Intentions to remain employed in child welfare: The role of human caring, self-efficacy beliefs, and professional organizational culture

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ABSTRACT

This study reflects the national concern about high employee turnover rates in child welfare (CW). Personal and organizational factors contributing to CW employee's intentions to remain employed in CW were studied as an alternative to more traditional studies of employee burnout and turnover. New measures of intent to remain employed in CW, human caring, self-efficacy beliefs, and professional organizational culture were developed and administered to all CW staff in two states (n=941). Reliability estimates for the new measures ranged from .79 to .92. Core findings supported relationships hypothesized among the measures and identified human caring as an important, new variable linked to CW employees' intentions to remain employed in CW. In two discriminant function analyses, the human caring variable was the most heavily weighted variable in linear combinations of the study variables that differentiated extreme intent to remain employed groups (upper and lower quartiles). The measure of self-efficacy beliefs about capabilities to accomplish work tasks was positively and more strongly related to human caring than to professional organizational culture. Explanations of the core findings are provided and implications for theory development, education and practice in CW, and future research are discussed.

1. Introduction

Employing competent and qualified employees is important to any organization, especially in child welfare where critical decisions that impact families and the safety, permanency, and well being of children are made on a daily basis. The quality of services can only be as high as the competence of the professionals that provide them (Ewalt, 1991). While employee competence is essential to the quality of client services, there are many other personal and organizational factors that influence the quality of services as well. For many employed in child welfare, a complex constellation of personal and organizational factors and work experiences contributes to the decision to either remain or leave employment in the difficult child welfare work context. Employee retention studies in child welfare are important because ultimately, high employee turnover results in discontinuity and disruption of services to children and families (Flower, McDonald, & Sumski, 2005).

Public child welfare agencies have struggled with attracting and retaining qualified child welfare workers and this struggle has interfered greatly with the provision of quality services to clients. According to the Child Welfare League of America (2004) “no issue has a greater effect on the capacity of the child welfare system to effectively serve vulnerable children and families than the shortage of a competent and stable workforce” (p. 1). National studies indicate annual turnover rates ranging from 20% to 40% (American Public Human Services Association [APHSA], 2001, 2005; U.S Government Accounting Office [GAO], 2003). According to the APHSA (2005) it requires some seven to thirteen weeks to fill vacant worker and supervisor positions. High employee turnover rates in child welfare also put considerable and unpredictable strain on the child welfare organization. When employees leave child welfare, cases are assigned to already overburdened workers and supervisors, which add more stress to the total system.

There has been continuing discussion in the literature about employee burnout and turnover in child welfare (Costin, Karger, & Stoessel, 1996; Crolley-Simic & Ellett, 2003; Drake & Yadama, 1996, 2002; Ellett & Ellett, 1997; Jayaratne & Chess, 1986; Kern, McGradden, Baumann, & Law, 1993; Lewandoski, 2003; Mor Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001; Pecora, Whittaker, Maluccio, & Barth, 2000; Russell & Hornby, 1987; Samantrai, 1992; Walker & Green, 1992). However, there are only a few studies focused on factors related to retention of child welfare workers (Dickinson, & Perry, 2002; Helfgott, 1991; Jayaratne & Chess, 1984; Landsman, 2001; Reagh, 1994; Rycraft, 1994; Smith, 2005; Vinokur-Kaplan, 1991). Many factors can contribute to child welfare employees’ decisions to remain in or leave their jobs such as personal characteristics, organizational constraints, low salaries and benefits, lack of career mobility and opportunities for advancement, and many other factors. This study focused on a set of personal and organizational factors and their contributions to
employees' intentions to remain employed in the complex and challenging child welfare work setting.

2. Problem, purpose, and rationale

The problem addressed in this research study was multi-faceted and had both personal/individual and organizational elements. There were significant gaps in knowledge related to staff retention in child welfare. (i.e. why many staff continue their employment in a difficult and taxing child welfare setting). While there have been numerous studies of employee turnover and burnout reported in the extant literature (see Crolley-Simic & Ellett, 2003), few studies have been conceptualized to identify factors predictive of child welfare staff intentions to remain employed in child welfare, and to explore relationships between these intents, personal characteristics, and elements of organizational culture. The specific purpose of the study was to assess the extent to which theory-based measures of human caring, self-efficacy beliefs, and elements of professional organizational culture differentiate between child welfare employees with strong and weak intentions to remain employed in child welfare. The working hypothesis framing the study was that each of these personal and organizational variables would be positively related to employees' intentions to remain employed in child welfare. A brief discussion of human caring, self-efficacy beliefs, and professional organizational culture follows.

3. Human caring

Human caring has long been considered an important personal and professional characteristic of the behavior of those employed in the helping professions such as medicine, social work, teaching, counseling, and so on (Noddings, 1984, 1996; Tucker, 1996). While there are a variety of perspectives about how human caring should/can be conceptualized, and available measures of this construct are sparse, human caring has received considerable historical attention in the literatures concerned with altruistic behavior (Batson, 1990; Moffett, 1993). Recent research centered on altruism and altruistic motivation, of which empathy is an important factor, provides empirical support for different kinds of altruism, depending upon the motivation underlying helping behavior (Batson, Fultz, & Schoenrade, 1987). Likewise, human caring has been conceptualized as comprised of two distinct dimensions, i.e. the knowledge and technical skill to care for others, in addition to the affective dimension of caring about others (Moffett, 1993).

Understanding the complexities of human caring as a basis for developing theories of motivation has received considerable attention in experimental settings in social psychology. One core issue in research on human caring has been how the motivational basis for caring can be best understood. For example, Batson et al. (1987) view pro-social motivation as altruistic when the intent is oriented toward another's welfare. From an extensive review of the literature on human caring, Moffett (1993) concluded that human caring is generally viewed as requisite for successful practice in nursing, teaching, counseling, social work and other human services professions. However, empirical research on the construct of caring and these professions is just beginning to emerge.

