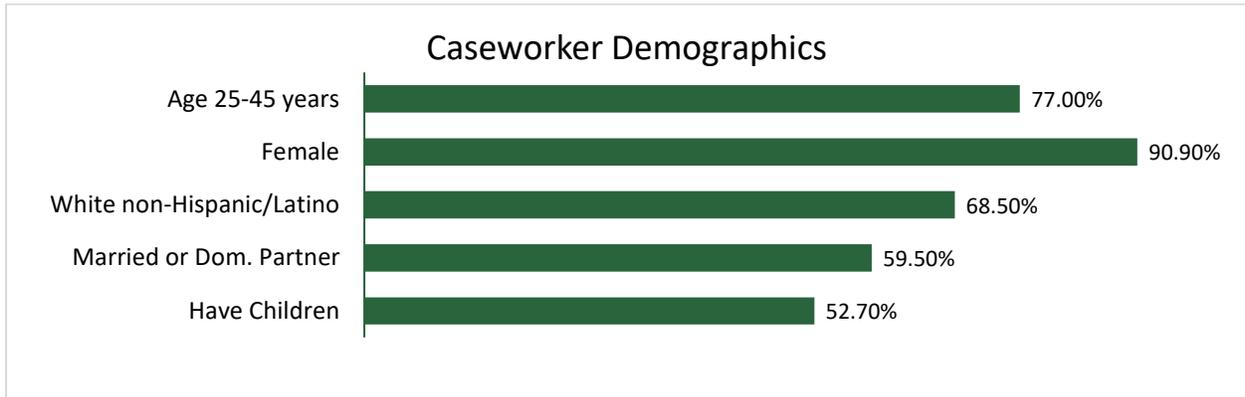
4.1 Sample Description

This section describes the sample of caseworkers who completed the survey.

Demographics

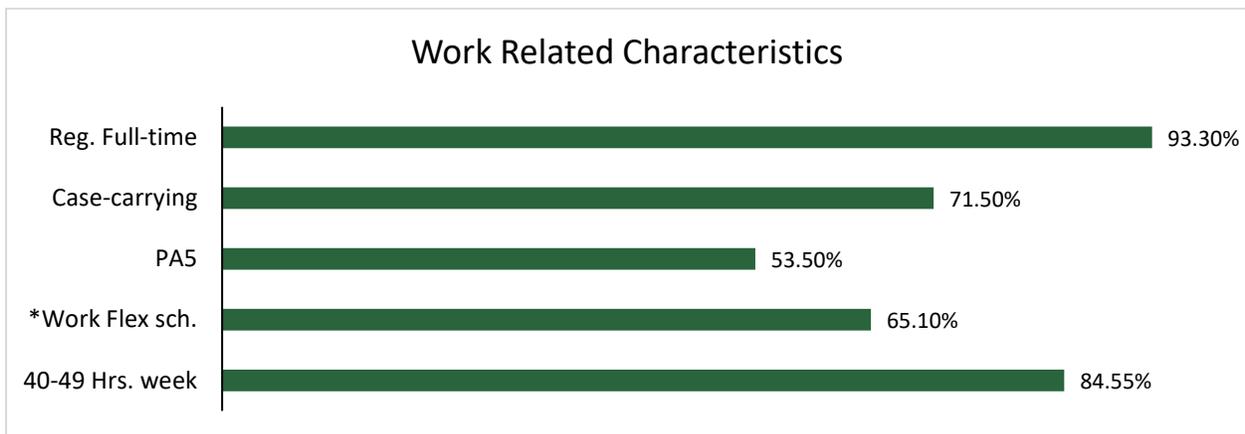
As displayed in Figure 1 on the following page, 77% of the caseworkers are in the 25-45 years old range, 91% are female, 69% are Caucasian, 60% are married, and 53% have children.

Figure 1: Caseworker Demographics



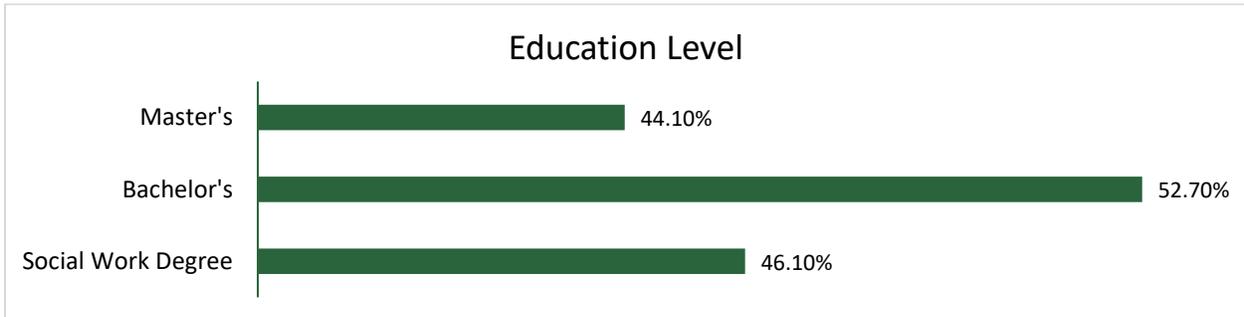
As displayed in Figure 2, 93% of respondents are regular, full-time employees, 72% are case-carrying caseworkers (80% of the non case-carrying caseworkers were certified), 54% work primarily in Program Area 5 (child abuse and neglect population or PA5), 65% have a flexible work schedule (of the 89% from counties that offer a flexible schedule), and 85% work between 40-49 hours per week. Of the 146 caseworkers who work a second job (17% of all respondents), 94% hold a regular, full-time position as a child welfare caseworker. The frequency tables for caseworker work-related demographics are displayed in Appendix B.

Figure 2: Caseworker Work Related Characteristics



As displayed in Figure 3 on the following page, 52% have a bachelor's degree, and 44% have a Master's degree as their highest level of educational attainment. Just over 46% of respondents have a social work degree (373), of those, 145 or 18% have a BSW and 228 or 28% have an MSW.

Figure 3: Caseworker Education Level



As displayed in Table 2, 34% of respondents had an internship in a public child welfare setting.

Table 2: Internship in Public Child Welfare Setting (N = 838)

<u>Internship</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Yes	284	33.9%
No	554	66.1%

As displayed in Table 3, 16% of respondents reported a first interest in child welfare work before college, 36% were first interested during college, and 48% had a first interest after college, during graduate school, or after graduate school.

Table 3: First Interest in Child Welfare (N = 836)

<u>Time Period</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percent</u>
High school	90	10.8%
After high school	44	5.3%
College	299	35.8%
After college	255	30.5%
Graduate school	62	7.4%
After graduate school	86	10.3%

Tenure

As displayed in Table 4 on the following page, 41% of respondents have been in their current position for one year or less, 23% for two years, and 36% for three years or more. The average current position tenure for the survey sample was 3.4 years.

Table 4: Tenure in Current Position in your County (N = 841)

Tenure	Frequency	Percent
0-6 months	76	9.0%
7-11 months	134	15.9%
1 yrs.	139	16.5%
2 yrs.	189	22.5%
3-6 yrs.	174	20.7%
7-10 yrs.	59	7.0%
11-14 yrs.	35	4.2%
15-19 yrs.	20	2.4%
20 yrs. or more	15	1.8%

Overall, 430 respondents (51% of all respondents) had a previous public child welfare position, with 55% having a position in the same county, 24% having a position in a different county, and 20% having a position in another state. As displayed in Table 5, 25% of these respondents were in their previous position for one year or less, 19% for two years, and 56% for three years or more. The average previous position tenure was 4.1 years. For respondents with a previous position in public child welfare, 79% had case-carrying positions while 21% had non case-carrying positions. For the case-carrying caseworkers who had a previous position in child welfare ($n = 332$), 57% had a majority of PA5 cases, 15% had a majority of PA4 cases, and 26% had a blended caseload. For non case-carrying caseworkers who had a previous position in child welfare ($n = 92$), 55% were certified and 45% were non-certified.

