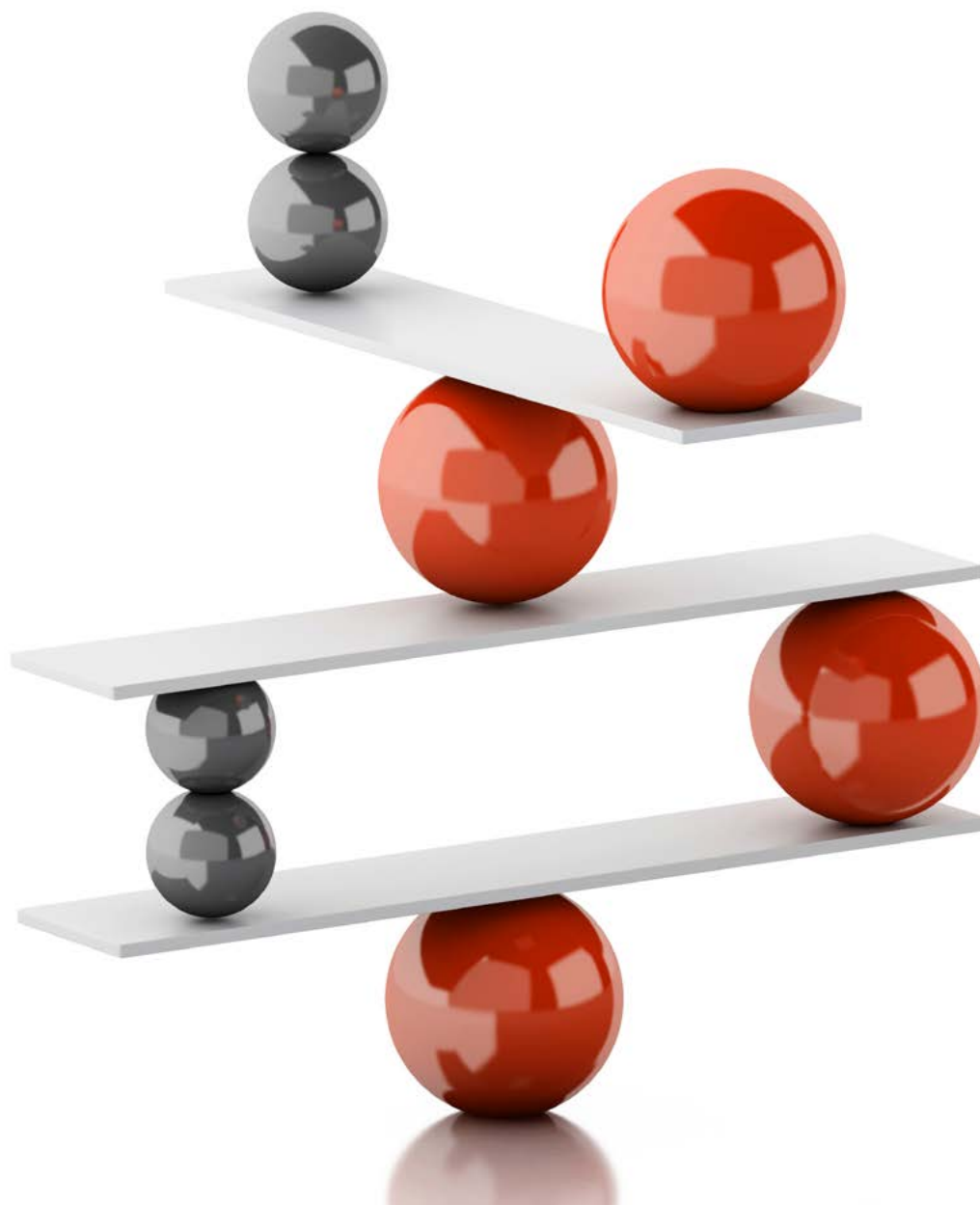


Minnesota Child Welfare Workforce Stabilization Study 2016



Child Protection Summary Report

Introduction

Research and practice have long supported the notion that effective delivery of public and tribal child protection services requires a competent, committed workforce. Staff turnover in child protection threatens to undermine the effectiveness of these systems, and has proven costly to families, children, and the system itself.

In light of the Minnesota Governor's Task Force on the Protection of Children, numerous practice and policy decisions are being made that affect the delivery of public and tribal child protection services in Minnesota. The existing child protection workforce is being taxed in ways it has not been previously, partly due to new recommendations and requirements, changing workloads, and an influx of new staff entering the child protection workforce.