3.1. Conceptual basis of human caring in this study

The construct of human caring in this study was borrowed from the original work of Moffett (1993) in her studies of human caring characteristics of nurses. Based on a working definition provided by Benner and Wrubel 1989, that caring reflects subjective feelings or attitudes which indicate that someone or something matters, and in an extensive review of the professional literature on human caring, Moffett conceptualized human caring as consisting of both affective components (caring about others), and professional knowledge and technical skills (caring for others). Both of these components are considered to interact to produce the care giving behavior of professionals in human services settings. Thus, caring is a complex psychological variable believed to be important in framing sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs and feelings of others, personal and professional commitment, and ethical/moral behavior reflected in actions taken by child welfare professionals as they interact with the clients they serve. In child welfare and other human services, those with strong human caring characteristics would be expected to persist and perform more successfully when faced with obstacles present in a difficult work context, and to be reinforced by such success than those with weak human caring characteristics. Thus, strong human caring, linked to persistence and success would be expected to strengthen employees' intentions to remain employed in child welfare and other human services contexts. The study reported here only included measurement of the affective components of caring (i.e., caring about others). No attempt was made to assess the professional knowledge and technical abilities to care for clients.

3.2. Can human caring and altruism be objectively measured?

Social psychologists as well as sociologists, economists, political scientists and social biologists have studied human caring and altruism in experimental settings. Batson alone has conducted over 40 studies on altruism and empathy. Thus, some attempts have been made to operationally define and measure altruism and human caring. For example, Wolfe (1986) identified traits and behaviors that he believed to be indicative of human caring such as attentive listening, patience, responsibility, sensitivity, touch, honesty, comforting and respect. Many of these concepts are recognized as vital for effective social work practice.

Moffett (1993) observed how graduates from nurse education programs acquired the basic technical knowledge, skill, and ability to care for patients. She speculated that affective caring or caring about patients distinguished outstanding nurses from other nurses. In her study of 734 registered nurses from 14 randomly selected acute care hospitals, Moffett used extensive statistical analyses to identify four sub-factors defining the affective components of human caring in the nursing context (Professional Commitment, Moral/Ethical Consciousness, Responsivity, and Receptivity). According to Moffett, these four factors are not completely independent of one another since human caring is a global construct, with identifiable, but dynamically interrelated dimensions. It is not likely, for example, that one would exhibit strong responsiveness to the needs and feelings of others and, at the same time, little or no receptivity to others' needs and feelings.

Cognitive and affective features of human caring are thought to influence personal attitudes toward clients and coworkers, and core values and beliefs that are considered essential for caring within the helping professions. Empathy and nurturance for example, are integral to both receptivity and responsiveness to the needs and feelings of others. Thus, a human services professional needs to possess the professional knowledge necessary to care for those served, as well as the attitudes, values, beliefs and feelings to care about (altruistic empathy) those served.

4. Self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), the most powerful determinant of human agency and action (behavior) is one's system of self-efficacy beliefs. In discussing the nature of self-efficacy beliefs, the environment and behavior, Bandura states:

perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to produce given attainments...(and self-efficacy beliefs)...influence the courses of
action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and failure, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize (p.3).

According to Bandura, individuals are less influenced by objective facts than they are their own beliefs, and these beliefs affect their interests, motivation, affective states and behavior. Thus, the strength of individual beliefs about the connectedness between personal behavior and outcomes is the impetus for human motivation, making decisions, and choice.

Within Bandura’s social cognitive theoretical framework, and given the complexity and taxing nature of the child welfare work context, the strength of self-efficacy (and collective efficacy) beliefs of child welfare staff are important personnel and human resources concerns. The self-efficacy construct and self-efficacy theory have important applications to, and implications for social work, particularly for child welfare. The child welfare work context is arguably the most difficult in social work. Thus, and for example, those with strong self-efficacy beliefs in their capabilities to accomplish child welfare outcomes with children and families will demonstrate persistence in their efforts and resilience in overcoming the many obstacles, barriers, and at times, the many frustrations and confusions associated with child welfare work contexts. Alternatively, child welfare staff possessing weak beliefs in their capabilities to positively affect outcomes with children and families, will be less motivated and interested in child welfare work, predictably have less success in accomplishing client outcomes, and thus, would be less likely to remain employed in child welfare. This does not mean that all those who choose to leave child welfare have weak self-efficacy beliefs about practice since one’s belief system plays out within a larger organizational and environmental context, which can place limits and constraints on an individual’s behavior. Administrative assignments in a child welfare organization for example, might interfere with staff carrying out professional practices for which they have strong self-efficacy beliefs.

5. Professional organizational culture in child welfare

The culture of an organization has been conceptualized and defined in a variety of ways. Most typically, organizational culture has been defined as a set of shared, latent assumptions, beliefs, values and norms that influence the espoused values, attitudes, and behaviors of organizational members (Denison, 1996; Rousseau, 1990; Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Schein, 1992; Trice & Beyer, 1993). The culture of an organization and the strength of organizational culture serve to direct the behavior of organizational members and produce observable indicators of culture such as artifacts, forms, symbols, and rituals.

The culture of most organizations is complex, consists of multiple layers and subcultures, and can be understood from a variety of perspectives. The culture in a child welfare organization, for example might be understood in terms of the extent to which the culture reflects elements of professionalism, which is the organizational culture focus of this study. According to Ellett (2000), professional organizational culture refers to respondents’ perceptions of the norms (both formal and informal), values, interests, and beliefs shared by members of an organization that emanate from established professional ethics and standards that guide individual and collective behavior of organizational members. Professional culture frames organizational members’ sense of who we are as professionals and what we do around here (p.25).

Professional organizational culture in child welfare might be strengthened in several ways such as: (a) selecting employees with social work degrees; (b) providing strong mentoring for new employees; (c) implementing models of clinical supervision; (d) developing collegial norms of sharing, support, and new learning among staff; (e) encouraging continuing education; (f) providing experiences that strengthen professional commitment; and (g) many through other means as well.

When combined with visible and tangible rewards for quality performance, personal recognition of excellence, clear career paths and choices, and other organizational supports for employees, factors that strengthen professional organizational culture should enhance the retention of child welfare employees (Ellett & Ellett, 1997; Hopkins, Mudrick, & Rudolph, 1999). It is known for example, that states that have established the BSW or MSW degree for child welfare practice as a minimum requirement for initial employment, experience greater employee retention rates (Dickinson & Perry, 2002; Hopkins et al.; Russell & Hornby, 1987; Smith & Laner, 1990). Likewise, findings in one national and two statewide studies indicate that child welfare staff who hold degrees in social work out perform individuals who hold other degrees (Albers, Reilly, & Rittner, 1993; Booz-Allen & Hamilton, 1987; CWLA, 1989; Dhooper, Royse, & Wolfe, 1990; Lieberman, Hornby, & Russell, 1988). Thus, lack of adequate preparation for professional work in child welfare settings, coupled with increased job demands and insufficient opportunities for building professional organizational culture, may be strong factors contributing to high rates of employee turnover in child welfare (Costin et al.,1996; Ellett & Ellett, 1997; Helfgott, 1991; Pecora et al., 2000).