Table 5: Tenure in Previous Public Child Welfare Position (N = 430)

Tenure	Frequency	Percent
0-6 months	16	3.7%
7-11 months	24	5.6%
1 yrs.	66	15.3%
2 yrs.	82	19.1%
3-6 yrs.	161	37.5%
7-10 yrs.	52	12.2%
11-14 yrs.	9	2.1%
15-19 yrs.	16	3.7%
20 or more	4	0.9%

Overall, 464 respondents (55% of all respondents) had a previous non-public child welfare position working with children, youth, or families. As displayed in Table 6 on the following page, of the previous non-public child welfare positions 20% were with mental health, 17% were with congregate care, 11% were with child placement agencies, 8% were with youth corrections, 7%

were with domestic violence, 6% were with substance abuse, and 2% were with CASA. Please note that respondents could select more than one previous non-public child welfare position.

Table 6: Type of Previous Non-public Child Welfare Position (N = 638)

Position Type	Frequency	Percent
Mental health setting	125	19.6%
Congregate care	105	16.5%
Child placement agency	70	11.0%
Youth corrections	50	7.8%
Domestic violence	47	7.4%
Substance abuse	41	6.4%
CASA	10	1.6%
Other	190	29.8%

As displayed in Table 7, 13% of respondents had one year or less of professional experience in child welfare, 30% had two to four years, 29% had five to ten years, and 28% had 11 or more years of professional experience. The average professional experience tenure in child welfare was 7.4 years.

Table 7: Tenure of Professional Experience in Child Welfare Field (N = 839)

Tenure	Frequency	Percent
0-6 months	21	2.5%
7-11 months	38	4.5%
1 yrs.	54	6.4%
2 yrs.	101	12.0%
3-6 yrs.	251	29.8%
7-10 yrs.	137	16.3%
11-14 yrs.	84	10.0%
15-19 yrs.	66	7.9%
20 or more	87	10.4%

4.2. Intent to Stay

As displayed in Table 8, 81% of respondents reported being satisfied with their current position.

Table 8: Satisfaction with Current Position (N = 837)

Satisfied	Frequency	Percent
Yes	678	81.0%
No	159	19.0%

As displayed in Table 9, there is no statistically significant difference between case-carrying and non-case carrying caseworkers' on satisfaction with their current position ($p = .445$). Specifically, 83% of non-case carrying caseworkers were satisfied with their current position, while 80% of case carrying caseworkers were satisfied.

Table 9: Satisfaction with Current Position for Case and Non-Case Carrying Caseworkers (N = 834)

Role	No	Yes	Total
Case-carrying	117	480	597
% within role	19.6%	80.4%	100.0%
Non-case carry	41	196	237
% within role	17.3%	82.7%	100.0%
Total	158	676	834
% within role	18.9%	81.1%	100%

As displayed in Table 10, 29% of caseworkers only intend to stay in their current position for one year or less, while 17% plan to stay for two years, and 54% intend to stay for more than two years.

Table 10: Intent to Stay in Current Position (N = 832)

Timeframe	Frequency	Percent
6 months	102	12.3%
1 year	141	16.9%
2 years	142	17.1%
More than 2 yrs.	447	53.7%

This contrasts with the intent to stay for caseworkers when they started in public child welfare. As displayed in Table 11, only 10% planned to stay one year or less, while 90% intended to stay two years or more.

Table 11: Initial Intent to Stay in Public Child Welfare (N = 837)

Timeframe	Frequency	Percent
6 months	12	1.4%
1 year	74	8.8%
2 years	135	16.1%
More than 2 yrs.	616	73.6%

Of the 160 caseworkers (19% of all respondents), who intend to seek another position in their same county, Table 12 on the following page shows that 23% plan to seek another position

immediately, another 40% intend to seek another position within one year, and 38% plan to seek another position in their county within two or more years.

Table 12: Timeframe for Seeking another Position in Same County (N = 160)

Timeframe	Frequency	Percent
Immediately	36	22.5%
Within 6 months	28	17.5%
Within 1 year	36	22.5%
Within 2 years	38	23.8%
In more than 2 yrs.	22	13.8%

As displayed in Table 13, there was no difference between case-carrying and non-case carrying caseworkers' intent to stay in their current position ($p = .274$).

Table 13: Intent to Stay in Current Position (N = 829)

Role	6 months	1 year	2 years	More than 2 yrs.	Total
Case-carrying	75	102	106	311	594
% within role	12.6%	17.2%	17.8%	52.4%	
Non-case Carrying	27	37	36	135	235
% within role	11.5%	15.7%	15.3%	57.4%	
Total	102	139	142	446	829
% within role	12.3%	16.8%	17.1%	53.8%	

A subgroup analysis was conducted to determine whether caseworkers with previous non-public child welfare position in a congregate care setting differed on intent to stay from those whose previous non-public child welfare position was not in a congregate care setting. There was no statistically significant difference between the groups on intent to stay ($p = .239$).

Three of the survey questions asked for 11 factors to be ranked in order of importance from 1=most important to 11=least important. Most of the caseworkers ranked the factors from 1 to 11. The results for each question are listed below. The top 5 factors for each question from most important to least important are in bold. Please note that the *lower* the mean the *more important* the item was ranked.

As displayed in Table 14 on the following page, caseworkers identified the following factors as being the most influential in beginning working in child welfare: having a commitment to child welfare, job benefits, job availability, flexible schedule, and location of the job.

Table 14: Most Influential Factors to Begin Working in Child Welfare (N = 808)

1. Commitment to Child Welfare	mean = 2.97
2. Benefits	mean = 3.63
3. Job availability	mean = 3.80
4. Flexible schedule	mean = 4.86
5. Location	mean = 5.35
6. Possibilities for promotion	mean = 6.70
7. Organizational climate	mean = 7.36
8. Child Welfare stipend	mean = 7.40
9. Social connections	mean = 7.72
10. Supervisor support	mean = 7.96
11. High salary	mean = 8.24

As displayed in Table 15, the same five factors were reported as being the most strongly influential for caseworkers staying in child welfare. The only difference was flexible schedule and job availability swapped places. The biggest change was supervisor support which moved from the tenth most important to the sixth most important factor in staying in the child welfare field.

Table 15: Most Influential Factors to Remain Working in Child Welfare (N = 792)

1. Commitment to Child Welfare	mean = 3.04
2. Benefits	mean = 3.38
3. Flexible schedule	mean = 3.99
4. Job availability	mean = 5.68
5. Location	mean = 5.92
6. Supervisor support	mean = 6.18
7. Possibilities for promotion	mean = 7.26
8. Social connections	mean = 7.33
9. Child Welfare stipend	mean = 7.42
10. Organizational climate	mean = 7.58
11. High salary	mean = 8.22

As displayed in Table 16 on the following page, the same five factors were the most influential in staying in the same county; however, benefits and commitment to child welfare changed places.

Table 16: Most Influential Factors to Stay Working in County (N = 780)

1. Benefits	mean = 3.48
2. Commitment to Child Welfare	mean = 3.95
3. Flexible schedule	mean = 4.30
4. Location	mean = 4.84
5. Job availability	mean = 5.69
6. Supervisor support	mean = 5.90
7. Social connections	mean = 7.08
8. Organizational climate	mean = 7.29
9. Child Welfare stipend	mean = 7.44
10. Possibilities for promotion	mean = 7.60
11. High salary	mean = 8.44

As displayed in Table 17, 56% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they knew what to expect when starting in child welfare, while 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they knew what to expect.

Table 17: Knowing what to Expect when Starting in Child Welfare (N = 828)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	110	13.3%
Somewhat disagree	172	20.8%
Neither agree nor disagree	81	9.8%
Agree	383	46.3%
Strongly agree	82	9.9%

As displayed in Table 18, this gap in expectations continues, as only 58% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their expectations matched the day-to-day work of child welfare.

