Public Abstract

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Title:THE ROLE OF TEAMWORK IN PUBLIC CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKERS' INTENTIONS TO LEAVE

The high turnover rates among caseworkers have emerged in the past decade as one of the most serious issues within the public child welfare agencies. High turnover rates lead to reductions in case work quality with resulting higher risks to children in care. Turnover also creates additional public costs to replace and retrain lost workers. Research has focused on the reasons behind the caseworkers' stated intentions to leave (a surrogate for turnover) leading to many suggested remedies. Studies have found high burnout rates, low job satisfaction, and difficult organizational climates as the major reasons for turnover with the remedies of lower case loads, better pay, and greater public recognition. Recently, hiring staff with social work degrees has been offered as remedy to turnover but the studies are inconclusive. One area that has not been well explored is teamwork. In fact, no published studies have been found linking "teamwork" and workers' intentions to leave.

This study, using an analysis of secondary data, develops a construct of "teamwork" to study its relationship to turnover. The study specifically explores "teamwork" compared with individual work-related factors - burnout and job satisfaction; one work environment factor – organizational climate and one personal factor –educational background. Logistical regression analysis was conducted on an anonymous random sample of 319 public child welfare caseworker's responses to an organization-wide survey conducted in one U.S. Midwestern state in 2005.

Findings indicate that the workers' positive perception of teamwork decreases their stated intentions to leave whereas the workers' burnout increases their stated intentions to leave. Based on the findings, implications for social work practice, social agency policy and directions for future research are discussed. The limitations of the study, instruments, and analysis of secondary data are included.