Support of and mentoring new employees also seems to be of considerable importance in employee retention. In most states, following initial employee selection, there is a period of formal on-the-job training in the first six months of employment including induction and orientation to child welfare. Beyond initial training, however, there is little coordinated emphasis on mentoring and support of these employees. The importance of mentoring and support to both competent practice and employee retention has been recognized in many professions (Collins, 1994).

In adaptive organizational cultures, the role of leader/managers is viewed as an important element of organizational success and is articulated through leader/manager values, e.g., caring about people, and behaviors, e.g., willing to take risks, attending to all constituent concerns (Kotter & Heskett, 1998). Child welfare organizations are dynamic and are constantly adapting to pressures internal and external to the work environment, (e.g. unpredictable crises with clients and ever-changing legal mandates and policies). Thus, a professional organizational culture characterized by supportive and adaptive leaders with strong interpersonal skills would seemingly strengthen child welfare staff members’ intents to remain employed in child welfare.

Agencies that recognize staff who work with quality and effectiveness via performance-based evaluations and fair compensation for achieving clearly defined responsibilities and expectations, experience low staff turnover (Helfgott, 1991). Helfgott further discusses the importance to competent staff of receiving recognition, status, and prestige within the profession of social work and in their communities. Competent supervision, staff participation in decision making, maintaining a collegial work environment, and resources to meet client needs, round out Helfgott’s recommendations. Studies in education as well as Industrial and Organizational Psychology have reported promising findings about culture as instrumental to affecting meaningful organizational change (Cavanagh, 1997; Fullan, 1993; Reichers & Schneider, 1990). Personal, as well as organizational beliefs, norms and values have powerful influences on individual and organizational behavior, which makes professional culture a rich independent variable to explore as a correlate of employee retention in public child welfare agencies.
6. Methodology

6.1 Sample

All professional level public child welfare staff members in the states of Arkansas and Louisiana were surveyed in February of 2000. The total survey population for the study from the two participating states was 2140 professional level child welfare staff (1359 in Louisiana and 781 in Arkansas). Useable surveys were received from 946 individuals (44.2%). Only five surveys were deleted due to excessive missing data.

6.2 Measures

6.2.1 Intent to Remain Employed—Child Welfare (IRE-CW)

The Intent to Remain Employed—Child Welfare (IRE-CW) measure consisted of 6 original items developed for this study and three items from a prior study (Ellett, 1995). There was no existing measure to assess child welfare employees’ intentions to remain employed in child welfare at the time of this study. Steel & Ovalle (1984) and Tett & Meyer (1993) have shown that employees’ self reported turnover intention is the strongest predictor of actual employee turnover, and intent to leave employment has been frequently used as a proxy for turnover in the psychology literature. The IRE-CW measure used a four-point, forced choice Likert response format ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree) applied to a pool of 9 items resulting in a possible score range of 9 to 36. Items numbers 3, 5 and 7 were reverse coded for subsequent data analyses. The conceptual definition and sample items developed to operationalize child welfare employees’ intentions to remain employed in child welfare are included in the Appendix.

6.2.2 Human Caring Inventory—Social Work (HCI-SW)

The Human Caring Inventory—Social Work (HCI-SW) included in the Appendix is an adaptation of the Caring Inventory for Nurses (CIN) originally developed by Moffett (1993). The CIN was designed by Moffett to measure the following affective components of the human caring construct: Professional Commitment, Moral/Ethical Consciousness, Receptivity, and Responsivity (responsiveness to the needs and feelings of others). Items on the CIN were subsequently modified and adapted for use with social workers (Ellett, 1995). The form of the human caring measure used in this study was a further adaptation using statistical analysis results from prior studies and reexamination of item content for fit with the current study relative to the total length of the entire survey packet. Items reflecting the Professional Commitment dimension of human caring were not included in the development of the HCI-SW. In keeping with the CIN developed by Moffett, four items to examine the social desirability of responses (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964) were embedded in the HCI-SW measure. Thus the HCI-SW adapted for this study was designed to measure three affective components of caring as follows (with the number of items comprising each scale): Moral/Ethical Consciousness (5), Receptivity (5), and Responsivity (5). Four social desirability items (item #s 5, 10, 15, and 19) were also included on this measure. The final form of the HCI-SW consisted of 19 items rated using a four-point, forced choice Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The possible score range for the total HCI-SW measure was 15 to 60. Items numbers 7, 9 and 14 were phrased in the negative and were reverse coded for subsequent data analyses. The conceptual definition of Human Caring and examples of 15 items comprising the HCI-SW are shown in the Appendix.

6.2.3 Self-Efficacy Assessment—Social Work (SEA-SW)

This measure operationalized the theoretical construct of self-efficacy reflected in social cognitive theory as described by Bandura (1997). A pool of 20 self-efficacy items was developed. The Self-Efficacy Assessment—Social Work (SEA-SW) requests that respondents make judgments about the strength of their personal beliefs in their capabilities to organize and carry out tasks to successfully accomplish outcomes in child welfare, in view of their particular work context. Seventeen of the twenty items generated for the SEA-SW are child welfare task statements and three items, #’s 2, 5, and 12 are statements of efficacy motivation and persistence to accomplish work tasks. The final SEA-SW consisted of 20 items that were responded to using the following stem: The strength of my personal beliefs in my capability to: (item statement). The response format was a four-point, forced choice Likert scale ranging from: 1 (Weak) to 4 (Very Strong). The possible score range for the total SEA-SW was 20 to 80. The conceptual definitions of self-efficacy and examples of items comprising the SEA-SW are shown in the Appendix.

6.2.4 Professional Organizational Culture Questionnaire—Social Work (POCQ-SW)

The POCQ-SW is a version of the Revised School Culture Elements Questionnaire (Bobbett, Olivier, Ellett, Rugutt, & Cavanagh, 1998) that was specifically adapted for child welfare settings in this study. The School Culture Elements Questionnaire (SCEQ) was originally developed by Cavanagh (1997) for use in schools in Western Australia. Of the 54 items comprising three subscales of the SCEQ, 24 were selected and slightly reworded to fit the child welfare context, and 10 new items were developed to operationalize three dimensions of professional organizational culture in child welfare settings. The final version of this measure included the following three dimensions and numbers of items: (a) Vision/Leadership (15), Collegial Teaching and Learning (10), and (c) Professional Commitment (9). Each item was responded to using a four-point, forced choice Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The conceptual definitions of the sub-factors of Professional Organizational Culture and examples of items comprising the POCQ-SW are shown in the Appendix.