Table 18: Expectations Match Day-to-day Work in Child Welfare (N = 828)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	71	8.6%
Somewhat disagree	143	17.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	130	15.7%
Somewhat agree	386	46.6%
Strongly agree	98	11.8%

4.3. Caseworker Stress

As displayed in Figure 4, 54% of respondents indicated that they have many external pressures that create stress in their life; 78% reported that they have work pressures that create stress in their life; and 22% of caseworkers agreed that negative media coverage of child welfare increases stress in their life.

Figure 4: Sources of Caseworker Stress (n = 828)

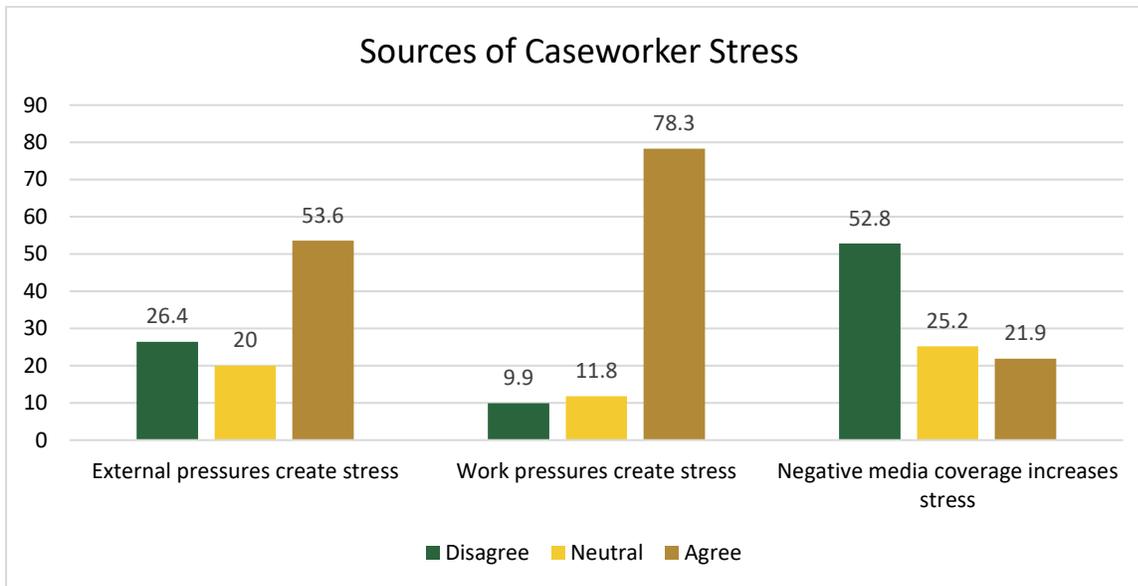


Table 19 displays results on the negative media coverage question by county.

Table 19: Negative Media Coverage Increases Stress Results by County

County	ADA n=102	ARA n=102	BOU n=91	BRO n=5	DEN n=156	DOU n=20	ELP n=122	JEF n=77	LAR n=83	MES n=37	PUE n=33	Survey Total
Strongly/ Somewhat Agree	21 20.6%	24 23.6%	22 24.2%	0 0%	34 21.8%	3 15.0%	34 27.8%	16 20.8%	12 14.4%	7 18.9%	9 27.3%	182 21.9%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	25 24.5%	25 24.5%	26 28.6%	1 20.0%	41 26.3%	5 25.0%	29 23.8%	26 33.8%	20 24.1%	3 8.1%	8 24.2%	209 25.2%
Strongly/ Somewhat Disagree	56 54.9%	53 52.0%	43 47.3%	4 80.0%	81 52.0%	12 60.0%	59 48.4%	35 45.5%	51 61.5%	27 73.0%	16 48.5%	437 52.8%

ADA = Adams; ARA = Arapahoe; BOU = Boulder; DEN = Denver; DOU = Douglas; ELP = El Paso; JEF = Jefferson; LAR = Larimer; MES = Mesa; PUE = Pueblo

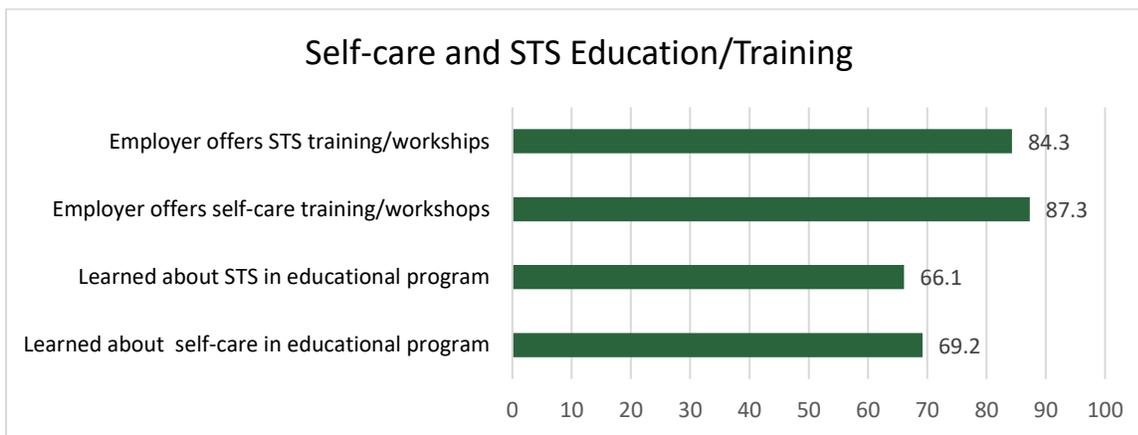
4.4. Protective Factors

This section presents findings from questions designed to measure protective factors, such as education, training, and collaboration that help mitigate caseworker stress. These protective factors are important given the high levels of stress faced by caseworkers in the field and their lives.

Education/Training

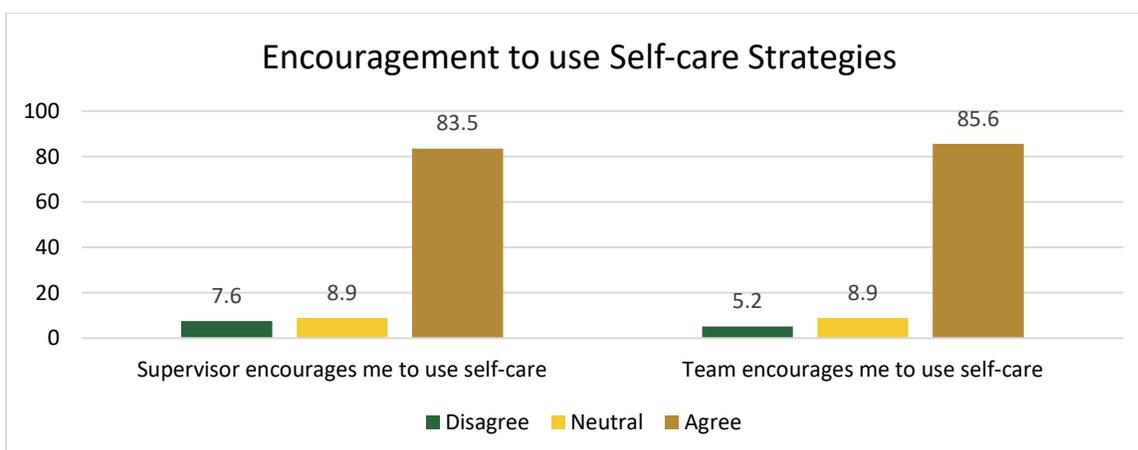
As displayed in Figure 5, respondents indicated high levels of agency support in offering training and workshops to address secondary traumatic stress (84%) and self-care (87%). This training is important given that a smaller percentage of caseworkers had learned about STS (66%) and self-care (69%) in their educational program.