The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) has partnered with the Minnesota Association of County Social Service Administrators (MACSSA) Children's Committee and the Minnesota Department of Human Services to better understand the state of Minnesota's child welfare workforce, with a particular focus on child protection professionals, in order to develop strategies to stabilize and strengthen the workforce in a time of child protection reform. To accomplish this, CASCW developed the Child Welfare Workforce Stabilization Survey. While the survey was sent to the larger child welfare workforce, this summary specifically focuses on the child protection workforce.

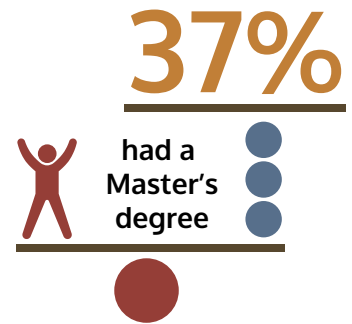
Method

In February 2016, an electronic survey was sent to 1,948 professionals working as front line staff or supervisors in child welfare (including: child protection services, children's mental health, foster care, adoption and permanency, prevention and early intervention services, and other related children's services). A total of 862 child welfare professionals from 81 counties and one tribal child welfare agency responded to the survey, a 44% statewide response rate.¹ Of the 862 responses, 823 included complete information. 89% (734) of respondents indicated that they currently work in child protection, involuntary foster care, and/or adoption/permanency. The following summary report is based upon these responses.

Respondents

Below are characteristics of the 734 respondents who worked in child protection, involuntary foster care, or adoption/permanency at the time of the survey:

- 87% were female and 13% were male, divided along the age spectrum of 20-25 years to over 60 years old
- 10% were professionals of color: 93% were Caucasian, 1% Hispanic/Latino/Latina, 1% Hmong, 1% Somali, 2% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% African American, and 4% Native American
- 97% had at least a Bachelor's degree (47% in social work, 43% other related social science)
- 37% had a Master's Degree (25% in social work)
- 15% were current students or graduates of a Title IV-E child welfare education program
- 76% were case workers or social workers, 15% were supervisors, 4% case aides, and 5% were in other positions
- 58% had been in their current position less than five years, and 23% had been in their position one year or less.



Summary Findings

This section summarizes findings related to job satisfaction, the prevalence and impact of secondary traumatic stress, and the adequacy of supervision and peer support. It also includes a summary of findings related to workforce stability over the past twelve months, workforce turnover intentions for the next twelve months, and resources and supports that would help retain child protection professionals in the workforce. This section closes with a summary of reflections on the recent child protection reform efforts.

Job Satisfaction - 67% reported general satisfaction with their job as it currently is; surprisingly, 68% also reported feeling overwhelmed in their job duties.

Secondary Traumatic Stress - 83% reported experiencing secondary traumatic stress, but only 63% reported that they had the supports they

21%

Plan to seek employment outside of their current position



needed to manage this stress. 37% of respondents said secondary traumatic stress negatively affects their ability to do their job.

Supervision – 78% reported receiving adequate supervision. However, 48% reported that their supervision centers on administrative monitoring and compliance rather than support or education.

Peer Support - 95% reported that their peers provide support and assistance when problems arise.

Workforce Stability during the Past 12 Months:

- 47% did **not** seek employment outside of their current position
- 53% actively sought employment outside of their current position
 - » 45% actively sought employment within child protection, foster care, or adoption/permanency at a different agency
 - » 39% actively sought employment within their current agency but outside of child protection, foster care, or adoption/permanency
 - » 45% actively sought employment outside of their agency and outside of child protection, foster care, or adoption/permanency

Workforce Stability Intentions during the Next 12 Months:

- 79% reported planning to remain in their current position (without seeking employment elsewhere)
- 21% reported planning to seek employment outside of their current position
 - » 6% reported planning to seek employment in public child protection, involuntary foster care, or adoption/permanency in a different agency
 - » 14% reported planning to leave public/tribal child protection, involuntary foster care, or adoption/permanency
- 52% believed their supervisors were aware of their intentions to stay or leave
- 22% plan to retire in the next 10 years, and 58% of those plan to retire within the next five years

Retaining Employees - Respondents reported that the top three things that would increase their likelihood of remaining employed in child protection, involuntary foster care, or adoption/permanency include: increased salary (88%), lower caseload (81%), and fewer administrative requirements (81%; e.g., less paperwork, administrative meetings, etc.).