6.3 Data collection procedures

Data for the study were collected by administering a survey packet that included: (a) a cover letter describing state agency approval of and purpose of the study, request for participation, and instructions; (b) the study measures included on electronic scan forms; (c) a demographic information form; and (d) an pre-addressed return postage envelopes. Participants were informed about how/why they were selected for the study and advised that all information would be collected in a manner that would maintain participant anonymity and the confidentiality of responses. Time lines for completing the instrument packet (two weeks) were detailed, and procedures for mailing the completed response forms to the researcher were described.

To increase response rates, two follow-up reminders were e-mailed to all professional level child welfare staff granting, two, one-week extensions. Approximately one month from the time the survey response forms were disseminated, they were electronically scanned to a computer-based data file for subsequent analyses.

6.4 Data analysis procedures

A variety of data analyses were completed in the study. These included: (a) descriptive statistics by each state and for the total sample (demographic items); (b) descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for items of each measure by each state; (c) Principal Components Analyses (PCA) of each measure to empirically identify sub constructs (d) descriptive statistics for each measurement dimension; (e) reliability analyses of the data for each identified measurement dimension (Cronbach Alphas); (f) bivariate (Pearson product moment) correlations among the measures; and (g) two, two-group discriminant function analyses (DFA). A comprehensive description of the data
The complete survey packet was administered to 2140 child welfare staff in Louisiana and Arkansas during the spring of 2000. Completed surveys were received from 946 participants for a 44.2% return rate representing child welfare staff at all levels within their agencies (41.36% for Louisiana and 45.7% for Arkansas). While the response rate was acceptable, the length (94 items) and voluntary nature of the survey may have deterred some staff from participating. The final data file with useable responses available for analysis was 941 cases. Descriptive statistics (sample sizes, frequencies, means and standard deviations) were computed on all categories of variables for the demographic information form and for each survey measure item. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe all of these results in detail. However those considered of particular interest are noted here.

### 7.1. Descriptive statistics for the sample

Of the total respondents, 83% were female and 16.7% were male, and 58.2% were over age 40. By ethnicity, percentages of responses were: 65.3% white 31.9% African American, and 2.8% other. Percentages of responses by age were 16.7% 30 years or younger, 25.0% between 31 and 40, and 58.2% older than 40 years of age. Education levels were 3% with less than a college degree, the vast majority, 68.8%, with a baccalaureate degree, and 27.7% with a master’s degree. A considerably larger percentage of staff had master’s degrees in Louisiana (40.0%) than in Arkansas (8.7%). The Bachelor of Social Work represented the most often reported undergraduate degree e (29.8%), with sociology second (15.4%), then psychology (13.5%). The remaining 41.3% had other undergraduate degrees, and 67.9% of those who reported a master’s degree held MSWs.

Length of employment for the total sample was as follows: 1–3 years (27.0%), 4–9 years (24.6%), 10–19 years (22.6%), and 20+ years (22.3%). Perhaps the most noticeable difference when comparing findings for the two states was that 45.8% of Arkansas respondents had 3 years or less child welfare experience compared to 18.9% of Louisiana respondents. Conversely, 34% of Louisiana respondents had 20 or more years experience in child welfare contrasted to 6.6% of those in Arkansas.

### 7.2. Selected descriptive statistics for measurement items

For the total sample, and the Intent to Remain Employed measure, the highest item mean was 3.10 for item # 5 (not actively seeking other employment), and the lowest mean was 2.30 for item # 2 (remain even if offered position outside child welfare with higher salary). For the Human Caring measure, the highest mean was 3.68 for item # 11 (treating clients with dignity, and the lowest mean, excluding the social desirability items, was for # 9 (become involved in clients’ problems). The highest mean score for the Self-Efficacy measure was for item # 2 (3.31) (regularly expend the energy and effort to accomplish work tasks) and the lowest item mean score for this measure was 2.65 for item # 16 (influence my career opportunities in the child welfare organization in which I work). For the Professional Organizational Culture measure, item # 30 had the highest mean score (3.25) (believe that work in child welfare is important to the children, families and communities served) and the lowest mean score was item # 16 (2.19) (cooperatively participate with administrators in developing new agency programs and policies).

### 7.3. Principal components analyses

Since each of the study measures was either originally designed for the study or adapted from measures used in non-social work contexts, a series of exploratory Principal Components Analyses (PCA) to empirically identify sub constructs for each measure was completed for the total sample of respondents (n=941). By way of summary, the following sub constructs for the study measures, the number of items comprising each, the range in component/item loadings (correlations), and the variance explained by each sub construct were as follows: Intent to Remain Employed in child welfare (9), .54 to .76 (48.46%); Human Caring (13) .37 to .68 (25.97%); Self-Efficacy for work tasks (11) .50 to .70 (24.24%); Efficacy Motivation (8), .48 to .69 (18.83%); Professional Organizational Culture (Administrative Support-ADMS) (11) .52 to .79 (20.32%); (Professional Sharing and Support-PS) (7) .56 to .75 (17.42%); (Vision/Professionalism/Commitment-VPC) (8) .50 to .65 (14.76%).

### 7.4. Descriptive statistics for measurement dimensions

Table 1 presents a descriptive statistical summary for each state and the total sample for each measurement dimension (sub construct) identified through the various PCA analyses. Included in the table are means, standard deviations, and means expressed as a percentage of the maximum possible score for each measurement dimension. This latter index was computed to facilitate more direct comparisons among the measurement dimensions because the number of items included in these dimensions varies from one to the next. It should be noted that the 4-point rating scales on the measures were not zero-based, thus the percentages are somewhat over estimated. The percentages can however, be relatively compared within and across the four measures. As shown in the table, for the total sample, Mean % Max scores ranged from 80.1% (Human Caring-HCI) to 62.5% (Administrative Support-ADMS). In comparing results for this index for the two states, Arkansas percentages exceeded those for Louisiana on five of the seven measurement dimensions. The percentages for Louisiana were a bit higher than Arkansas percentages on IRE (intentions to remain employed in child welfare) and EMOT (efficacy motivation). In examining differences in these percentages, the largest difference favoring Louisiana was 3.4% Intent to Remain Employed (IRE) and the largest difference favoring Arkansas was 3.2% (Vision/Professionalism/Commitment-VPC) of the professional organizational culture measure.