Figure 5: Self-care and Secondary Traumatic Stress Education and Training (n = 828)



As displayed in Figure 6, respondents reported very high levels of encouragement from their supervisor (84%) and team (86%) to use positive self-care strategies.

Figure 6: Supervisor and Team Encouragement to use Positive Self-Care Strategies (n = 828)



In addition to positive self-care strategies, Table 20 displays that respondents also reported high levels of strong social supports in their life with 93% in agreement.

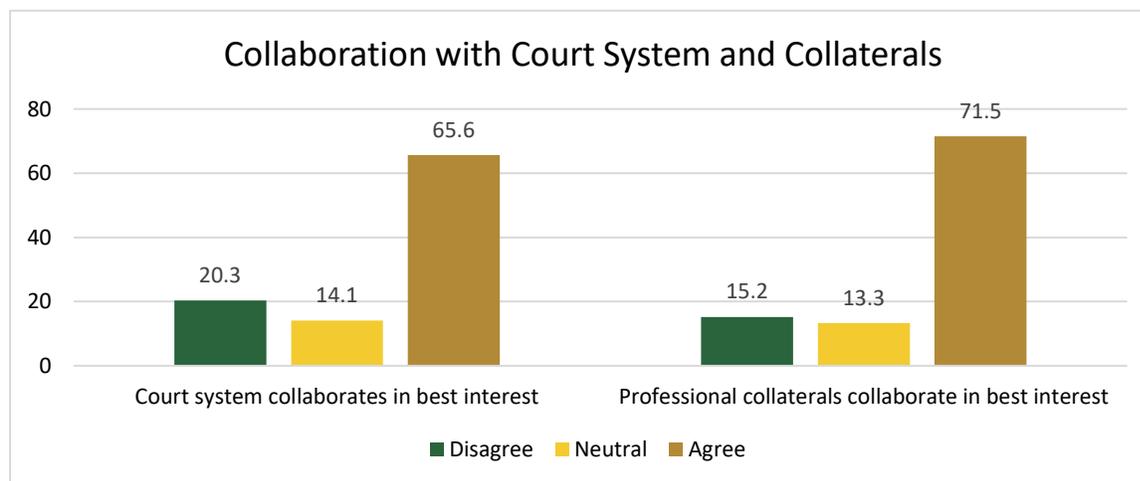
Table 20: Strong Social Supports (N = 828)

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	4	0.5%
Somewhat disagree	22	2.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	29	3.5%
Somewhat agree	214	25.8%
Strongly agree	559	67.5%

Collaboration

Survey respondents were asked to respond to questions about partnering with the court system and collaterals, as these collaborations can serve as protective factors in helping caseworkers serve the best interests of children and families. As displayed in Figure 7, 66% of respondents agreed that the court system collaborates well with child welfare, while 72% reported that professional collaterals collaborate well.

Figure 7: Collaborations with Caseworkers in Best Interest of Children and Families (n = 828)



On the following page, Table 21 displays results on whether the court system collaborates with child welfare in the best interest of children and families by county.

Table 21: Court System Collaboration Results by County

County	ADA n=102	ARA n=102	BOU n=91	BRO n=5	DEN n=157	DOU n=20	ELP n=121	JEF n=77	LAR n=83	MES n=37	PUE n=33	Survey Total
Strongly/ Somewhat Disagree	24 23.5%	23 22.5%	13 14.3%	0 0%	30 19.1%	6 30.0%	29 24.0%	10 13.0%	19 22.9%	8 21.6%	6 18.2%	168 20.3%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	18 17.6%	20 19.6%	7 7.7%	0 0%	22 14.0%	1 5.0%	11 9.1%	16 20.8%	12 14.5%	4 10.8%	6 18.2%	117 14.1%
Strongly/ Somewhat Agree	60 58.8%	59 57.8%	71 78.0%	5 100%	105 66.9%	13 65.0%	81 67.0%	51 66.2%	52 62.6%	25 67.6%	21 63.6%	543 65.6%

ADA = Adams; ARA = Arapahoe; BOU = Boulder; DEN = Denver; DOU = Douglas; ELP = El Paso; JEF = Jefferson; LAR = Larimer; MES = Mesa; PUE = Pueblo

Table 22 displays results on whether professional collaterals collaborate with child welfare in the best interest of children and families by county.

Table 22: Professional Collaterals Collaboration Results by County

County	ADA n=102	ARA n=102	BOU n=91	BRO n=5	DEN n=157	DOU n=20	ELP n=121	JEF n=77	LAR n=83	MES n=37	PUE n=33	Survey Total
Strongly/ Somewhat Disagree	14 13.7%	20 19.6%	14 15.4%	1 20.0%	32 20.3%	5 25.0%	15 12.4%	10 13.0%	9 10.8%	2 5.4%	4 12.2%	126 15.2%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	19 18.6%	22 21.6%	8 8.8%	1 20.0%	17 10.8%	2 1.8%	10 8.3%	11 14.3%	9 10.8%	6 16.2%	5 15.2%	110 13.3%
Strongly/ Somewhat Agree	69 67.7%	60 58.8%	69 75.8%	3 60.0%	108 68.8%	13 52.8%	96 79.4%	56 72.7%	65 78.3%	29 78.4%	24 72.7%	672 71.5%

ADA = Adams; ARA = Arapahoe; BOU = Boulder; DEN = Denver; DOU = Douglas; ELP = El Paso; JEF = Jefferson; LAR = Larimer; MES = Mesa; PUE = Pueblo

4.5. Psychological Safety

The Psychological Safety (Psy-S) short scale has four questions. It measures the quality of the relationship between members of a work team or unit, especially how safe it is for workers to speak up, admit mistakes or point out safety concerns, so everyone on the team can learn from them (Edmondson, 1999). The scale has been used in hospitals, airlines and other industries where safety is a high priority. The 7-point Likert scale was replicated to allow comparison with other studies. The Psychological Safety scale had normal distributions. The mean was 5.09 with a standard deviation of 1.05 ($n = 819$).

As displayed in Tables 23-26 on the following pages, 67% of respondents disagreed that mistakes made in their workgroup are held against them; 87% agreed that people in their workgroup value others' unique skills and talents; 79% agreed that members of their

workgroup are able to discuss problems and tough issues; and 61% agreed that it is safe to take an interpersonal risk in their workgroup. Highly safe work environments will have 10% or fewer responses in the neutral and three disagree categories for Psy-S and L-MX, neutral and agree for reverse coded questions (Vogus, et al., 2016).

Table 23: *If you make a mistake in workgroup, it is often held against you (N = 820)*

Response	Frequency	Valid %
Very strongly agree	14	1.7%
Strongly agree	30	3.7%
Agree	102	12.4%
Neutral	122	14.9%
Disagree	188	30.2%
Strongly disagree	248	22.9%
Very strongly disagree	116	14.1%

Table 24: *People in workgroup value each other's unique skills and talents (N = 820)*

Response	Frequency	Valid %
Very strongly disagree	7	0.9%
Strongly disagree	14	1.7%
Disagree	25	3.0%
Neutral	58	7.1%
Agree	306	37.3%
Strongly agree	251	30.6%
Very strongly agree	159	19.4%

Table 25: *Members of workgroup are able to bring up problems and tough issues (N = 820)*

Response	Frequency	Valid %
Very strongly disagree	7	0.9%
Strongly disagree	20	2.4%
Disagree	60	7.3%
Neutral	81	9.9%
Agree	316	38.5%
Strongly agree	220	26.8%
Very strongly agree	116	14.1%

Table 26: It is safe to take an interpersonal risk in my workgroup (N = 819)

Response	Frequency	Valid %
Very strongly disagree	13	1.6%
Strongly disagree	27	3.3%
Disagree	86	10.5%
Neutral	198	24.2%
Agree	274	33.5%
Strongly agree	150	18.3%
Very strongly agree	71	8.7%

4.6. Professional Quality of Life

The Professional Quality of Life (ProQOL) has 30 questions and three subscales measuring Compassion Satisfaction, Secondary Traumatic Stress and Burnout (Stamm, 2010). The Compassion Satisfaction (CS) subscale had normal distributions. The mean was 3.73 with a standard deviation of .613 ($n = 819$). The Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) subscale had normal distributions. The mean was 2.49 with a standard deviation of .653 ($n = 819$). The Burnout (BO) subscale had normal distributions. The mean was 2.44 with a standard deviation of .590 ($n = 820$). The ProQOL Concise Manual provides an overview of how the summation scores fall into low, moderate or average, and high areas that can be used for self-administration for information or to monitor over time. As displayed in Table 27, there was no significant difference between the t scores for each subscale in the ProQOL manual as compared to the converted t scores from the survey responses.