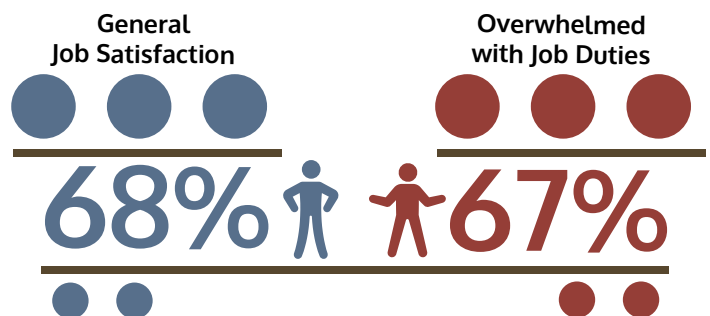
Effects of Reform

- 84% of respondents reported being generally aware of the child protection reforms taking place in Minnesota
- 66% of respondents reported satisfaction with communication by their agency regarding reform; however, only 35% were satisfied with communication by DHS regarding proposed changes
- 94% of respondents indicated that there is a need to increase public awareness of their work

Conclusion

Preliminary analysis indicates that Minnesota's public and tribal child protection workforce is stressed in ways that have created significant workforce instability over the past year. While the vast majority of the child protection workforce has indicated intentions to remain employed in their current position in the coming year, the reported intentions may not fully reflect what will actually occur. The reported intentions of the workforce are likely a conservative estimate of the instability that Minnesota's child protection system may face over the next 12 months.

In the coming year, Minnesota's child protection system should expect turnover of at least a quarter of the workforce (one out of every four front-line and supervisory professionals), including those who reported intentions to leave their current position, those who are planning to retire, and those who (currently)



intend to remain but change plans over the course of the next 12 months. Child protection professionals reported that higher salaries, lower caseloads, and fewer administrative requirements would help retain them in the field. While these changes may bring greater stability, research indicates that this may not be enough to sufficiently stabilize Minnesota's child protection workforce.

In the current context of reform, Minnesota's need for a competent, highly skilled, and stable workforce is paramount. In addition to considerations of changes regarding salary, workload, and administrative requirements (which are supported by recommendations of the Governor's Task Force), Minnesota's public and tribal child protection systems must take action to maintain the current child protection workforce while planning for the influx of new professionals that are arriving as a result of recommendations made by the Governor's Task Force, as well as positions opening due to retirement and other turnover. In particular, leaders should focus their efforts on alleviating the general feelings of overwhelm that child protection staff are facing. This would include:

- Providing additional supports for dealing with secondary traumatic stress, including developing and implementing agency-wide plans for attending to issues of secondary traumatic stress in the workforce;
- Improving the quality of supervision, with an increased focus on educative and supportive supervision (as opposed to administrative supervision) through ongoing training of supervisors, and the refinement of policies and infrastructure to better support reflective supervision;
- Maintaining and building upon opportunities for peer support, as promoting a culture of peer support is critical for the child protection workforce (including shared physical and virtual spaces for child protection professionals to connect about confidential and sensitive issues);



- Developing and implementing communication strategies to ensure a cohesive, directly applicable message (inclusive of DHS and agency guidance), delivered with sufficient detail to keep the workforce informed of reform efforts including changes in policy and practice; and
- Attending to the public perception of child protection work in Minnesota, especially considering the imbalance of negative child protection publicity experienced since 2014.

In the coming months, CASCW will continue to analyze data from the Child Welfare Workforce Stabilization Survey. Based on this analysis, CASCW will develop aggregate reports that provide a more nuanced understanding of the workforce and issues faced than can be covered by this summary. In addition to considering statewide trends, care will also be taken to better understand issues arising in each of MACSSA's 11 regions. With this information, child protection leaders will be better positioned to support and retain Minnesota's child protection workforce.

¹Although there is no established or confirmed number of child welfare professionals in Minnesota, we attempted to ascertain the total possible number of respondents via phone calls with Directors at each county and tribal child welfare agency. Directors indicated that 1,948 professionals were working as front line staff or supervisors in child welfare. This number was used to calculate the overall response rate to the survey.

²Respondents were allowed to select all that apply; thus responses do not sum to 100%.