### 7.5. Reliability analyses

A Cronbach Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficient was computed for each of the dimensions of each measure identified through the PCA procedures using the entire sample of respondents (n=941). Alpha reliability coefficients for the data for the Intent to Remain Employed and Human Caring measures were .86 and .79, respectively. Alpha coefficients for the Self-Efficacy for work tasks and Efficacy Motivation measures were .87 and .81, respectively. Alpha coefficients for the Professional Organizational Culture dimensions
7.6. Bivariate correlations

Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were computed among the various measurement dimensions and these results are presented in Table 2. Included in the table are correlations of each of the study measures with the index of Social Desirability (SD). For the table total, only 5 of 28 correlations (asterisked) failed to reach statistical significance \( p < .05 \). As shown in the last column of the table, the SD index correlations with the study measures ranged from .22 to .00. These findings show little or no influence of social desirability on responses to the survey measures. Interestingly, the SD index was moderately, but negatively related to the measure of human caring (HCI/SD, \( r = -.22 \)) and to the self-efficacy measures (ETSK/SD, \( r = -.21 \); EMOT/SD, \( r = -.22 \)). Thus, child welfare staff with the strongest reported human caring characteristics and self-efficacy beliefs responded with the lowest levels of social desirability \( (\text{the tendency to respond in a socially desirable rather than truthful manner}) \).

The correlations in Table 2 show an interesting pattern of relationships among the study variables. For example, the Human Caring measure (HCI) is positively correlated with the two self-efficacy variables (HCI/ETSK, \( r = .39 \), \( p < .001 \); HCI/EMOT, \( r = .38 \), \( p < .001 \)). The three professional organizational culture variables are all strongly and positively correlated \( (p < .001) \) with each other. Of particular interest are relationships between the IRE measure and the other variables. All of these correlations were positive in direction and statistically significant \( (p < .001) \). These findings show that the quality of administrative support, the strength of self-efficacy beliefs, and ongoing professional sharing and support, at the first level of analysis (bivariate correlations), go hand in hand with child welfare employees’ intentions to remain employed in child welfare.

As might be expected, the strongest correlations in the table are those among the three dimensions of the measure of professional organizational culture (ADMS/PS, \( r = .64 \); ADMS/VPC, \( r = .68 \); PSS/VPC, \( r = .70 \)) and the two dimensions of the self-efficacy measure (ETSK/EMOT, \( r = .69 \)).

7.7. Discriminant function analyses (DFA)

Two separate discriminant function analyses (DFAs) were computed with sub samples that represented the highest and lowest quartiles of scores on the intent to remain employed (IRE) measure for the total sample and for a sample of employees with three years or less employment in child welfare. The second DFA was of particular interest given the rather high national turnover rates for relatively new child welfare staff. These two DFAs used the human caring, self-efficacy and professional organizational culture measurement dimensions as an independent variable set, and the IRE as the dependent variable. It was of interest to examine the extent to which a best linear combination of the study measures could differentiate between extreme groups classified by the highest and lowest scores on the intent to remain employed measure.

The first DFA was completed with the total sample of 941 respondents by partitioning the sample into contrasting groups representing the upper quartile group (UG; \( n = 260 \)) and lower quartile group (LG; \( n = 237 \)) on the IRE measure. The mean IRE scores for the Upper and Lower Quartile groups were 30.61 and 17.61, respectively. Of interest was the extent to which the personal (human caring and self-efficacy) and organizational (professional culture) variables were weighted in differentiating these extreme groups. This analysis identified a single discriminant function \( (\text{best linear combination of the independent variables}) \) that differentiated between the upper and lower quartile IRE groups (Wilks’ Lambda = 0.75, \( F = 26.84 \), df = 6490, \( p < .0001 \)). Table 3 shows the discriminant function weights (DFW) for each of the six independent variables in the DFA for the lower and upper IRE quartile groups. The DFW values \( (\text{of each variable show the relative contribution of the variable to a best linear combination of the set of variables that statistically differentiates the upper and lower quartile groups}) \). These values typically vary somewhat between contrasting groups. As can be seen in the table, by far, the most heavily weighted variable in the discriminant function differentiating the two groups was the measure of human caring (HCI) \( (\text{Lower Q DFW} = 2.42; \text{Upper Q DFW} = 2.45) \). The second most important variable differentiating the two groups was the measure of efficacy motivation/persistence (EMOT) \( (\text{Lower Q DFW} = 0.81; \text{Upper Q DFW} = 1.07) \), followed by the organizational culture dimension of professional sharing and support (PSS) \( (\text{Lower Q DFW} = 0.66; \text{Upper Q DFW} = 0.73) \). The posterior correct group classification percentages are also noted at the bottom of Table 3 \( (\text{Lower Q Group} = 72.2\%; \text{Upper Q Group} = 71.9\%) \). These results show that approximately 72% of the respondents to the measures would predictably be correctly classified into upper and lower quartile IRE groups based upon scores on the single discriminant function \( (\text{best linear combination of the variables}) \) derived.

A second DFA was completed using all respondents with three or fewer years of employment in child welfare \( (\text{UG}; n = 46) \) and \( (\text{LG}; n = 51) \). The mean scores for the Upper and Lower Quartile groups were 30.24 and 13.67, respectively. This analysis derived a single, best linear combination of the variables that statistically differentiated the two extreme IRE groups (Wilks’ Lambda = 0.67, \( F = 7.28 \), df = 6.90, \( p < .0001 \)). Again, the most heavily weighted variable in the discriminant function differentiating the Upper and Lower quartile IRE groups was the measure of human caring (HCI) \( (\text{Lower Q DW} = 1.66; \text{Upper Q DW} = 1.68) \). The second most heavily weighted variable was the measure of efficacy motivation/persistence (EMOT) \( (\text{Lower Q DW} = 0.91; \text{Upper Q DW} = 1.25) \), followed by the measure of professional sharing and support (PSS) \( (\text{Lower Q DW} = 0.48; \text{Upper Q DW} = 0.56) \). This single linear combination of the independent measures yielded posterior correct group classification percentages of approximately 73%.

In comparing the results of the two DFAs in Tables 3 and 4, it is interesting to note that the human caring (HCI) variable was more

Table 2
Summary of Pearson product moment intercorrelations among all study independent variables for the total sample \( (n = 941) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>IRE</th>
<th>HCl</th>
<th>ADMS</th>
<th>PSS</th>
<th>VPC</th>
<th>ETSK</th>
<th>EMOT</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRE</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCl</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMS</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPC</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETSK</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMOT</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>.***</td>
<td>.***</td>
<td>.***</td>
<td>.***</td>
<td>.***</td>
<td>.***</td>
<td>.***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* \( p < .05 \).