Table 27: Comparison between Colorado Sample and Manual Scores for ProQOL Subscales

	Colorado Sample Subscale t Scores		
	Compassion	Secondary Traumatic	
	<u>Satisfaction</u>	<u>Burnout</u>	<u>Stress</u>
25 th percentile	43.94	42.51	42.51
50 th percentile	49.47	49.29	48.64
75 th percentile	57.63	57.78	56.30

	ProQOL Manual Subscale t Scores		
	Compassion	Secondary Traumatic	
	<u>Satisfaction</u>	<u>Burnout</u>	<u>Stress</u>
25 th percentile	44	43	42
50 th percentile	50	50	50
75 th percentile	57	56	56

The survey results based on the scales and subscales used in the caseworker survey depict a relatively healthy workforce in terms of both the psychological and organizational factors measured. The ProQOL manual divides summed scores for the subscales into low, moderate and high ranges for individuals to self-assess using raw scores (Stamm, 2010). The ideal combination of scores would be low for both burnout and secondary traumatic stress subscales and high for compassion satisfaction (Stamm, 2010). There were 204 caseworkers, 24.9%, with some configuration of the ideal combination of scores. The most distressing combination is high scores in burnout and secondary traumatic stress, with a low score in compassion satisfaction. Only 1% of survey respondents have a high level of STS, less than 1% have a high level of burnout, and less than 1% have a low level of compassion satisfaction. Most caseworkers had moderate scores in one or more subscales and 362, or 40%, had combined scores of moderate in all three subscales. The low, moderate and high scores for each subscale can be seen in Table 28.

Table 28: Overall ProQOL Subscale Levels and Percentages (N = 820)

	STS		CS		BO	
22 or less = Low	305	37.2%	7	0.9%	320	39.0%
23-41 = Moderate	505	61.6%	607	74.0%	499	60.9%
42 or more = High	10	1.2%	206	25.1%	1	.1%

A subgroup analysis was run on the association between scores on the ProQOL subscales and caseworker age groups. The only statistically significant relationship was for the Compassion Satisfaction (CS) subscale. Specifically, caseworkers in the 46-55 year age group had significantly higher levels of CS than did workers in the 25-35 year age group ($p = .001$). Caseworkers in the 46-55 year age group also had significantly higher levels of compassion satisfaction than did caseworkers in the 20-24 year age group ($p = .046$), and the 36-45 age group ($p = .045$).

4.7. Secondary Traumatic Stress

To supplement the survey responses and provide an opportunity for qualitative data to reveal more about the complexity of child welfare retention, five focus groups were conducted with caseworkers from the ARCH counties. Focus group participants were selected from survey respondents who expressed an interest and provided an email address on the survey. The five counties chosen for the focus groups, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, El Paso, and Larimer, were those with highest numbers of case-carrying caseworkers willing to participate. Email invitations were sent to the entire list of interested caseworkers. Mass emails were sent because when invited to participate on a specific day and time, it was difficult for caseworkers to commit to attend due to scheduling conflicts. Some caseworkers who responded and indicated a willingness to attend were not able to when the time came. Overall, there were 19 focus group participants with a range of one year to 17 years of child welfare experience. In

addition, several supervisors from the five counties were invited to participate in a short phone interview about caseworker retention.

Open-ended questions on the survey and focus groups/interviews with caseworkers and supervisors generated thoughtful responses on the impact of STS. Respondents mentioned that being yelled at, removing children from the home, and terminating parental rights were particularly traumatic experiences inherent to child welfare casework. Participants also reported that they experienced stress from documentation, caseloads, and organizational issues with administrators. One focus group participant noted, “There is some impact from the work and the stuff that we see, but the stuff that makes me lose my mind is the barriers that get in the way of us being able to do our job or help families.” For example, “Even if you have the best supervisor in the world and a great team, if your agency isn’t pulling for you, you’re not going to succeed.” Caseworkers also described the stress resulting from the difficulty in getting resources and services in place for families.

There is a perception that caseworkers need to have information about secondary traumatic stress, access to self-assessment tools to determine levels of stress, and ongoing support to prevent and ameliorate secondary traumatic stress (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2016). However, very few of the survey participants rated high in secondary traumatic stress. The correlation between STS and intent to stay was significant when considered by itself, but with a low effect size. Secondary traumatic stress was not a significant factor in the ordinal regression models when other variables were included. It may be that the focus on secondary traumatic stress has helped to alleviate it, so that it no longer has such a large impact on retention. Another possibility is that what has been labeled STS is really burnout, as a result of not feeling valued combined with barriers to direct practice and services for families.

4.8. Leader Member Exchange

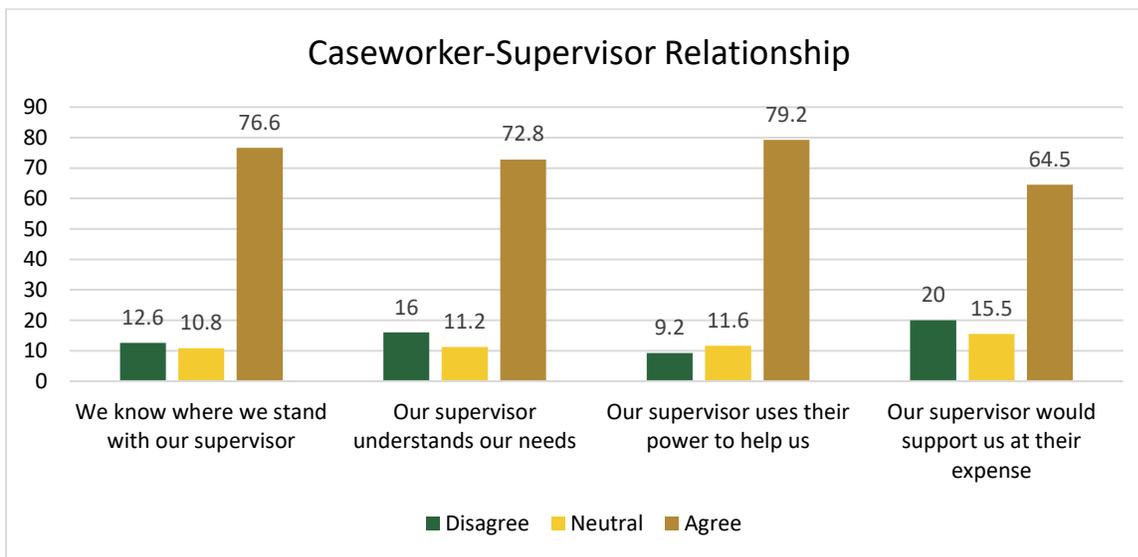
The Leader-Member Exchange (L-MX) scale has eight questions. It is based on social exchange theory and measures the quality of the relationship between a worker and direct supervisor. Response choices are a 7-point Likert scale, which was used to allow comparison with other studies. The L-MX subscale had a normal distribution, with a mean of 5.08 and a standard deviation of 1.35 ($n = 816$).

Overall, caseworkers perceive their relationship with supervisors as positive, although there is some room for improvement. As displayed in Figure 8 on the following page, 77% of respondents report knowing where they stand with their supervisor; 73% of respondents indicate that their supervisor understands the needs of employees in their workgroup; 79% report that, regardless of their supervisor’s formal authority, he/she would use his/her power

to help the employees in their workgroup to solve problems in their work; and 65% indicate that their supervisor would support team members at his/her expense.

There was a significant negative correlation between total years of professional experience in child welfare and the mean of the combined responses to the Leader-Member Exchange scale questions ($r = -.144$; $p = .000$). As years of experience increase, the overall quality of the relationship with direct supervisors decreases. The Leader-Member Exchange scale measures the relationship with one’s direct supervisor.

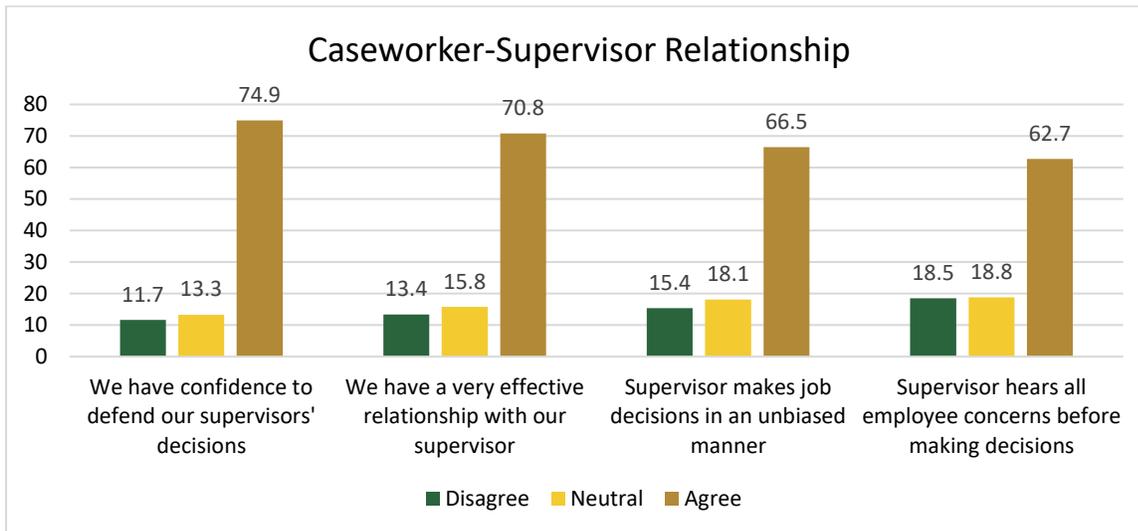
Figure 8: Leader Member Exchange Results (N = 817)



Supervisors often find themselves caught in the middle between caseworkers and managers who are less aware of what caseworkers face on the frontlines. In reference to upper managers, one supervisor explained “I mean they’re just not aware how decisions on that level impact the frontline. So we’re managing up to that a lot.” Focus group responses referred to the importance of relationships with managers and administrators above direct supervisors. In the words of one participant, “Acknowledgment from higher ups that we’re valued, I think would be huge.”

As displayed in Figure 9 on the following page, 75% of respondents have enough confidence in their supervisor to defend his/her decisions if he/she was not present to do so; 71% report having a very effective relationship with their supervisor; 67% indicate that job decisions are made by their supervisor in an unbiased manner; and 63% report that their supervisor makes sure that all employee concerns are heard before job decisions are made.

Figure 9: Leader Member Exchange Results (cont.) (N = 817)



4.9. Realization of Initial Expectations

There was one open-ended question on the survey which asked, “If your experiences have not matched your initial expectations, how are they different?” There were 511 caseworkers who responded to this survey question. This section details their responses to this question. The text in bold contains a theme that emerged in the data. Text in italics are quotes taken from the survey responses verbatim. Although the question specifically asked about experiences not matching expectations, some caseworkers wrote that their expectations did match their experiences and expanded on the reasons that they felt prepared or knew what to expect.

- **Because my education/training prepared me**

I completed an internship in child welfare prior to being employed, however had I not, I don't think I would have had accurate expectations of the job.

- **Knew it would be difficult and it is**

I expected this career to be challenging but not this challenging! A lot of expectations that are ever changing and always getting higher.

My expectations have matched my experience for the most part. As a case carrying caseworker there were definitely times I was overwhelmed by the work - but definitely expected that to be the case.

- **Matches now (different position/over time expectations changed/have been met)**

My job matches my expectations. That does not necessarily mean the expectations are appropriate. The job continues to be severely underpaid. We are worse off than the clients we

serve, as we make just enough to not take advantage of all the resources we doll out on a daily basis. We work 50+ hours a week, and our own families suffer for our dedication.

I had the wrong expectations of the position and quickly learned what the position and job duties were.

After more experience, you learn what to expect, and it is the unexpected.

When caseworkers' experiences were not aligned with their initial expectations they provided the following explanations as to why:

- **Poor training**

The training that is offered really does not prepare you for the work that you actually do each day.

The first time I started in child welfare 20 plus years ago, the training was not great. I had 10 cases on my desk and they basically told me to read them and then do a home visit. Not much training to start in child welfare at the time.

- **Lack of education**

My college degree was in Psychology and not in Social Work, so most of my experience was learned on-the-job.

There was no emphasis in my graduate program about all of the paperwork and yellow tape and boxes that need to be checked for the State. If I'd known the ways in which all of those things actually get in the way of helping families grow and heal, I would have done something different.

- **Nothing can prepare you for this work**

I don't think anyone can really anticipate what this work is until you're doing it. I didn't realize how much of it I would internalize and stress over.

Although I was told of the general expectations of the job, I don't think you really FEEL or COMPREHEND what is being asked of you, what it will feel like, how it will impact you and the families you work with, until you are actually doing the work. I was NOT AT ALL prepared for the amount of extra hours I'd have to work, including weekends and holidays. I was not at all prepared for the growing demands year after year.

I had no idea what to expect and now performing day to day task there is no way someone can have realistic expectations for the job without prior experience.

There is no amount of training that can prepare you for this job, other than doing the job. The constant crises, traumatic incidents, chaos and rewards are not something that can be taught in any class, lecture, or grad school.

- **Lack of empathy toward families**

I thought we would focus on the whole family and have time for family engagement. I feel it's all about deadlines and paperwork and not about the families of the services they need.

It appears that the rules and procedures are continually changing. Over the past year there has been an increased shift in focus and a higher emphasis placed on compliance rather than engagement with families or actually helping families.

- **Work is unpredictable**

Working in child welfare has many different foci. Sometimes I've known what to expect and what happens, other times not so much.

The work ebbs and flows and it hard to know what to expect in a day to day experience. The workload can be very high and stressful.

- **Overwhelming workload**

I am more overloaded with stress and cases than I anticipated, and the hours of expected work are not conducive to someone with a family - working after hours, on-call, etc.

There is a lot of work that goes into this job and sometimes that means working over 40 hours per week. With a full caseload of 10 it is difficult to put the amount of work necessary into each case.

My caseloads continue to grow and there's no cap. It increases burnout and is why so many of my colleagues are choosing to leave.

The caseload is too high and I feel that because of that, we are not able to do our best work.

Workload is impossible to achieve. I cannot be sufficiently dedicated to any one case due to being pulled in so many directions due to high number of child clients on workload.

- **Emotionally taxing**

I never imagined the effect of secondary trauma, or the way clients would treat me. I also did not know how passionate I would become about the job, or the friendships I would form in my office.

I don't think I expected the trauma impact that this job has on me personally when I first started with this type of work.