Table 3
Results of linear discriminant function analysis for lower \( (n = 237) \) and upper \( (n = 260) \) quartile Intent to Remain Employed (IRE) groups for all professional child welfare staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>GP 1 (Lower Q, ( n = 237 ))</th>
<th>GP 2 (Upper Q, ( n = 260 ))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HCl</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETSK</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMOT</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADMS</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPC</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentage of cases correctly classified for GP1 = 72.2%; GP2 = 71.9%.
heavily weighted for the total sample (Table 3) than for the group of relatively new employees (Table 4). However, the self-efficacy (EMOT) variable was more heavily weighted for the relatively new employees than for the total sample (Table 4). The Professional Sharing and Support (PSS) variable was more heavily weighted for the total sample (Table 3) than the employees with three years or less experience in child welfare (Table 4). These variables were also a bit more heavily weighted for the Upper Q groups than for the Lower Q groups in each DFA. For both DFAs, the self-efficacy about work tasks (ETSK) and administrative support (ADMS) variables were the least heavily weighted.

8. Discussion and implications

This study was grounded in concerns about the national problem of high employee turnover rates in child welfare, particularly for new employees, and the negative impact employee turnover has on child welfare organizations’ abilities to deliver quality services to children and families. The study represents an alternative line of inquiry to more traditional studies reported in the literature that have examined factors related to employee turnover and burnout (see for example, Crolly-Simic & Ellett, 2003). The focus of the current study was on what might be learned from individuals who survive and intend to remain employed in child welfare. Studying personal characteristics of those who choose to remain employed in child welfare and characteristics of the organizations in which they work, appears to be a viable and informative alternative to more traditional studies of employee turnover and burnout literature in child welfare.

The focus of this study was the role that selected personal characteristics (human caring and self-efficacy beliefs) and organizational characteristics (professional organizational culture) can play in employees’ intentions to remain employed in child welfare. Particularly important, were the implications of the study findings for new employees (those with three years or less employment), where high turnover rates are a significant problem. A human caring variable grounded in the prior conceptual and empirical work of Batson (1990), Batson et al. (1987), and Moffett (1993), a self-efficacy variable derived from the theoretical conceptions of Bandura (1997), and elements of professional organizational culture (Ellett, 2000) were examined in relationship to a new measure of employee’s intentions to remain employed in child welfare. Of additional interest in the study was developing new measures for these variables for use in future child welfare studies. The study was a two-state survey of all child welfare staff in Louisiana and Arkansas.

The findings provided reasonable support for the initial validation of the study measures. Items for the measures were developed using job analysis and content validation procedures with child welfare professionals as appropriate, and a series of Principal Components Analyses to empirically verify measurement dimensions (sub-constructs). The bivariate correlations among the various measures provide some support for the criterion-related validity of the measures as well. The initial reliability estimates for these measures for the sample studied were rather strong, particularly for newly constructed measures.

At the simplest level of analysis to examine relationships between the study variables, the results showed that the human caring, self-efficacy, and professional organizational culture variables were all positively related to employees’ intentions to remain employed in child welfare. These findings were consistent with the working hypothesis framing the study that personal and organizational characteristics of child welfare staff and work environments are positively related to intentions to remain employed in child welfare. A somewhat new and important variable in the study was a measure of human caring. While human caring has not been systematically or thoroughly researched in social work, the practice and profession of social work have always identified with the helping professions and the importance of caring about clients (Tucker, 1996). Thus, individuals who score high on a measure of human caring would predictably have high frustration tolerance, be able to depersonalize job stresses, and stay focused on work outcomes which they find personally rewarding and satisfying, all of which serve to reinforce caring about their clients and their work in child welfare (Cicero-Reese & Black, 1997; Reaghi, 1994; Rycraft, 1994). This logic was corroborated in part in this study by the moderately strong, positive relationships between the measure of human caring and the measures of self-efficacy beliefs. These results suggest that human caring may be an important part of the personal motivation needed to successfully complete difficult work tasks in child welfare. According to Bandura (1997), success is the most important means of building and strengthening self-efficacy beliefs. These findings are consistent with current theoretical conceptions and empirical research on self-efficacy beliefs by Bandura and others within social cognitive theory.

The culture of child welfare organizations is an important characteristic defining the context in which child welfare staff work. Cultures have multiple dimensions, and important among these is the extent to which the organizational culture is grounded in norms reflecting professionalism among employees at all levels of the organization. This study clearly documented statistically significant, positive relationships between three dimensions of professional organizational culture (Administrative Support, Professional Sharing and Support, and Vision/Professionalism/Commitment) and employees’ intentions to remain employed in child welfare. Thus, child welfare organizations that develop and maintain a work environment characterized by norms, beliefs, values, and behaviors reflecting professionalism among employees would predictably enhance employee retention and subsequently reduce employee turnover.

While the bivariate correlations among the study variables supported the working hypothesis framing the study, of additional interest were the results of the two discriminant function analyses (DFAs) that examined the extent to which best linear combinations of the human caring, self-efficacy beliefs and professional organizational culture measures could differentiate between child welfare staff with the weakest and the strongest intentions to remain employed in child welfare. The first DFA partitioned the entire sample (N=941) into upper and lower quartiles using the intent to remain employed (IRE) measure. The second DFA partitioned a sub-sample of employees with three or fewer years of employment in child welfare into upper and lower quartiles using the IRE measure. The patterning of results of the DFAs clearly documented the importance of human caring in differentiating these extreme groups when the human caring measure was considered in concert with the measures of self-efficacy and professional organizational culture. Self-efficacy motivation and persistence to accomplish child welfare work tasks and to a lesser extent, though still important, the Professional Sharing and Support dimension of the professional organizational culture measure also contributed to differentiating the two extreme IRE groups. These findings suggest that personal characteristics of child welfare employees (in this case human caring and self-efficacy motivation and
perspective) play a more important role in child welfare employees' intentions to remain employed in child welfare than elements of organizational culture.

The human caring variable was more heavily weighted in the discriminant function for the total sample than for the sub-sample of employees with three or fewer years experience in child welfare. This finding makes intuitive sense because the greater the length of employment, the greater the opportunity for work experiences to either strengthen or weaken elements of human caring. This same logic suggests that elements of organizational culture (in this case professional sharing and support among colleagues and supervisors) would be more important in differentiating intentions to remain employed in child welfare for more experienced than less experienced staff.