I was naive about the pain, suffering, and dysfunction that exists in our society. I didn't expect it to be so emotionally impactful at times.

I had no idea how emotionally challenging it would be to work in child welfare. I knew I wanted to work with families but, until I began my position, I had no real comprehension of how tough the job was going to be.

- **Unsafe job**

I was unaware of all the nuances, of placing children and the level of difficulty in doing so. I also was unaware of my own potential safety and well-being and how the agency would handle that.

I didn't expect the aggression/violence/stalking from some of the clients. I didn't realize this could be such an unsafe job.

School doesn't teach you what you need to know about real life situations such as removing a child from an angry parent or how to de-escalate people.

- **High level of responsibility**

I was not aware of how much responsibility caseworkers would have (vs. parents) for getting children enrolled in school, getting them to school, therapy, court, etc.

Courts and laws do not place any responsibility on the parents/caregivers. If there is any mistake, error or misunderstanding, DHS is held accountable for everything.

- **Lack of resources**

There is a lot of focus on our budget and how we spend money. When I began I did not think of the county's budget when referring services, now I do.

The lack of resources available to families within the community is also frustrating.

- **Lack of support**

I sort of understood there was going to be some bureaucracy, I didn't think it was going to be a frustrating to deal with.

The struggle with the lack of support from top management was unexpected.

There is a lack of support, flexibility, and communication with administration.

- **Low/stagnant pay**

I am basically making the same salary as when I started 10 years ago.

Before going into this field I assumed that I would be paid a living wage. I am unable to afford living in Denver and will have to either move or change jobs.

I also think that as a caseworker I should get paid more. I think that I am not getting paid enough for the amount of work I do and the amount of stress that goes into this position.

- **More documentation and less time with families than expected**

I was not sure of the paperwork and the amount of time spent on a computer versus actually in the field with families.

The overload of paperwork. I feel as though for every 1 hour I spend with a family I spend 4 at my desk documenting.

There is far more paperwork than I initially expected, and every change brings more paperwork and less time for direct client work. I expected child protection to be out in the field, working with families face to face, and I spent more time face to face with my computer.

It is clear from these themes and quotations that the issue of caseworkers' intent to stay in the field is complex. While themes do exist in these responses the issue is also based on individual personalities and preferences in large organizational systems.

5. Discussion

The discussion section present the conclusions, limitations, and implications for policy and practice that emerged from the ARCH caseworker survey.

5.1. Conclusions

Overall, the ARCH Caseworker Survey found that caseworkers from the ARCH counties are satisfied with their position and healthy considering their exposure to traumatic events and the demands of the job. Specifically, 81% of caseworkers from the ARCH counties are satisfied with their current position in child welfare. Furthermore, 71% of caseworkers plan to stay in their current position for two or more years. There were no differences between case carrying and non-case carrying caseworkers in satisfaction or intent to stay. However, there is some erosion in the intent to stay over time, as 90% of caseworkers indicated that they intended to stay two or more years when they started in public child welfare.

Caseworkers identified the following factors as being the most influential in beginning and staying in child welfare: having a commitment to child welfare, job benefits, job availability, flexible schedule, and location of the job. The biggest change over time was supervisor support which moved from the tenth most important to the sixth most important factor in staying in the child welfare field. As for expectations, 56% of caseworkers agreed that they know what to expect when starting in child welfare, while 58% agree that their expectations match the day-to-day reality of being a caseworker. From a positive perspective, caseworkers mentioned that they were well prepared by their education and training, and that they knew how difficult the position would be before entering the field. However, other caseworkers reported that nothing can prepare you for this work, and that the unpredictability, overwhelming workload, high level of responsibility, lack of resources/support/compensation, and amount of time required for documentation were also ways that their expectations were not met.

Although stress is a persistent challenge, as 78% of survey respondents reported that they have work pressures that create stress in their life, the survey results depict a relatively healthy workforce in terms of both the psychological and organizational factors measured. For example, caseworkers expressed high levels of psychological safety as 87% agreed that people in their workgroup value others' unique skills and talents, and 80% agreed that members of their workgroup are able to discuss problems and tough issues. Furthermore, only 1% of survey respondents have a high level of secondary traumatic stress (STS), less than 1% have a high level of burnout, and less than 1% have a low level of compassion satisfaction.

However, caseworkers benefit from protective factors, such as education, training, and collaboration that help mitigate their stress. For example, caseworkers report high levels of support in offering training and workshops to address secondary traumatic stress (84%) and self-care (87%), and high levels of encouragement from their supervisor (84%) and team (86%) to use positive self-care strategies. In addition, caseworkers perceive their relationship with supervisors as positive with three-quarters of respondents indicating that supervisors understand their needs and use their authority to help them problem solve. There is some room for improvement, however, as one-third of respondents indicated that supervisors do not make decisions in an unbiased manner and do not ensure that all employee concerns are heard before decisions are made.

5.2. Limitations

Like all survey research, the ARCH Caseworker Survey has several notable limitations, which may limit its generalizability and applicability in interpreting the findings. First, although the response rate was exceptional at 64%, the respondents only represent 11 counties in Colorado, so caution is urged in extrapolating the findings to all caseworkers in the State. Second, the survey is cross-sectional, in that it was administered at one point in time. Although several retrospective questions were asked, the results capture the perceptions of caseworkers at the current time and do not reflect future thoughts and behaviors. Specifically, there is no way to corroborate the intent to stay results with actual retention outcomes for the survey sample. However, a future phase of the ARCH Caseworker Retention study will follow a cohort of caseworkers over time to allow for this type of analysis. Third, the survey benefitted from the inclusion of several validated scales and instruments, but also included questions developed by the ARCH Retention Study workgroup that were not tested for reliability or validity. Thus, some of the results may not accurately represent the constructs of interest.

This report benefits from the inclusion of qualitative data collected from focus groups comprised of caseworkers who completed the survey. However, some of the quantitative data presented would be enhanced by more introspection from caseworkers and a greater sense of the context in which the responses were offered. To this end, county-specific reports were

generated from the caseworker survey, which will allow counties to interpret their own findings and determine how best to respond from a policy and practice perspective. Lastly, the survey did not address all questions related to child welfare retention (e.g., documentation), so the findings may be somewhat incomplete in understanding why caseworkers stay in their position, their county, and in the field. Again, the next phase of the study will allow for additional topics that emerged from the survey findings to be explored in more depth to better inform decision-making for this critical issue facing the field.

5.3. Implications

Addressing turnover in child welfare must be approached through specific, multifaceted, and evidence-based interventions. Retention is complex, therefore it is necessary to assess the uniqueness of agencies and organizations, and work to create a local and agency-specific retention strategy that will be most effective, as one strategy alone is unlikely to improve retention (IASWR, 2005). Effective interventions that contribute to personal, psychological, and organizational factors have been found to positively impact retention.

5.3.1 Personal Interventions

The following are recommendations for interventions related to the personal factors for child welfare caseworkers including age/tenure, urbanicity, education, stipends, and work-life balance.

Age/Tenure. Implementing interventions that are suited for a diverse workforce can be a part of a multi-faceted approach to improving retention. Since organizations are likely to have employees who have various amounts of tenure, either with the agency or in child welfare, learning how to provide support based on their needs, and matching interventions for their length of employment can be a useful tool in personalizing the approach to increase retention.

Urbanicity. Rural areas may find benefits to retention from mentoring, accurate job descriptions, incentives and rewards, professional development opportunities, adequate resources, community partnerships, training to create healthy dual community relationships, incorporating collaboration and cooperation into the workplace, and setting clear expectations, (Kim & Hopkins, 2017).

Education. The Western Regional Recruitment and Retention Project (WRRRP) made two suggestions regarding educational options to help increase retention: (1) implementing a sabbatical program for workers to do independent study after working with an organization for two years; and (2) creating MSW internship partnerships to provide education to potential caseworkers and help decrease the impact of heavy caseloads (Butler Institute for Families, 2006).

Work life balance. Organizations can communicate their investment in employees by providing caseworkers with the ability to balance their work-life demands in their preferred way, and being flexible in the ways they increase access to career and development opportunities (Kruzich, et al., 2014). Suggestions to improve work-life balance include non-traditional work structures, flexible hours, working remotely, and compressed work schedules (Lizano & Mor Barak, 2015).

5.3.2. Psychological Interventions

The following are recommendations for interventions related to the psychological factors for child welfare caseworkers including secondary traumatic stress, satisfaction, and resiliency.

Secondary traumatic stress. Prevention strategies include new caseworker training that teaches awareness and identification of vicarious trauma, while developing coping strategies (Middleton & Potter, 2015; Sprang, Craig, & Clark, 2011). Peer mentoring is another recommended intervention, utilizing support, feedback, and intentional debriefing to decrease the impact of vicarious trauma (Middleton & Potter, 2015).

Satisfaction. Efficient communication, involvement in decision making, and peer influence were areas of improvement and recommended change to increase caseworker satisfaction (Spath, et al., 2013).

Resiliency. The following strategies are thought to enhance resiliency in child welfare caseworkers: recognizing trauma's impact on caseworkers; providing trauma coping training; and focusing on fostering creativity and self-efficacy (Spath, et al., 2013). Resiliency building requires a multi-layer approach throughout the organization to create a sense of belonging and a sense of meaning in the work. Having self-efficacy, knowing the job has value and helps people, and being able to rely on a significant person for support also enhances resiliency.

5.3.3 Organizational Interventions

The following are recommendations for interventions related to the organizational factors for child welfare caseworkers including supervision, administrative support, workload, job role, documentation, salary/benefits, incentives/promotions, training/professional development, culture, commitment, decision inclusions, and fairness/respect.

Supervision. The WRRRP made the following suggestions to improve caseworker retention through better supervision:

1. Improve supervisors skills to counteract burnout among workers;
2. Create cohesion between administration and supervisors;

3. Allocate resources to support and train supervisors;
4. Support caseworkers during transition processes;
5. Make improvements to supervisor training (Butler Institute for Families, 2006).

It is vital for supervisors to balance criticism with a focus on what caseworkers are getting right. Supervisors should avoid punitive measures to force compliance with timelines, and recognize that a more supportive response is to ask a caseworker what is making it difficult to complete a task at a particular time. Supervisors need training in how to achieve this balance, along with empathetic support from managers. During the onboarding process, it is important to match new caseworkers with supervisors much earlier in process and not wait until after training unit assignment to initiate contact.

Administrative support. Communication can be improved by using a chain of command to increase monitoring and assistance, ensuring everyone is made aware of changes, and communicating in ways that make all caseworkers feel respected (Johnco, et al., 2014). Other suggestions include careful supervisor hiring and continual training, utilizing a professional model rather than a regulatory one, and pairing with employees without a social worker background who could assist with administrative duties (Barbee, Antle, Sullivan, Huebner, Fox, & Hall, 2009). Managers need to recognize and support caseworkers through a variety of the following means:

1. Learn what caseworkers have done well and give them specific praise.
2. Keep in touch with the realities of the frontline environment through shadowing caseworkers and meeting with teams to ask what is happening.
3. Have frequent, sincere communication with caseworkers, so that everyone is receiving the same information.
4. Be responsive to caseworker needs and demonstrate their commitment to making changes by listening to caseworkers with empathy and avoid becoming defensive.
5. Connect support and recognition to compassion satisfaction components or self-efficacy from helping children and families.
6. Be more transparent and communicate that they have barriers to overcome as well, so as not to be perceived as uncaring about the challenges of caseworkers.

Workload. Considering case complexity when assigning caseworkers could address the unmanageability of high caseloads and potential negative impact on families being served (Johnco, et al., 2014). Workload management also can be improved by using guidelines to assess client safety and risk, and sharing the decision making responsibility when making service priorities (Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, 2005).

Job role. For child protective services (CPS) investigators specifically, recommendations include: pre-hire screening to assess for fit, stipends for additional education, and information about other career options within CPS that they could pursue if they experience burnout (Center for Public Policy Priorities, 2009). Flexibility in job tasks and scheduling allows caseworkers to focus their work based on their skill strengths, and by increasing control, caseworkers can better manage stress (Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, 2005).

Documentation. Increasing efficiency can be done by decreasing the number of non-social work related tasks that caseworkers have to do, increasing task completion by centralizing responsibilities to the caseworker, improving technology, and working closely with children and families (Johnco, et al., 2014). Streamlining documentation and making a clear connection between completing paperwork and increasing resources to meet client needs could help decrease frustration with this aspect of the work. One strategy is to train and coach caseworkers in writing succinct Trails entries and ROC notes. This would decrease time spent on documentation, and improve the ability to find specific information in the electronic case record.

Salary, benefits. The WRRRP recommendations for salary and benefits include: pay for performance systems, higher pay for higher levels of education, frequent review and adjustment of salaries, soft benefits, flexible benefits, organizational career ladder, and advocating for legislative support to fund more positions (Butler Institute for Families, 2006).

Incentives/Promotions. Incentives can include public rewards and bonuses, especially for in-demand skills (Sudol, 2009). Loan repayment and forgiveness programs are underutilized retention strategies (Gomez, Travis, Ayers-Lopez, & Schwab, 2010). The responsibility for enhancing a system of rewards and creating supports to decrease emotional exhaustion rests with managers and administrators (Shim, 2010). Opportunities for advancement should include an organizational plan for promotions that can be flexible, and incentivize and promote promotion to staff (National Collaboration for Youth, 2005).

Training, professional development. Training can be improved by increasing mock cases, field training days, and gradually increasing cases as training progresses, as well as assigning new workers to different supervisors (Johnco, et al., 2014). Networking opportunities can be done through peer-to-peer mentoring and communication within and across organizations (National Collaboration for Youth, 2005).

Culture. Culture can be enhanced through some of the following suggestions: address caseworker's burnout through a multi-faceted approach, increase and improve communication and trust, create a culture of learning, professionalize the social work career, assess the impact of organization policies on workers, and utilize programs to decrease caseworker stress created

by large workloads (Butler Institute for Families, 2006). Boyas and Wind (2010, 2012) made the following suggestions to enhance employment-based social capital in child welfare agencies: (1) improve communication so that caseworkers can receive information and express concerns; (2) increase perception of support; (3) distribute influence to caseworkers; (4) create and maintain trust and cooperation; and (5) increase the bond between the caseworker and the organization to create inclusion and attachment.

Commitment. According to the Center for Public Policy Priorities (2009), some suggestions to engender organizational commitment include:

1. involving supervisors throughout the hiring process;
2. including supervisors in leadership training such as the Casey Family Program's Project;
3. providing expedited certification for new hires who have advanced qualifications;
4. decreasing stigma by increasing public awareness of positive work and impact of CPS.

Decision inclusion. Surveying is a tool that can be used to include caseworkers in the decision making process, and the data can also be used to gain insight on organizational well-being (Sage, 2010). Genuinely involving caseworkers in policy changes is also important. This will mean eliciting and seriously considering the perspectives of caseworkers on what changes to prioritize; providing regular updates on changes that were made and those that are taking longer to complete; and revisiting the list of concerns to prioritize the next changes to target.

Fairness/Respect. Researchers recommend increased public recognition, better listening and understanding staff concerns by supervisors, evaluation and enhancement of communication, and development, salary, and benefit opportunities that demonstrate an agency's investment in the caseworker (Augsberger et al., 2012). Caseworkers need to hear acknowledgement of the day-to-day impact of the job. They need more recognition of effectiveness from families, other child welfare professionals, and supervisors/managers. There should be a public service campaign to highlight positive outcomes in the media. Partnering with the community should be promoted more.

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