From another perspective, and expressing some caution, the results of the DFAs support the criterion-related validity of the total measurement system and its ability to differentiate intentions to remain employed in child welfare using a known groups validation design. Discriminant weights for some variables (e.g., ADMs–Administrative Support) were rather small and the posterior correct group classification percentages are somewhat lower than desired. The sections that follow briefly described implications of the findings for theory, education and practice, and future research in child welfare.

8.1. Implications for theory

Past conceptions of employee turnover and burnout have at their theoretical foundation constructs related to psychological tension and stress emanating from personal difficulties within the organization in what appear to be rather hopeless interactions with a difficult clientèle. An alternative theoretical model, like the one framing the current study (Ellett, 2000), seeks to understand retention of employees in child welfare as a result of the strength of personal characteristics (in this study a deep-seated concern for clients, a strong sensitivity to the needs and feelings of others, and strong beliefs about one's capabilities to accomplish work tasks) developed within a supportive, professional culture.

There are several implications of the findings for theory development in child welfare, organizational theory, and the larger domain of social cognitive theory. For example, the finding that human caring and self-efficacy beliefs among child welfare staff are positively related has implications for the development of theories of human caring and self-efficacy within the larger domain of social cognitive psychology. From the self-efficacy theory perspective, human caring appears to enhance the strength of self-efficacy beliefs as well as efficacy motivation and persistence. Alternatively, as self-efficacy beliefs are strengthened through work task success, heightened physiological and affective states associated with task success, observing positive models successfully accomplish tasks (e.g., experienced colleagues), and verbal persuasion from supervisors, human caring would predictably be strengthened. Though the relationship between human caring and self-efficacy has not been previously noted in the literature, the explanation of the relationship provided here is consistent with Bandura’s (1997) discussion of the sources of self-efficacy beliefs and the theoretical conception of human agency linking self-efficacy beliefs, behavior, and the external environment (reciprocal triadic causation). The finding that human caring and efficacy motivation/persistence are positively correlated and were the most heavily weighted variables differentiating those with strong and weak intentions to remain employed in child welfare provides additional support for including these two personal characteristics variables in future theory development.

The results of this study also suggest that any comprehensive theory of strengthening organizational holding power (for employees), and subsequently employee retention in child welfare, needs to accommodate personal characteristics of employees such as human caring and self-efficacy beliefs, and perhaps other personal characteristics as well. Ellett (2000) has developed a larger conceptual framework to study retention in child welfare that accommodates a large number of personal and professional organizational culture variables. As future empirical research evolves on this framework, the role that personal and organizational variables play in retention of child welfare employees should become more clear, and theoretical models to understand retention in child welfare organizations will become available as an alternative to existing models of employee turnover and burnout.

8.2. Implications for education and practice

The findings reported in this study have a variety of implications for education and practice in child welfare. The linkages established between self-efficacy beliefs, human caring, elements of professional organizational culture, and intentions to remain employed in child welfare have implications for the pre-service preparation, selection, mentoring, supervision, and career development of child welfare professionals. Providing pre-service education and on-the-job experiences designed to develop and strengthen human caring and self-efficacy beliefs may enhance child welfare employee retention. At the pre-service level, for example, providing educational experiences in BSW and MSW curricula that challenge students to reflect upon the needs and feelings of others, that require students to explore professional dilemmas related to moral and ethical behavior, and so on, might well develop and strengthen their human caring attitudes and beliefs. Similarly, developing employee selection procedures that give some priority to measuring elements of human caring, and providing on-the-job mentoring of new employees with priority given to experiences that strengthen human caring, may well serve to increase retention in child welfare. It may be that child welfare workers with strong human caring characteristics communicate to clients that they are cared about, which in turn leads to better worker/client relationships and perhaps strengthened outcomes in child welfare practice.

The findings of this study suggest, as well, that strengthening child welfare employees self-efficacy beliefs about their capabilities to accomplish difficult work tasks and their motivation and persistence through concerted efforts to provide: (a) early mentoring; (b) close clinical supervision; (c) continuous professional development; and (d) assigning reasonable caseloads within a supportive, professional culture, may also enhance employee retention. The finding that professional organizational culture was positively related to self-efficacy beliefs and motivation/persistence suggests that fostering high quality interpersonal relationships in child welfare organizations can strengthen self-efficacy beliefs of child welfare staff about their capabilities to carry out difficult work tasks. Thus, the combination of developing personal characteristics important for child welfare practice (in this case human caring and self-efficacy beliefs) and strengthening a supportive professional organizational culture would predictably improve employee retention rates in child welfare. These observations are consistent with the theoretical conceptions of Bandura (1997) and a large number of self-efficacy studies in multiple contexts. The findings reported here and their implications are also consistent with those emanating from another large-scale study of the child welfare work force (Ellett & Ellett, 1997).

8.3. Implications for future research

A variety of future research studies can extend the line of inquiry initiated in this study. At the foundation of future quantitative studies is quality measurement. An important element of this study was the development of a new set of measures of intent to remain employed, human caring, self-efficacy beliefs, and professional organizational
culture that can be used in future research in child welfare. Initial validation of each of these measures was explored through exploratory Principal Components Analyses and to some extent, criterion-related validation procedures. Initial measurement reliability estimates were also computed for this large, two-state sample, and the resulting coefficients are considered rather strong for a set of newly developed measures.

Developing quality measures and understanding characteristics of underlying measurement constructs is a complicated and continuous process (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955). One of the apparent shortcomings of past research in child welfare retention and turnover studies has been inadequate measurement, from both a conceptual and operational perspective. This study was designed, in part, to address these shortcomings. Future studies using confirmatory factor analyses might be completed with these new measures to strengthen confidence in their operational and conceptual characteristics. Reliability analyses using samples of child welfare staff in different work contexts might also support the confidence that can be placed in data generated by these measures. The minimal influence of social desirability on responses to the measures used in this study is quite encouraging. However, continuing to explore the social desirability of responses to these new measures in future studies is recommended.

Unique to this study was the response format for the self-efficacy for work tasks measure. The focus of this format was on an individual’s ratings of the strength of my personal beliefs in my capability to accomplish specific child welfare work tasks (see Appendix). Traditional self-efficacy measures focus on ratings of concepts such as degree of confidence in one’s ability, degree of perceived competence, extent to which one has the ability to accomplish a given task, and so on. The decision to focus on judgments about the strength of one’s beliefs in their capabilities to accomplish a given task more directly reflects core elements of Bandura’s (1997) definition of self-efficacy. The reliability of the self-efficacy for work task measure for this sample (Alpha = 87) shows considerable statistical support for using this response format for self-efficacy measures in child welfare.

The extant turnover and burnout literature has typically focused on work-related stress variables as important in the decision to leave employment in child welfare. The results of the current study clearly showed that elements of professional organizational culture and employees’ personal characteristics (particularly human caring) are important factors contributing to employees’ intentions to remain employed in child welfare. Thus, factors contributing to, and the motivational basis for, the decision to remain or leave employment in child welfare, may be quite different. It may well be, for example, that many child welfare staff leave employment in child welfare because of low salaries, lack of a clear career path and other organizational reasons, even though they possess strong self-efficacy beliefs about their capabilities to be successful in carrying out work tasks. As well, there may be many child welfare employees who choose to remain employed in child welfare, even though their personal commitments to the work are weak and their levels of human caring and self-efficacy beliefs are weak as well. This situation might exist, for example, in small rural communities where professional employment opportunities are scarce, and individuals choose to remain employed as a matter of convenience and job security. Future research can add to this general line of inquiry by investigating these and other issues not investigated in this study.

This study used only quantitative (survey) methods. Quantitative studies are important and useful. However, they are somewhat limited in providing in-depth explanatory information that can typically be gleaned from the use of qualitative methods such as focus group interviews. Future studies might well profit from the use of mixed methodologies (quantitative and qualitative) to study the problem of employee turnover and to broaden our understanding of factors that contribute to the retention of employees in child welfare. Close inspection of the results reported in this study make it clear, for example, that follow-up, qualitative research methods could provide more in-depth understanding of some of the quantitative results attained. Though beyond the scope of this study, a variety of sampling strategies (e.g., purposeful selection of statistical outlier cases) could have been used to select interesting cases for follow-up qualitative research. These cases could be individual child welfare staff at different levels, or perhaps entire organizational units with differing quantitative results profiles. Future mixed methods studies can undoubtedly add depth to our understanding of employee retention and turnover in child welfare organizations as this important line of inquiry moves forward.

Furthering our understanding of factors related to employee retention in child welfare is an important research concern. However, studying interventions that enhance retention and prevent turnover is also an important research concern. Future longitudinal studies of organizational interventions deliberately designed to enhance employee retention in child welfare are needed. Personal and organizational factors related to employee retention have been studied here. While informative, the study results do not identify effective intervention strategies to enhance retention. Such evidence-based practice studies of innovations designed to strengthen the holding power of child welfare organizations and to address the national problem of high employee turnover rates in child welfare are needed.

In his work on culture, Fullan (1993) says, “Teachers are privileged and burdened with the responsibility of becoming better inner and outer learners who will connect to wider and wider circles of society.” Like teachers, child welfare staff are both privileged and burdened to make a positive difference in the lives of children and families through accurate assessment, making considered decisions, and intervention for the safety and permanency of children. Thus, employing and retaining competent staff are integral to carrying out the child welfare organization’s mission. This study, in part, addressed these important professional and research concerns.

Appendix A. Conceptual definitions and sample items for the study measures

A.1. Intent to Remain Employed in Child Welfare (IRE-CW)

The conceptual definition of employee intent to remain employed in child welfare is derived from a larger understanding of the personal, psychological and work context factors encompassing cognitive, affective and behavioral elements that contribute to the holding power of the child welfare work context for the employee and to the organizational culture. From this perspective, individuals who desire to remain employed in child welfare make a personal determination to persist in child welfare because the career benefits centered on professional growth and self actualization, professional purpose and mission, professional needs gratification, and the importance of their work, are valued more than other job factors such as financial incentives, characteristics of the general work environment and associated work tensions and frustrations.

1. I intend to remain in child welfare as my long-term professional career.
2. I will remain in child welfare even though I might be offered a position outside of child welfare with a higher salary.
3. I am committed to working in child welfare even though it can be quite stressful at times.

A.2. Human Caring Inventory—Social Work (HCI-SW)

The conceptual definition of the affective component of Human Caring was conceptually defined in this study as: the tendency to be supportive, nurturing, responsive and sensitive to the needs and
feelings of others, to easily form relationships, to treat others with human dignity and respect and to take responsibility for one's actions for the welfare of others.

1. I find it easy to read clients’ and colleagues’ feelings.
2. I'm usually the first to offer help when someone needs something.
3. I advocate for clients who can't or don't speak for themselves.
4. I usually try to avoid becoming involved in clients' problems.

A.3. Self-Efficacy Assessment—Social Work (SEA-SW)

Self-efficacy tasks is derived from the work of Bandura (1997) who conceptually defines self-efficacy as “beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments.” (p.3), (specifically work tasks with clients).

Self-efficacy motivation refers to: the extent which individuals put forth energy and effort in their work and persist in the face of obstacles/barriers to accomplish given attainments and their perceptions of effectiveness in accomplishing key organizational outcomes.

The strength of my personal beliefs in my capability to:

1. use assessment skills in decision making about child safety is...
2. regularly expend the energy and effort to accomplish work tasks is...
3. remain motivated and persist in overcoming difficult or uncertain obstacles to accomplish outcomes for clients is...
4. work effectively with family members in child neglect cases is...

A.4. Professional Organizational Culture (POC)

Professional organizational culture is defined as: perceptions of the norms (both formal and informal), values, interests, and beliefs shared among members of an organization that emanate from established professional ethics and standards that guide individual and collective behavior of organizational members.

Administrative support refers to: the extent to which administrators interact with subordinates as professionals and encourage child welfare staff to share responsibilities for organizational vision and leadership and to continue personal, professional development.

Professional sharing and support refers to: the quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships among staff that enhance professional interactions, learning and development.

Vision/professionalism/commitment refers to: the extent to which shared values among staff reflect child welfare practices that demonstrate commitment to the continuous improvement of services to clients.

In this office, child welfare staff...

1. are proud to work in child welfare.
2. find that supervisors/administrators are willing to help them when problems arise.
3. spend time in professional reflection about their work.
4. believe that they can have a positive impact on the lives of most of their clients.
5. treat their colleagues as professionals when there are differences of opinions.
6. participate in collaborative sharing about successes and problems in their work.
7. are committed to continuous professional development.
8. value opportunities to learn from one another.

References


